

May 21, 2020

Parashiyot Behar-Beḥukkotai

Leviticus 25:1-27:34

Taught By:

Sammy, Seth, & Charles



## SUMMARY

*Moshe* teaches laws that relate to the land of Israel. One is *sh'meetah*, the law of the 7th year. Just like the seventh day of the week is Shabbat for us, every seventh year the land gets a whole year of Shabbat rest and temporarily returns to its wild state.

For six years, the people may plant and harvest, but in the seventh year there is no planting or harvesting. In the seventh year, all private fields and vineyards become public for the year and any person or animal can eat from anyone's land. Everyone returns to the way of gatherers, rather than farmers. When there was still slavery, slaves were set free every 50 years.

Every 50 years is the Jubilee year - called *Yovel* in Hebrew. The people count 7 times 7 years - a total of 49 years - and then mark the beginning of the 50th year with a blast of the shofar on *Yom Kippur*. The Torah's words about this year are written on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia: "Proclaim Liberty Throughout All the Land Unto All the Inhabitants Thereof." In the *Yovel* year, people who had to sell their family land in the past could return to their land. This is because all the earth really belongs to G-d. People are just passing through.



**SETH:** I think it makes sense so we don't wear out the land. We know that if we use the same land for farming the same things for a long time it can wear out the land, and maybe the water supply too. It will be more difficult to grow the food we need.

**CHARLES:** Also--when the land rests, it also forces us to take a kind of rest, too. We have to do things differently that year--spending less time in the field farming and just harvesting what grows there. Also--maybe there is something different about this land. Maybe G'd is saying that the land is a little like us. Both the land and the people living on it are Israelite. Just like Israelite people have to rest, Israelite land also has to rest. It might make people feel more connected to the land if we live according to some of the same rules.

**1) Why do you think that G'd tells the Israelites that the Promised Land will need to rest from farming every 7 years?**

**2) The *Torah* doesn't usually make a point of telling us where the Israelites received a rule, so why might it make a point of mentioning that we receive this rule--about giving the Promised Land a rest every 7 years--at Mt. Sinai.**

**SAMMY:** I think that the Torah is pointing out that we are receiving this rule *before* we get into the Promised Land, which makes sense! If we are going to a holy place it is important that we know as much as we can about how to treat that land before we cross over and enter there.



**3) If the Torah was ok with enslaving people, why do you think there was a rule that all enslaved people and their families had to be set free every 50 years?**

**CHARLES:** Owning a person is not like owning a book. People have the ability to make choices for themselves. If enslaved people and their families were never set free, then that would mean that there would be a whole group of people, and their children, and their grandchildren, and their great grandchildren--forever--who would never be able to make decisions for themselves. . . unless someone changed the law. I think the Torah wants all people to be able to make choices for themselves.