

# Shavua Tov

Weekly  Parsha

*A Rood Awakening!* Torah Commentary  
By Glenn McWilliams

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Torah Portion: *Behar*                      בהר                      “At Mount”

**God spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, telling him  
Vayedaber Adonay el-Moshe behar Sinay lemor**

Scripture for study:                      *Vayikra (Leviticus) 25:1 – 26:2*

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Torah Portion: *Bechukotai*                      בחוקותי                      “In My Statutes”

**If you follow My laws and are careful to keep My commandments,  
Im-bechukotai telechu ve'et-mitsvotay tishmeru va'asitem otam**

Scripture for study:                      *Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:3 – 27:34*

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*Genesis 1:1 In the beginning Elohim created the heaven and the earth.*

The Torah begins with this very powerful declaration concerning the origins of both the heavens and the earth. From the first words of the Torah we are reminded that the world we know did not come into existence by chance or by accident. The world that surrounds us is the willful work of a powerful and preexistent being, revealed in this opening verse only as Elohim. As the opening verses of the Torah continue to unfold, the nature and character of this creative force becomes clearer. As we read the creation narrative we learn much about this powerful Creator. We learn that He is an Elohim of order and distinction. For six evenings and mornings we witness the Creator revealing Himself through the distinctions and divisions He makes in His creation. On the seventh day the Creator makes yet one more distinction, the finishing touch of His masterpiece.

*Genesis 1:31 And Elohim saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. 2:1 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2And on the seventh day Elohim ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. 3And Elohim blessed the seventh day, and*

*sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which Elohim created and made.*

The Holy One blessed this seventh day and set it apart from all the other days. He sanctified this day by resting from His work of creation. Thus the seventh day is different from every other day. How strange it is that we do not hear of this sanctified day again for another 4,555 years. It is not until the children of Israel come out of Egypt that we again hear mention of setting the seventh day apart. While we may assume that Adam, Noah, and the Patriarchs all honored this sanctified day in their lifetimes, we must recognize that there is no such record given in the Torah. We should also note that there is neither commandment nor instruction given to Adam or his descendants concerning when or how to keep the Sabbath. It is not until the children of Israel come out of Egypt and enter the wilderness that they receive both the commandment and the first instructions concerning the Sabbath. This commandment to keep the Sabbath would later be included in the Sinai Covenant.<sup>1</sup> We should note here that the initial commandment to keep the Sabbath was to be a test for the children of Israel as to whether they would indeed keep the Torah.

*Exodus 16:4 Then said YHWH unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in My law, or no. <sup>5</sup>And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.*

*Exodus 16:21 And they gathered it every morning, every man according to his eating: and when the sun waxed hot, it melted. <sup>22</sup>And it came to pass, that on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for one man: and all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. <sup>23</sup>And he said unto them, This is that which YHWH hath said, To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto YHWH: bake that which ye will bake to day, and seethe that ye will seethe; and that which remaineth over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. <sup>24</sup>And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. <sup>25</sup>And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto YHWH: to day ye shall not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup>Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none. <sup>27</sup>And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. <sup>28</sup>And YHWH said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws? <sup>29</sup>See, for that YHWH hath given you the sabbath, therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. <sup>30</sup>So the people rested on the seventh day.*

There are many lessons for us to learn from these verses. First we should note that there is a sense of assumption that the children of Israel already know the law of the Sabbath. Next we should note the context of this Sabbath testing. The children of Israel (possibly three million of them) were grumbling and concerned about YHWH'S ability to provide for their physical needs. We should not minimize these concerns or delegate them to the realm of mere pettiness. Providing sustenance for nearly three million people is a great challenge, even in an established

and settled land. The children of Israel were leaving such a land to enter into the wilderness on a journey to unfamiliar territory that had to be conquered.

