

BEHAR-BECHUKOTAI

FUSION
WITH RABBI JASON



with
Rabbi Jason Sobel

5785 - THE YEAR OF OPEN WINDOWS

TORAH PORTIONS
Parashat Behar-Bechukotai



THIS WEEK'S TORAH PORTIONS

LEVITICUS 25:1-27:34

Behar-Bechukotai / פרשת בהר-בחוקתי

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COMMENTARY..... 1

The spiritual life is not transactional, it's relational! We don't merely check off boxes on a "Do Good" list and go back to our own concerns. We live and move and have our being *in* the Almighty God by faith in *Yeshua*. He is the sun, the "center of gravity" in our solar system. AND YET...He longs to walk among us, much like He did with Adam and Eve. *Let's go there!*

NEW TESTAMENT TIE-IN..... 2

The Jubilee Year seemingly has been growing in popularity as believers find encouragement in its promise of debt cancellation and material restoration. But what if something deeper is at play here? What if the call to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor is a clue that points to an even greater announcement, one that would ultimately fulfill the 50-year cycle?

HEBREW WORD STUDY..... 3

The Book of Leviticus can be...*intense*. The soft filter that contemporary Western Christians like to use when talking about God is not found here. Frankly, this book's presentation of God can be so radically different that it rattles its readers, provoking deep and often unsettling questions. This study will help you navigate one of those "harsh" passages with honesty, nuance, and hope.



OVER VIEW

With this "double portion" we reach the conclusion of the book of Leviticus. We're also more than halfway through the five books of Moses (aka the Pentateuch). In *Behar*, God instructs the Children of Israel to let the land "rest" (from agricultural development) every seven years, a "Sabbath of solemn rest for the land...to the Lord." We also read about the Jubilee year every 50 years. In *Bechukotai*, we read about the blessings that will come to the Children of Israel if they follow God's commandments (and a list of punishments if they don't).

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Weekly Torah Portions – *Parashat Behar-Bechukotai* / פרשת בהר־בחקתי | with **Rabbi Jason Sobel**

Staff Contributor

COMMENTARY

“It’s just business. It ain’t personal.”

We’ve all probably heard this in some gangster movie when a bad guy whacks someone because they didn’t keep up with the terms of the agreement. Well, with God, business *is* personal. The combo *parashot* of *Behar-Bechukotai* deals extensively with godly business practices regarding selling property, selling humans, the redemption of both, pruning and harvesting one’s crops, and even charging interest. All of these matters are personal business to God. One can’t compartmentalize them and say, “Hey, it’s just business.”

All of these seemingly “secular,” mundane phenomena are so dear to God that He promises that life will go well for the children of Israel if they keep His commandments relating to them (He, of course, also includes not making idols, keeping *Shabbat*, and honoring the *Mishkan* [Leviticus 26:1-2]). Ultimately, the LORD will bless the people with all they need if they do right by others. Even their military prowess will increase (Ibid 26:7-8).

Beyond this, a section in Leviticus 26:9-12 is quite fascinating upon closer inspection. In it, God promises that if the people obey His directives faithfully, He will do some exceptional things for them:

“I will turn toward you, make you **fruitful and multiply** you, and I will confirm My covenant with you. You will eat the old harvest and clear out the old because of the new. I will set My Tabernacle among you, and My soul will not abhor you. I will walk among you and will be your God, and you will be My people.”

This passage may seem like standard God-blessing-the-people-due-to-obedience language, but key words in it harken back to something profound.

In Genesis 3:23-24, we read how God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden. In our *parashat*, God returns to the original “creation mandate” of Genesis 1, empowering the Children of Israel to be “fruitful and multiply.” This time, however, God will be the one fulfilling this. God promises to fulfill His covenant with them, though it’s unclear what the meaning is here. Rashi (a leading biblical exegete in the Middle Ages) does provide insight. He believed this promise in Leviticus was the establishment of the new covenant, quoting Jeremiah 31:30-33, that would not be broken. God would once again be with the people and, much like the Edenic primordial past, *walk amongst us*.

The word “walk” is not such a unique word. However, an unusual Hebrew form of this word appears in Genesis and Leviticus.

Genesis 3:8 reads, “וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶת קוֹל יְיָ אֱלֹהִים מֵתְהַלֵּךְ בִּגְן” (“And they heard the sound of *Adonai Elohim* going to and from in the garden”).

