

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

*I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35*

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## LEVITICUS 25-26

Chapter 25 stands out from the previous laws because it is spoken on “on the mountain”, where God manifested his majesty and power, rather than in the Tent of Meeting. This chapter is marked by the number seven which, as we have seen, is a very significant number in the Torah. We are very familiar with fact that the seventh day relates to Creation. When God created the World, He “entrusted” the earth to man. As Creator, He laid down conditions for man to live here—conditions which He knows will bring abundance, not just to the earth itself, but to the whole of life. However, as we know from the NT, Satan is the ‘god of this world’<sup>1</sup>, since Adam relinquished dominion in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, he has a major influence over what happens on earth—*unless* man overthrows this and puts his trust in God.

### CHAPTER 25

#### Sabbatical Year

**Read verses 1-7** The LORD speaks to Moses about the time ‘*when you come into the land*’ and begins by relating the laws of the Sabbatical year (*Shemittah*). Every seven years, on the seventh year, fields must be left fallow, untended and unguarded. Like the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year is also “a Sabbath for the LORD”— a year when: *the land shall observe a Sabbath rest*.

This Law was first mentioned briefly in Exodus 23:10-11. The Torah emphasizes that it is God who gives the land and during the Sabbatical year it is forbidden for people to treat the land as their own and prevent others from enjoying the harvest. It is a year to allow the poor, the servants, ownerless animals and converts to take from the produce of the field. The heart of God has always been toward the poor and outcast and this law continually encourages people to help one another out of a sense of kinship. Leviticus 25 repeatedly uses the term “your brother,” when it actually refers to “your fellow Israelite”.

As we know, the NT continues this understanding of the brotherhood of all believers.

**Q. What scriptures can you think of that speak into this?**

This law also serves to increase trust in God and curb greed because it requires courage, faith and also planning to abandon one’s fields that have been carefully tended, for a whole year. This is acknowledged in verses 20-21: *And if you say, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, since we shall not sow nor gather in our produce?” Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years.*

This also reminds us of the instructions regarding the manna in Exodus 16 where the people were instructed to gather twice as much on the sixth day because “on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any.”

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4

To observe the Sabbath year requires faith in the provision of God. It is a time when man stops striving for material gain in favour of dedication to spiritual growth. A time when all men are equal and no-one strives for increase of worldly goods. It is a great leveller. The promises of God are clear: *"...you will dwell in the land in safety. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill, and dwell there in safety."* (v.18-19)

Both the Sabbatical year and the Sabbath day bear testimony to God's creation in six days and His rest on the seventh and begins to open our eyes to a more profound and far reaching significance of His call to 'enter into His rest'.

This underlines the principle that God is the ultimate owner of the earth, and we are mere temporary residents, as we read in verse 23: *The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.* Psalm 24 reiterates this: *The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.*

**Q. What does it mean for us to enter His rest?** (see Heb. 4)

## **Jubilee Year**

*8 And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. 9 'Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land.*

It is interesting to note that the Jubilee Year is linked here to the Day of Atonement.<sup>2</sup> The trumpet is sounded, marking the end of 49 years—*10 'And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family.11 'That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee to you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine.12 For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field. 13 'In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession.*

**Hebrew insight:** "Jubilee" is a translation of the Hebrew word *yôbêl*; meaning the blast of a horn (from its continuous sound); specifically, the signal of the silver trumpets. This word is found fourteen times in chapter 25 (and a further 5 times in ch.27), so we cannot overstate its significance.

The root meaning of the Hebrew word *shofar* - trumpet - means to be beautiful, goodly, to shine forth.

**Q. What do you think this Jubilee Year is pointing to?**

*23 'The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. 24 'And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land.*

Redemption covers land, houses and servants, but more specifically, it is a reminder of the Exodus from Egypt, since it also brings slaves to freedom and rest. Lev 25:42 *"For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. 55 For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants ..."*

It is only in Chapter 25 of Leviticus that we come to understand the significance of the words God commanded Moses to speak to Pharaoh: *This is what God says: "Israel is My son, My firstborn"* (Ex.

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<sup>2</sup> Review Leviticus 16 where we spoke of the Day of Atonement in some detail.

4:22). Here, God is engaged in the first act of redemption. He is exercising his right and responsibility as a close kinsman – their “Father”.