Learning to trust in the Holy One of Israel for their daily bread was indeed a very real test. For most people, the challenge of meeting the needs of food, clothing, and shelter for oneself and one's family occupies the greatest portion of the day and week. The demands of this challenge to meet the needs and desires of family and self can easily become the focus of one's life. Many people lose themselves in the pursuit of sense of financial and physical security. As families and communities increase in size their needs often increase with them, increasing the pressure on those responsible for meeting these needs. Circumstances change and impinge upon our lives, adding yet more pressure to provide security and comfort, or in some cases, to simply survive.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by the burdens of these challenges. It is easy to be deceived into thinking that everyone is dependent upon limited human resources to meet these needs. For those in the position of responsibility for meeting the needs of self, family, and community, it is easy to become anxious about meeting these challenges. It is easy to believe that the world is revolving because you are busy doing whatever it is that you do to keep life happening. It is easy to convince oneself that ceasing from these labors for even a moment will bring all life to a complete halt. How often it appears to us that the whole world is depending on us, and if we stop even for a moment, the whole family, community, and world would come crumbling down.

Because our hard work often does bring a return, it is easy to become addicted to that return. When all of our needs are met we often find ourselves working just as hard for the next level – our wants. This temptation to materialism is just as seductive as the idea of self-reliance. The Sabbath is a protection against both of these potential extremes. Let us take a look at the seven laws of the Sabbath for a moment and better understand its purpose and proclamation in our lives.

- 1. Remember the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8)**
- 2. Keep the Sabbath (Deuteronomy 5:12)**
- 3. Sanctify the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8; Deuteronomy 5:12)**
- 4. Cease from work on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:14-15)**
- 5. Rest on the Sabbath (Leviticus 23:3)**
- 6. Cause no one else to work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10)**
- 7. Kindle no fire on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3)**

To remember the Sabbath means that we actually recall the very seventh day of creation. By remembering this single day in history we relive the very event of creation, and therefore must recall the fact that there is a Creator. When we remember and keep the Sabbath we recall and proclaim that the earth and all that is in it came from the Holy One.<sup>ii</sup> When we remember the Sabbath we remember that it was the Holy One who created the world and declared it to be good. We should also remember that the Creator made all the necessary provisions for life on this planet to continue. By remembering the Sabbath we remember that it is not we who bring

food into the world, but the Creator! When we remember the Sabbath we remember that the world spins and functions by the will of the Creator and not by our work and whims.

When we understand this we are able to then keep the Sabbath. When we remember that the world exists by the will of YHWH ELOHIM and not by our own labors, we may cease our labors and rest in the knowledge that the Holy One will indeed maintain us. It is only when we believe that the Creator is indeed the source of our every blessing that we can let go of the reins of our lives, cease our labor, and actually rest at peace in the knowledge that the Creator can get along quite well without us. It is refreshing and liberating to know that the world continues without us. By ceasing our labors, including those which we bestow upon others for the sake of our needs and wants, we declare that there is something more important in this world than money and things. By releasing those who labor for our sake we declare that we believe that it is the Creator Himself who is the source of our blessings, and that we need not rely upon either the strength of the horse or the legs of man.<sup>iii</sup>

Only our confidence in the Holy One of Israel allows us to release our work force, to extinguish the fires of industry, and to rest in the knowledge that YHWH ELOHIM is the Creator, Redeemer, Deliverer, Sustainer, and Savior of our lives. So it is that YHWH tests the children of Israel as they come forth from the bondage and burden of industry in Egypt. There their master, Pharaoh, gave them the food of servitude. In Egypt they worked for their master. In freedom they would work for themselves. The Sabbath served to protect the children of Israel from total self-reliance to the point of forgetfulness. Moses would later warn the children of Israel not to forget the one who created them, delivered them, called them, and blessed them with the land of their heritage.