And Leviticus 26:12 reads, “וְהֵתֵּלַכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם” (“I will walk among you”).

The overarching idea here is that if God’s people will listen to His voice and not run from it, like they did in the garden, but obey it, God will walk with them once again, increase them, and establish His everlasting covenant with them. This *parashah* reveals God’s heart to us—the gracious desire to redeem His people and reestablish His intimacy with His children in the land of promise. It’s a beautiful heart indeed!

New Testament Tie-In

In the opening verses of this week's *parsha*, we read a verse that arguably has increased in popularity in recent years:

You are to make the fiftieth year holy, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It is to be a Jubilee to you, when each of you is to return to his own property and each of you is to return to his family.

– Leviticus 25:10

At face value, it's easy to understand why many people are drawn to the biblical concept of "jubilee." The notion of debt elimination and the restoration of lost property is a dream come true for so many of us who are struggling and believe that a fresh start would alter the course of our lives. A closer examination of the Jubilee reveals just how complex it would be to implement. The following verses involve detailed instructions regarding commerce in the time leading up to this sabbath of sabbaths. Perhaps this is why ancient Israel seemingly did not consistently observe the Jubilee.¹ One academic resource notes,

"While there is evidence that kinship redemption was practiced (Jeremiah 32, Ruth 4), there is simply no evidence of a national jubilee in the extant historical documents of Israel (though some would discern an allusion to a jubilee year in Isa 37:30, where a double year of fallow seems to be envisaged; but it may refer merely to the disastrous effect of invasion)."²

Let's fast-forward nearly 1,500 years from the "desert declaration" in Leviticus to a Galilean synagogue and listen to a charismatic rabbi read from the *Haftarah*:

"The *Ruach Adonai* is on me, because He has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, **and to proclaim the year of Adonai's favor.**" – Luke 4:18-19

There is one detail in the Gospel text worth noting: *Yeshua* stood up and announced this text fulfilled (cf. v 21) *after* He returned from forty days in the wilderness "in the power of the Spirit" (v 14). And what preceded the Lord's time of fasting and temptation in the wilderness? His descent into the Jordan River (via baptism). In a symbolic yet quite physical (almost theatrical!) way, the Messiah reversed Israel's journey. While they went from the wilderness to the Jordan River into the Promised Land, *Yeshua* went from Israel to the Jordan to the wilderness.

His return from the wilderness was marked out by the Spirit's empowering presence, a presence that no doubt inspired His reading of Isaiah. By identifying the prophet's words as referring to Himself, *Yeshua* announced His messiahship. The English verb "anointed" is a translation of the Greek *χρίω* (*chrīō*), which is a translation of the Hebrew verb *משח* (*mashach*), which is the basis of its corresponding noun, *mashiach* ("anointed one").

The year of jubilee, of liberty, of the Lord's favor reached its fulfillment not in the elimination of financial debt but moral ones. This ancient concept served as a platform for *Yeshua's* announcement of His messiahship. He was the one true Israelite who came through the wilderness in the Spirit's power and anointing rather than doubt and disbelief. Whoever He sets free is "free indeed" (John 8:36)!

Hebrew Word Study

ga'al [גאל] / "to abhor, loathe"

"I will destroy your high places and cut down your altars of incense, cast your dead bodies upon the bodies of your idols, and My soul will *abhor* you." – Leviticus 26:30

The verse cited above is intense. Many Christians have struggled to reconcile God's words here with His character as revealed in *Yeshua*. Of course, the context is critical (sober warnings detailing the severe consequences for the Children of Israel should they insist on rebelling against God's commands), but how should we understand the claim that God's soul will *abhor* His rebellious children?

"Abhor" is a translation of the Hebrew word *ga'al* (גאל). Its tri-consonantal root is:

- *Gimel* (ג) / 3
- *Ayin* (א) / 70
- *Lamed* (ל) / 30

English translators have taken diverse approaches to this provocative text...

"I will reject you." [CSB]
"I will despise you." [CEB]
"I will detest you." [CJB]
"And you will be disgusting to me." [CEV]
"My soul will loathe you." [NASB]

Those renderings don't make matters easier for us. One lexicon defines *ga'al* as, "an intense aversion which is expressed often in punitive or adverse action."³ This term appears ten times in the Hebrew Bible—five of those are in Leviticus 26! Let's look at *ga'al* in Jeremiah 14:19,

"Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul **loathed** [*ga'alah*] Zion? Why have You smitten us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for *shalom*, but nothing good came, and for a time of healing, but suddenly, terror!"

