

relevance and value for His people right now. They are “a shadow of the things to come...the substance [of which] belongs to Christ” (Colossians 2:17, ESV).⁵⁴

Concluding Thoughts

As you consider *Emor* this week, it is my hope and prayer that the Holy One of Israel is speaking directly to you. How do you approach the Lord’s appointed times? Do you truly bask in His presence on *Shabbat*? Do you glory in the accomplishments of Yeshua at each one of the feasts? Are you truly interested in allowing the appointed times of the Lord to instruct you in His ways and His ongoing progress of salvation history? What do the appointed times teach you about the future?

God’s people get to visibly demonstrate that they are His by remembering the appointed times. Each one of us makes up His Kingdom of priests, serving as His representatives among the masses of sinful humanity (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). Does your Messianic congregation or fellowship make *Shabbat* and the appointed feasts a time for reaching out to others, and in demonstrating the goodness of our Heavenly Father to others? Are they used as times to bless others with what He has done for us? Or, are the appointed times used to condemn and harass those who presently do not keep them, or think that they are unimportant? **If timing is everything**, then position yourself to be a beacon of His light and salvation to all you encounter—not only during the appointed times—but during all times!

B’har בְּהַר On the mount “The Faithful Jubilee”

Leviticus 25:1-26:2

Jeremiah 32:6-27

In our short *parashah* for this week, various commandments are given about the Sabbatical years for the Promised Land, the jubilee,⁵⁵ and more instruction about how God’s people are to treat their neighbors.⁵⁶ As you read and reflect upon this selection, you can readily conclude that the Lord is very serious about molding a faithful people who would depend upon Him for His provision. *B’har* opens by detailing the main instruction about Sabbatical years:

“The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, ‘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. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 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”’” (Leviticus 25:1-4).

⁵⁴ Consult the article “Does the New Testament Annul the Biblical Appointments?” by J.K. McKee, appearing in *Torah In the Balance, Volume I*.

⁵⁵ Leviticus 25:1-22.

⁵⁶ Leviticus 25:35-55.

The commandment to take one day in seven, to rest and remember the weekly *Shabbat*—is now mirrored on an annual cycle. Every seventh year all of the arable land is to have a rest from crop production. Furthermore, after seven sets of seven weeks of years (or forty-nine years), a fiftieth year of jubilee is to be proclaimed (Leviticus 25:8). On the fiftieth year or year of jubilee, the land is again to remain fallow and have its rest from crop production:

“You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in *from* its untrimmed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field” (Leviticus 25:11-12).

During the season of jubilee it would be almost three years before a crop could be harvested (years 49 and 50 with fallow land, and year 51 for the growing season). These commandments were obviously designed to develop a faithful people who trust and depend upon God for their provision and well being (cf. Leviticus 25:20-22).

After watching the Most High provide for His people for seven consecutive Sabbatical years, the year of jubilee (Heb. *yoveil*, יובל) was to be proclaimed (Leviticus 25:10). *But what was this year of jubilee to be?* Beyond simply letting the land remain fallow on this year, the entire economic system would go through a significant adjustment (Leviticus 25:23-34). Once every fifty years, the restoration of Israel to its original tribal boundaries, coupled with the annulment of labor contracts, is commanded:

“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” (Leviticus 25:10).

The Lord obviously knew the propensity of many in Ancient Israel to take advantage of weaker or less-gifted people, and every fifty years it was His intention to restore the Promised Land and its inhabitants to a degree of the way it was when they originally took possession. By restoring property to their original families, and releasing people from debt or indentured servitude, proper relationships can be restored between the Land and the people of Israel. The proclamation of the year of jubilee, in essence, would level the playing field for successive generations of Israelites. The human tendency to want to control and accumulate power by possession would be minimized, if not periodically eliminated.

The Lord instituted these commandments because He knew, that in their own strength, the exact opposite of what He requires for a nation of priests—who are supposed to serve others—would likely be prevailing. He knew that fallen humanity’s predisposition is to **wrong neighbor** rather than to **love neighbor**.⁵⁷ A secular humanist or Darwinist would conclude that people just have a tendency to gravitate toward a “survival of the fittest” mentality. However, in God’s goodness to Ancient Israel, these cyclical ordinances were enacted so that His people could return a kind of normalcy every fifty years and during each future generation, with much concern for the poor and destitute (Leviticus 25:35-55). To further insure proper relationships among the Israelites’ neighbors, the instruction following speaks against various kinds of wrongdoing (cf. Leviticus 26).

Do No Wrong

⁵⁷ Cf. Leviticus 19:18.