*Deuteronomy 8:10 When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless YHWH thy Elohim for the good land which He hath given thee. <sup>11</sup>Beware that thou forget not YHWH thy Elohim, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day: <sup>12</sup>Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; <sup>13</sup>And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; <sup>14</sup>Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget YHWH thy Elohim, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; <sup>15</sup>Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; <sup>16</sup>Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end; <sup>17</sup>And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. <sup>18</sup>But thou shalt remember YHWH thy Elohim: for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.*

On the Sabbath the children of Israel would remember that no matter what their circumstance, whether wandering in the wilderness or living in the land of milk and honey, it is YHWH ELOHIM who brings forth bread from the earth.<sup>iv</sup>

Not only was the weekly Sabbath to be a test for the children of Israel; it would also become a rehearsal for an even bigger test of faith yet to be faced. Here we should recognize the lovingkindness of YHWH to train us up as one trains up a child, giving the smaller challenges in preparation for the bigger ones to come. In the song Ha'azinu<sup>v</sup> YHWH reveals His wisdom and love for His creation in the fact that He knows what each creature needs and can endure.

*Deuteronomy 32:2 My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.*

Here we should understand that YHWH is speaking of His doctrine, and not of actual rain. In other words, He gives much to those who need much or can withstand much, but gives little to those who need little or can bear little. We see a similar analogy in the Brit Chadasha with regard to milk and meat.

*1 Corinthians 3:2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*

*Hebrews 5:12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of Elohim; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. <sup>13</sup>For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.*

*1 Peter 2:2 As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*

The apostle Shaul likewise wrote concerning the compassion of YHWH:

*1 Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but Elohim is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

The Sabbath tests our ability to let YHWH ELOHIM run His world for a day without our help. The weekly Sabbath also tests our ability to trust the Creator to meet our needs without our labor or assistance. In this regard the weekly Sabbath is training for the bigger test of the seventh year Sabbath for the land. Let us first note that our portion begins with the very clear revelation that these teachings were given by YHWH to Moses while on Mount Sinai.

*Exodus 23:10 And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: <sup>11</sup>But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard.*

Clearly the seventh year Sabbath and the *Yovel*, or Jubilee year are just as much a part of the covenant agreement as is the weekly Sabbath. We may here ask why the Holy One felt the need to remind the children of Israel of the fact that these words were spoken from Mount Sinai. I would suggest that this reminder was to strengthen the resolve of the children of Israel to fulfill the commandment even though it would appear that there would be great cost in doing so. In other words, for those who make their living through agricultural endeavors, the idea of not planting, pruning, or harvesting for one and sometimes two years is truly a costly venture. By reminding the children of Israel that these words were spoken at Mount Sinai, they are likewise reminded that they agreed to keep all the words of the covenant.

*Exodus 19:8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that YHWH hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto YHWH.*

This reminder is intended to strengthen the resolve of the children of Israel to keep their word and honor their promise to do all that YHWH has commanded. We witnessed a similar situation elsewhere in the Torah. Abraham called his servant to swear an oath that he would neither choose a wife for Isaac from among the Canaanites, nor take Isaac from the land of Canaan back to Padan-Aram.<sup>vi</sup> Jacob likewise made Joseph swear an oath that he would not bury his father in Egypt, but would bury him in the cave at Machpelah in the land of Canaan.<sup>vii</sup> In both of these instances it was a matter of strengthening the resolve of the one swearing the oath, rather than the mistrust that provided the motivation for the oath. We likewise witness a similar process earlier in the book of Leviticus concerning Aaron and his sons.

*Leviticus 6:8 And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>9</sup>Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, because of the burning upon the altar all night unto the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning in it.*

Here we see YHWH instructing Moses to “command” Aaron and his sons to offer the burnt offering. The question may be raised as to why YHWH instructed Moses to “command” Aaron and the *cohanim* to perform this offering instead of simply instructing them. I would suggest that while many of the other offerings, such as the Grain Offering, the Sin Offering, the Trespass Offering, and the Peace Offering, designate a portion of the offering to be given to the *cohanim* for their consumption, the Elevation Offering is fully consumed upon the altar and therefore offers no benefit to the *cohanim* performing the offering. For this reason YHWH commands that the *cohanim* offer this offering, even though there is no personal benefit to be gained in doing so. By using the stronger language of commandment, the *cohanim* are encouraged to be faithful in doing all that YHWH has instructed them regarding the offerings, regardless of the personal cost or reward involved in doing so.