Although the Torah speaks of the redemption of physical slaves, we can now see that the prophetic picture of the Jubilee year is that God Himself will redeem mankind, and ultimately all of Creation, from the effects of the Fall. God alone has true claim to the service of mankind, and if we are servants of God, we cannot be slaves to anyone or anything else, for “we cannot serve two masters”. To be “in the image of God” means to be called to a life of freedom. Only God’s servant is truly free, as Paul states in Galatians 5:1 “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has set us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”

At the heart of Israel was an idea almost unthinkable to the ancient mind: that God intervenes in history to liberate slaves – that the supreme Power is on the side of the powerless. It is no accident that Israel was born as a nation under conditions of slavery.... The free God desires the free worship of free human beings.<sup>3</sup>

This idea of freedom and equality is carried through strongly in the NT, where we read “...there is no longer slave nor free, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” The idea of serving God is also made clear – Paul continually called himself a servant of Jesus Christ – but, as we also know, that is not new to the NT. We saw back in Exodus that God brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt so that they could *serve* Him (see Ex. 8:1 etc). The paragraph below is a quote taken from our study of Exodus 12:

The only difference is a change of master—once they served Pharaoh, now will serve God. Either way, one could say there is no real freedom, as there is still the expectation of effort. The world would say that the only freedom that counts is the freedom to do what you like—but that is not freedom but anarchy, not liberty but lawlessness. Mankind needs a system of restraints for society to function as a civil community. God gifted His people with the Torah, a comprehensive series of laws and statutes to enable this.

The Hebrew word *avodah* – used widely in Exodus, and also here in Leviticus - jointly means work, worship, and service. “The various usages of this Hebrew word ... tell us that God’s original design and desire is that our work and our worship would be a seamless way of living. ... Avodah is a picture of an integrated faith. A life where work and worship come from the same foundation .... Avodah, on the other hand, suggests that our work can be a form of worship where we honor the Lord God, and serve our neighbors.”<sup>4</sup>

Returning to our current chapter, the *Shemittah* cycle is a rhythm in time designed to help Israel constantly keep in mind that their God is the true owner of the land, and of His people. Jubilee laws emphasize that the land and freedom are both divine gifts—men are merely stewards/sojourners/tenants: “**The earth is the LORD’S and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.**” (Ps. 24:1); ... **all the earth is Mine.** (Ex. 19:4)

**Q. Why is it necessary to be reminded constantly that God is the true owner of everything?**

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY – The people’s non-observance of these laws eventually led to the 70 years of captivity in Babylon – a year for each year of non-observance.<sup>5</sup> This implies that because the Jews failed to rest the land for at least 490 years, as instructed, one year of captivity was imposed for each year the land was forced to ‘serve’, so the land then received its required rest.

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<sup>3</sup> Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, Leviticus, p.369.

<sup>4</sup> <https://tifwe.org/avodah-a-life-of-work-worship-and-service/>

<sup>5</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:20-21

The Book of Ruth is a short but profound story in which we find the Law of Redemption of ancestral land at work. In fact, the word *geula*, “redeemed”, is a keyword in the book of Ruth, appearing more than twenty times throughout the book.

The definition of Redeemed is: “to buy back, to free from captivity by payment of ransom, to release from blame or debt, to free from distresses or harm, to free from the consequences of sin.”

1 Cor. 6:20 We also are *‘no longer our own, but we are bought with a price.’*

Redemption is absolutely central to the Christian message – without it we would still be lost in our sins and blind to God’s mercy and grace. *18 ...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.* (1 Peter 1:18-19)

### **Q. What is the ministry of Yeshua according to Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61?<sup>6</sup>**

... to proclaim liberty to the captives ... to set at liberty those who are oppressed.

Rom. 8:18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. 23 Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

## **CHAPTER 26**

*1 ‘You shall not make idols for yourselves; ... for I am the LORD your God. 2 You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD. 3 ‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then...*

Verses 4-12 go on to spell out the abundant blessings that will flow if the people live in accordance with the will of their God. Verses 13-39 then go on to give a very sobering account of the absolutely devastating consequences that will be reaped if they do not walk in obedience and observe God’s commandments.<sup>7</sup>

**Notice** the threefold parallel between verse 3 and verse 15.

*v.3-4 ‘If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them; then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit....*

*v.15-16 If you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant, I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.*

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<sup>6</sup> It is suggested that “the acceptable year of the Lord” which Yeshua proclaimed, referred to a Jubilee year.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 28 spells out these blessings and curses at even greater length.

**Walk in** - The Hebrew word for 'walk', suggests continuous activity, or movement forward – the implication being the progressive mastering of Torah through continuous, diligent observance.