We also find it in Ezekiel 16:45, "You are your mother's daughter, who **despises** [*go'elet*] her husband and her children. You are the sister of your sisters, who despised their husbands and their children. Your mother was a Hittite. Your father was an Amorite." In this passage, the prophet refers to Sodom as Jerusalem's sister and insists that Samaria did not commit half the sins of Zion. In both prophetic passages, there is a sense that the severe warnings of Leviticus would be realized in the Exile.

What do we do with this? Perhaps Robert Alter, Jewish scholar and "friend" of this column, can help us. The clue here is not in *ga'al* ("loathe") but *nefesh* (i.e., "My soul will loathe you" [NASB]). Alter comments:

The multivalent *nefesh* here means "throat" and hence...literally "my throat will not expel you," i.e., I will not writh in disgust over you...[*ga'al*] is chosen to stand in counterpoint to Israel's loathing God in verses 15 and 43 and God's loathing Israel in return for its miscreance.⁴

There are three crucial points to make. God's experience of *ga'al* is mirroring Israel back to herself, not in pettiness but grace. Second, this verbiage is clarifying that should the land vomit Israel out due to iniquity, God will not hesitate (i.e., writh) in executing judgment. Finally, this abhorrence is describing a temporary state, not the final word on God's heart for His people.

FUSION

Rabbi Jason & Fusion Global present
HEBREW WORD STUDY

געל

געל / ga'al: VB. **to abhor, loathe.** *To hate and reject someone or something. In the passive, it conveys the meaning "to be defiled."*¹

If Israel kept the Lord's law, the Lord would not abhor them but continue to dwell among them (Lev 26:11), but if they abhorred the divine statutes, then God would bring judgments on the people (26:15). The attitude which the Lord would hold toward those on whom he would visit judgment is expressed by this root (26:30), indicating a rejection of those persons. The divine abhorrence is paralleled on the part of the people by their abhorrence and their contempt for the Lord's statutes and ordinances (26:43). But the Lord's abhorrence of them would not extend to their destruction in the land of their exile or to forgetting them (26:44). The judgment predicted in Lev 26 finds its fulfillment in the time of Jeremiah who used this word to describe the Lord's attitude toward Israel when he afflicted them in accordance with the cursing formulae of the covenant.²

¹taken from the *Lexham Theological Wordbook*

²taken from the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

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THOUGHTS for REFLECTION

Take some time this week to prayerfully consider and discuss with friends:

- What must it have been like for Adam and Eve to walk with the Lord in the Garden of Eden in the cool of "the day"? There's something about this image that evokes a profound sense of goodness, like that is why God created us. It is too easy for the cares of this temporal life to fill our horizon, convincing us that they are our reason for living. Nothing could be further from the truth! As you walk in obedience to God's commands this week, do so as an expression of your desire to walk with Him...***in step!***
- On one level, every year is a Jubilee in *Yeshua HaMashiach*! 2,000 years ago He proclaimed the "the year of *ADONAI*'s favor"—why should we assume He's not still proclaiming it today? The challenge for us lies in our choice to live in alignment with His proclamation. Ask the Spirit to reveal how *Yeshua*'s announcement in Luke 4 is true for your life today.

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NEXT WEEK'S READINGS: *Parashat Bamidbar* / פרשת במדבר

TORAH

Sunday / Numbers 1:1-19

Monday / Numbers 1:20-54

Tuesday / Numbers 2:1-34

Wednesday / Numbers 3:1-13

Thursday / Numbers 3:14-39

Friday / Numbers 3:40-51

Saturday / Numbers 4:1-20

Prophetic Reading (*Haftarah*):

Hosea 2:1-22

New Covenant Reading:

Matthew 4:1-17

Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *Tree of Life Version*.

¹ Scripture suggests that God sent Israel into exile precisely because of missed Sabbath years (*cf.* 2 Chron 36:20-21).

² Christopher J. H. Wright, "Jubilee, Year of," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1027-1028.

³ Bruce K. Waltke, "גערל 369," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 169.

⁴ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1, 3 vols. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019), 457.