Here we learn two important principles of keeping the Torah. First we learn that YHWH does everything in His power to encourage and empower us in fulfilling our calling to be His manifest presence in the world. We witness again the truth that YHWH knows exactly what we need to be faithful to our calling. The second principle we learn is that we are to keep the Torah

out of our love for the Creator, and not out of thought for personal cost or reward. We find this principle repeated in the Mishnaic Tractate Pirkei Avot:<sup>viii</sup>

*Antigonus a man of Socho received the tradition from Shimon the Righteous. He would say: Do not be like servants who serve their master on the condition of receiving a reward; instead be like servants who serve their master not on the condition of receiving a reward. And let the fear of Heaven be upon you.<sup>ix</sup>*

So in our portion the children of Israel are strengthened by this subtle reminder to be faithful in fulfilling every word of the Torah.

Just as there are important lessons to be learned from contemplating the seventh day or weekly Sabbath, so too are there lessons to be learned from the seventh year Sabbath or Shmittah Year. Our Torah portion begins with the instruction that every seven years the children of Israel are to give the land a rest.

*Leviticus 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 YHWH.<sup>3</sup>Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;<sup>4</sup>But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for YHWH: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.*

First let us be clear that the seventh year Sabbath is a part of the rhythm of the Torah. We must remember here that the calling given to the children of Israel is for them to become the manifest presence of YHWH in the world. To fulfill this calling the children of Israel must learn to walk in rhythm with YHWH. Keeping Torah is a matter of learning the rhythm of the Torah, lest we find ourselves marching to the beat of a different drum! Let us briefly look at these rhythms so that we may better understand the placement of the seventh year Sabbath.

- The Daily Rhythm - The Tamid, or continual offering of the two lambs morning and evening.<sup>x</sup> Without the altar functioning we may replace this twice-a-day continual offering with twice-a-day prayer.<sup>xi</sup>
- The Weekly Rhythm - The weekly Sabbath<sup>xii</sup>
- The Monthly Rhythm - The sighting of the new moon marks the beginning of each month.<sup>xiii</sup>
- The Yearly Rhythm - The cycle of *Mo'adim*<sup>xiv</sup> and *Mikra*<sup>xv</sup>
- The Seventh Year Rhythm - The Sabbath for the land<sup>xvi</sup>
- The Fiftieth Year Rhythm - The *Yovel*, or Jubilee year<sup>xvii</sup>

As we study the Torah we find other patterns and rhythms incorporated within these rhythms ultimately culminating in the rhythm of six millennia followed by a seventh millennium which will be the Messianic Kingdom. Again within these rhythms we see YHWH starting small and then making the scope of His reign larger and larger, sanctifying even greater epochs of time in the process. As we keep these patterns and rhythms we likewise increase the proclamation of

the reign of YHWH over all the earth. Let us now turn our attention to the seventh year Sabbath.

The first detail we should recognize concerning this special year of rest is that it is specifically for the land of Israel. This *mitzvah*<sup>xviii</sup> is only binding upon the children of Israel when they are living in the land. By directly connecting this *mitzvah* to the land of Israel, YHWH further sanctifies the land for His purposes. Here we must recognize that just as the children of Israel are a chosen people, so too is the land of Israel a chosen land. One could in fact argue that before the Holy One chose Abraham, He had already chosen the land of Israel.

*Genesis 12:1 Now YHWH had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: <sup>2</sup>And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: <sup>3</sup>And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*

It is this land that is shown to Abraham that eventually becomes the heritage of Abraham and his descendants through Isaac and Jacob. Through covenant promises made with Abraham and confirmed with Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants, this land is set apart as a chosen land.