**My Statutes** - From a root which means “to inscribe”, thus it is said that statutes are “inscribed on the heart”. Thus one becomes so connected to the will of God that His presence and His Kingdom becomes manifest on earth.<sup>8</sup>

**Keep My Commandments** – to guard, to exercise great care over, to tend.

God is calling his people to engage all their faculties in the keeping of their covenant relationship. The people must put value on God’s words enough to study them and know them; not just to know them but to keep them (guard, tend, watch over) in their hearts; and do/perform them. Being in Covenant relationship with God is a very serious matter.

**Q. How do you, as a New Covenant believer, respond to this?**

What did Yeshua say? Read John 14:21-24; 15:7-11. What Commandments did he refer to?

Read Jeremiah 31:23-34 and relate it to our discussion.

## **The Promised Blessings of Leviticus 26:1-13**

We may question why walking in the ways of God – loving his commandments and keeping them – results in blessings on the land. Release of creation itself from bondage into glorious freedom is spoken of in various scriptures: e.g. Ps. 96:10-13.

Whilst these Torah blessings would undoubtedly have had meaning and fulfilment on the natural level, they might also be seen metaphorically. As we would know, it is Biblically valid to translate the material blessings to spiritual ones. Consider for example:

- Psalm 1:1-3 – men are likened to trees planted by rivers of water?
- The Word is likened to water, e.g. “Come to the water, you who are thirsty.”
- “Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew. As raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass.” (Deut.32:2)

*2 Chronicles 7:14 "if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will **forgive their sin and heal their land.**"*

The NT is also replete with metaphorical sayings. Yeshua often spoke in parables, using agricultural analogies to teach spiritual truths and adding: “Whoever has ears, let them hear ...” For example, the Matthew 13 parables, such as the Parable of the Four Seeds; John 15:5 “I am the true vine you are the branches”; Gal 6:7 “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”

## **Peace**

*6 I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid;*

Central to the blessings in verse 6 is the promise of peace. We see from this that peace is the essential supplement to all blessings; indeed, peace is always mentioned at the end of our prayers because it is the ultimate and final blessing. The appearance of the promise of peace at this point in the middle of the blessings instead of the end implies that the subsequent blessings relate to the

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<sup>8</sup> Teaching from the *Sefet Emet*, a great 19thC Chassidic rabbi.

time of the Messiah in which peace already reigns. *Ramban* states that this section of peace blessings refers to the future Messianic period.<sup>9</sup>

### **Q. What thoughts can you bring to the table?**

Leaving peace with His disciples was certainly important to Yeshua: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives, give I to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.* (Jn. 14:27)

### **Q. Are you walking in the peace that only our Messiah can give? If not, why not?**

## **The Curses – Leviticus 26:14-32**

The blessings listed in chapter 26 are totally outnumbered by the curses. What does this mean? What we find is that the blessings are listed in a general fashion, while the curses are listed in much more detail. If they followed His statutes they would *immediately* enjoy the entire range of infinite blessings. But if they disobeyed and violated His Covenant, the curses would begin to kick in – not all at once, but one by one. First they would suffer health issues intended to make them repent. Crop failure would be next and so things would continue to deteriorate for them unless they repented as a people.

Exile becomes the worst curse of all, since it is separation from the land and from God's presence Lev. 26:33 *I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you.*

Recall the exile of the Jewish people. Note also how Israel's dispersion into the nations thematically connects with Adam & Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden.

V.32 : *"I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it"*

It is noteworthy that, 2000 years after the destruction of the Temple and banishment of Jews from the Land, it remained desolate until they returned to the land.

Mark Twain who visited Israel in 1867 described it like this in *Innocents Abroad*:

We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given wholly to weeds - a silent, mournful expanse... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. We reached Tabor safely... We never saw a human being on the whole route. We pressed on toward the goal of our crusade, renowned Jerusalem. The further we went the hotter the sun got and the more rocky and bare, repulsive and dreary the landscape became... There was hardly a tree or a shrub anywhere. Even the olive and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country. No landscape exists that is more tiresome to the eye than that which bounds the approaches to Jerusalem... Jerusalem is mournful, dreary and lifeless. I would not desire to live here. It is a hopeless, dreary, heartbroken land... Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes."<sup>10</sup>

Verses 34-35 draw attention again to the land requiring its rest and enjoying its Sabbaths. The modern world forgets so easily – the Land that was once called Palestine now flourishes in an extraordinary way under Israel's hand.

### **READ verses 40-45 — How then should we view modern Israel?**

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<sup>9</sup> Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, p.317.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from [http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/return\\_to\\_the\\_land\\_of\\_israel/](http://www.simpletoremember.com/articles/a/return_to_the_land_of_israel/) Interesting article on the rebirth of Israel.