*Genesis 13:15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. <sup>16</sup>And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. <sup>17</sup>Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.*

*Genesis 15:18 In the same day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: <sup>19</sup>The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, <sup>21</sup>and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.*

*Genesis 17:7 And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be an Elohim unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. <sup>8</sup>And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their Elohim.*

*Genesis 26:2 And YHWH appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: <sup>3</sup>Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father.*

*Genesis 28:13 And, behold, YHWH stood above it, and said, I am YHWH the Elohim of Abraham thy father, and the Elohim of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.*

*Genesis 35:12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.*

*Exodus 3:17 And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey.*

*Exodus 6:3 And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH was I not known to them. <sup>4</sup>And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.*

*Exodus 6:8 And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am YHWH.*

We must understand here that this chosen land is given to the children of Israel as a heritage and not an inheritance. There is a great difference between the two. An inheritance is a gift given from one person to another. Often an inheritance is received after the event of someone's death. Once the inheritance is given, the recipient is free to do with the gift whatever he or she so chooses. In other words, once the inheritance is given, it becomes the sole possession of the one who receives it. The recipient is free to spend it, sell it, give it away, or hold possession of it and cherish it. But a heritage is quite different. A heritage is like a legacy. One becomes connected to the story or history of the heritage. In this case the heritage is a particular land chosen by YHWH ELOHIM. For the children of Israel to receive this land as a heritage means that their name and life story will be forever connected to the history and legacy of this land. Regardless of whether the children of Israel are living in the land or exiled from it, the story of this particular people and this particular land are eternally bound together as one.

No longer do we call this the land of Canaan, but the land of Israel. In this regard the people of Israel and the land of Israel belong together. But unlike an inheritance, the people of Israel are not free to do with this gift as they please. The nation of Israel is not free to parcel up the land in any fashion they want. Israel is not free to give the land away to other nations and peoples, nor is Israel free to sell the land. Israel is not free to use the land for purposes contrary to chosen purposes of YHWH. While the land was given to Israel as a heritage, the land itself still belongs to YHWH.

*Leviticus 25:23 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is Mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with Me.*

*Ezekiel 36:5 Therefore thus saith the ADONAI YHWH; Surely in the fire of My jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed My land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey.*

It is YHWH who has chosen the land of Israel, and He has done so for a purpose. The land of Israel is to be the land of Torah. Just as the people of Israel were chosen by YHWH for the sake

of the Torah, so too was this particular land chosen for the Torah. Together YHWH, the Torah, the land of Israel, and the people of Israel make up Israel. Anything less than the combination of these four entities and it is not the complete ISRAEL. From the beginning of Israel's reception of the promise of receiving the land of Israel, the children of Israel were well aware that there were other people living in the land. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all lived as pilgrims and sojourners among the land of their heritage. The Torah also reveals that the Holy One would remove the inhabitants of the land of Canaan because of their great wickedness.

*Leviticus 18:24 Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: <sup>25</sup>And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. <sup>26</sup>Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: <sup>27</sup>(For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) <sup>28</sup>That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. <sup>29</sup>For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. <sup>30</sup>Therefore shall ye keep Mine ordinance, that ye commit not any of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am YHWH your Elohim.*

*Leviticus 20:22 Ye shall therefore keep all My statutes, and all My judgments, and do them: that the land, whither I bring you to dwell therein, spue you not out. <sup>23</sup>And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them. <sup>24</sup>But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am YHWH your Elohim, which have separated you from other people.*

*Deuteronomy 9:4 Speak not thou in thine heart, after that YHWH thy Elohim hath cast them out from before thee, saying, For my righteousness YHWH hath brought me in to possess this land: but for the wickedness of these nations YHWH doth drive them out from before thee. <sup>5</sup>Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations YHWH thy Elohim doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which YHWH sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.*

From these verses we learn that although the children of Israel are the chosen people and the land of Israel is the chosen land, the children of Israel would be allowed to live in this land only if they continued to fulfill their promise to keep the Torah. Again we are reminded that this is the land of Torah that they inhabit. The Torah repeatedly reminds the children of Israel that their stay in the land is contingent upon the grace of YHWH and their faithfulness to the covenant.

*Exodus 20:12 Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which YHWH thy Elohim giveth thee.*

*Deuteronomy 4:1 Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which YHWH Elohim of your fathers giveth you.*

*Deuteronomy 4:26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.*

*Deuteronomy 11:11 But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: <sup>12</sup>A land which YHWH thy Elohim careth for: the eyes of YHWH thy Elohim are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year. <sup>13</sup>And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments which I command you this day, to love YHWH your Elohim, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>14</sup>that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season, the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. <sup>15</sup>And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. <sup>16</sup>Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them; <sup>17</sup>And then YHWH'S wrath be kindled against you, and He shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruit; and lest ye perish quickly from off the good land which YHWH giveth you.*

*Deuteronomy 28:1 And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of YHWH thy Elohim, to observe and to do all His commandments which I command thee this day, that YHWH thy Elohim will set thee on high above all nations of the earth... <sup>12</sup>YHWH shall open unto thee His good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow.*

*Deuteronomy 28:15 But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of YHWH thy Elohim, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee... <sup>21</sup>YHWH shall make the pestilence cleave unto thee, until He have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it... <sup>24</sup>YHWH shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed. <sup>25</sup>YHWH shall cause thee to be smitten before thine enemies: thou shalt go out one way against them, and flee seven ways before them: and shalt be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth... <sup>63</sup>And it shall come to pass, that as YHWH rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so YHWH will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it.*

The dependency of the children of Israel upon their relationship with YHWH to remain in the land is made very clear in the contrasting verses found in our second portion. Beginning with Leviticus 26:3-13, YHWH declares the blessing that the children of Israel will enjoy in the land of Israel if they continue to remain faithful to the covenant and fulfill their calling. Leviticus 26:14-43 contains the woes and catastrophes that will befall the children of Israel if they fail to keep the Torah.

Many have pointed out the great discrepancy and imbalance present in this chapter. The scales seem at first sight to be very unjust: eleven verses of blessings compared to thirty verses of cursings. Let us not, however, judge too quickly. We should note that all the blessings are listed in very open-ended and general terms. In other words, all the blessings are given without an end in sight. The curses, on the other hand, come one at a time, and are very specific in their nature. In other words, the curses have an end in sight. The blessings are an eternal act of giving. The curses are meant only to deter us from transgressing the covenant, and will last only until we repent. If we repent with the first chastisement, we shall never know the rest of the curses. We should understand the number of these curses are an expression of YHWH'S desire to return us to the realm of blessing. That there are so many curses also demonstrates the great lengths that the Holy One will go to in order to turn our hearts back to Him. Unfortunately we are often as stubborn as He is tenacious. It should be clear from this that YHWH wants His people to live in His land and to keep His Torah. In part, this is the purpose of seventh year Sabbath.

Every seven years the children of Israel are to cease from their planting, pruning, and harvesting and allow the land to lie fallow. As is true with the weekly Sabbath, the children of Israel must put their faith in YHWH to provide for all of their needs. By keeping this seventh year Sabbath the children of Israel are reminded that they are not the landlords, but sojourners in the land living there by the grace of YHWH. By keeping the seventh year Sabbath the children of Israel are reminded that it is YHWH who causes the sun to shine, the rain to fall, and the crops to grow. Since the trees and fields continue to produce their goods it is clear that the Creator is still the source of life, even in the land of Israel.

While it is advantageous from an agricultural perspective to rotate crops every year, this is not so for the land of Israel. YHWH commands the children of Israel to plant their land for six consecutive years. Generally this would deplete the land and produce smaller and smaller crops and harvests. But not so in the land of Israel. Instead, as was true with the manna in the wilderness, YHWH produces a double harvest in the sixth year. At the time when the crops should be at their worst, the land of Israel produces its greatest harvest. This can only happen because of the connection between the land and its Creator. Thus the children of Israel are very visibly reminded that they live in the land only by the grace of YHWH shown to those who love Him and keep His commandment.

There is yet another lesson that we may glean from the seventh year Sabbath. The children of Israel were called to become the manifest presence of YHWH. The calling given at Mount Sinai was not for the children of Israel to become a bunch of holy and righteous individuals, but a holy nation. Only by living the Torah as a people and a nation can Israel truly fulfill this calling.

*Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: <sup>6</sup>And ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*

Israel is to become the many-membered body of the Holy One. No one understood this calling more than the apostle Shaul.

*Romans 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: <sup>5</sup>So we, being many, are one body in Messiah, and every one members one of another.*

*1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Messiah. <sup>13</sup>For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. <sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many.*

*1 Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. <sup>26</sup>And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. <sup>27</sup>Now ye are the body of Messiah, and members in particular.*

*Ephesians 4:4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.*

*Ephesians 4:15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Messiah: <sup>16</sup>From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.*

*Ephesians 5:30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.*

*Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of Elohim rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.*

Messiah likewise recognized our calling to be one body and be united to him.

*John 17:11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.*

*John 17:20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; <sup>21</sup>That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou*

*hast sent me. <sup>22</sup>And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.*

Through industry and exercise of personal giftings, talents, and opportunities every individual distinguishes himself from others. We are all unique individuals. At times, however, even within the body there those who rise higher than others. Equality is not the same as unity. Because of the inequalities that develop and exist within the body of believers, even among the children of Israel hardships, jealousies, and resentments can develop. Because success, pride, arrogance, selfishness, and egotism can also raise their ugly heads, it makes it all the more difficult to maintain that unity. It is difficult at times being just a member of the body and not the head. The seventh year Sabbath is a protection against such afflictions. In the seventh year the land of Israel is given a rest. As we have already stated, it is at this time we realize that it is not our ingenuity or industry that is to be credited for the milk and honey. In the seventh year we are forbidden to plant, prune, or harvest; yet without our help we witness that the crops continue to grow.

The children of Israel were not allowed to harvest these crops as they had done the previous six years, but they could glean from the fields. In the seventh year the fences around the crops and vineyards were left open. The food of the seventh year was free to all of creation. The animals and beasts of the field, the poor and the rich alike, all gleaned from these crops. In this there was a great equality among the children of Israel.

But the seventh year Sabbath went even beyond this. The seventh year was also a time of equality between lender and debtor. The Torah commands:

*Deuteronomy 15:1 At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. <sup>2</sup>And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called YHWH'S release.*

It was on the tenth day of the seventh month, on Yom Kippur, that the Sabbath of the land would be declared. At the time when YHWH would wipe Israel's slate clean of all their iniquity and transgression, the children of Israel would likewise forgive the debt of their brethren, again restoring everyone to an equal relationship with one another. In the fiftieth year even property that was purchased from a brother would be restored to him, so that no family in Israel would be forever bound to a lesser status. By restoring the sense of equality among the children of Israel, peace and unity in the body could be maintained, and pettiness, jealousy, resentment, and unhealthy competition were averted. In this way the seventh year Sabbath cyclically corrected and restored balance to the body of YHWH. Clearly the Sabbath and Jubilee years placed all of creation on an equal footing as the recipients of YHWH'S grace, mercy, and love. By keeping this cycle and rhythm the children of Israel declared the sovereignty of YHWH ELOHIM to the entire world.

SHAVUA TOV !

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<sup>i</sup> Exodus 20:8-11

<sup>ii</sup> Exodus 9:29, 19:5; Psalm 24:1

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- iii Psalm 147:10
- iv Mark 4:26-28
- v Deuteronomy 31:19, 32:1-45
- vi Genesis 24:1ff
- vii Genesis 47:27-31
- viii Ethics of the Fathers, or more literally, Chapters of the Fathers, is a tractate of the Mishna composed of ethical maxims of the Rabbis of the Mishnaic period. It is the second-last tractate in the Mishnaic order Nezikin.
- ix The Schottenstein Edition Pirkei Avos 1:3, Mesorah Publications, Pg 31
- x Exodus 29:38-39
- xi Hosea 14:2
- xii Exodus 20:8-11
- xiii Numbers 28:11; Psalm 81:3
- xiv *Mo'adim* is the Hebrew word for "appointed times" (*mo'ed* in the singular), and is sometimes translated as "feasts." *Mikra* is the Hebrew word for "rehearsal," although it is often translated as "convocation." Together, *mo'adim* and *mikra* are understood as "appointed rehearsals" that are shadow pictures of future prophetic events.
- xv Leviticus 23:1ff
- xvi Leviticus 25:1ff
- xvii Leviticus 25:8ff
- xviii A *mitzvah* is a commandment of the law of Moses