Two times in *B'har*, admonitions against wrongdoing are strongly asserted. The Hebrew verb *yanah* (יָנַח), meaning “to oppress, to treat violently” (*AMG*),⁵⁸ suggests that this was a part of the reason why the jubilee year was instituted:

“If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend or buy from your friend's hand, you shall not wrong [*yanah*] one another. 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. 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. So you shall not wrong [*yanah*] one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God” (Leviticus 25:14-17).

Earlier in the Torah, the verb *yanah* is employed to refer to the treatment that was **not to be done** to the sojourner or stranger within the midst of Israel:

“You shall not wrong [*yanah*] a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:21).

“When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong [*yanah*]” (Leviticus 19:33).

“He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat [*yanah*] him” (Deuteronomy 23:16).

As you read a little further in *B'har*, you will detect that the Israelites are not only told to do no wrong, but they are also specifically commanded to help or assist others who are less fortunate. In other words, we might say, **instead of wronging their neighbors, they were to love their neighbors:**

“If a fellow countryman of yours becomes so poor he has to sell part of his property, then his nearest kinsman is to come and buy back what his relative has sold...Now in case a countryman of yours becomes poor and his means with regard to you falter, then you are to sustain him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. Do not take usurious interest from him, but revere your God, that your countryman may live with you. You shall not give him your silver at interest, nor your food for gain...You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God” (Leviticus 25:25, 35-37, 43).

The legal principles of setting aside contracts for various time periods, redemption rights, forgoing interest on loans or debts, bankruptcy codes, and a variety of other business activities in modern times—may be able to trace their roots to some of the commandments in *B'har* that were to regulate Ancient Israel's economy. In various respects, you can even see links between these verses and the creation of some welfare states in the West.⁵⁹ In fact, when you study the history of the Jewish people and the Jewish tendency to often be “liberal” on many social issues, these positions have some of their roots in this very Torah portion.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Baker and Carpenter, 451.

⁵⁹ Editor's note: Be aware of how much of the socialized medicine seen in places like Western Europe and Canada was originally promoted by many Christian clergy, who thought it was a Biblical and moral duty to provide free healthcare to the masses. Only the interference of government bureaucracy saw quality of care suffer, being unable to serve all people.

If the faith community itself would make an effort to help the sick and destitute, using their resources wisely in sponsoring clinics and education for healthy living, then a government administrated health system would be largely unnecessary.

⁶⁰ Cf. Levine, in *Etz Hayim*, pp 742-746.

Lack of Faith

Even though we can make various links and comparisons between modern-day legal and economic systems, and Israel's legal and economic system in the Ancient Near East, one thing is quite clear: **Ancient Israel had a difficult time following the basic tenets of the Sabbatical year and the year of jubilee.** When you examine history of Israel as recorded in the Tanakh, noticeably absent is the record that the Sabbatical years or jubilee years were ever remembered. Something must have been misunderstood for these commandments to not be followed. Was the faith required to let the ground remain fallow for a Sabbatical year just missing? Were the positions of agricultural influence too valuable for some to give up? It cannot be avoided that God declares how the Promised Land was His to give the Israelites, and how He definitely has the right to tell them how to administer it:

“The land, moreover, shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are *but* aliens and sojourners with Me. Thus for every piece of your property, you are to provide for the redemption of the land” (Leviticus 25:23-24).

God owned the Land, and simply allowed Israel to occupy it in order to produce crops or tend their livestock. If this principle had been understood and complied with, then many of the problems about owning and controlling land—and much of the oppression of the poor spoken against in the Prophets—could have been minimized. The problem is that the Ancient Israelites largely did not have the faith or confidence to follow these precepts. They may have believed the Word of God, but for some reason or another, found it difficult to implement following many of the commandments, which we are considering this week in *B'har*.

We need to remember that the God of Israel desires a people who will manifest faith and trust in Him. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all figures of faith who modeled the appropriate actions that pleased Him. And, we know that without faith, it is impossible to please Him:

“And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6; cf. 11:8-16).

The Faithful Jubilee

As you ponder the instructions described in *B'har*, you can consider how many of our spiritual forbearers seemed to lack the faith to keep these commands. You should be reminded that it was because of a longstanding disobedience to them that Jeremiah's warning, about the required punishment for not obeying the Sabbatical year, was fulfilled by the exile of the Southern Kingdom to Babylon for seventy years:

“This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years...For thus says the LORD, ‘When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place’” (Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10).

“Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete” (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

While the Southern Kingdom was punished for not observing the statutes of the Lord, consider how He must have been quite patient in allowing the people to ignore the

command to let the Promised Land rest, for many centuries. Even though He had to issue judgment, Jeremiah's words continue with the promise of restoration: "I know the plans that I have for you," declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope' (Jeremiah 29:11). The theme of Israel's restoration from captivity, and a return to the favor of God, is a consistent one seen throughout the Prophets.⁶¹

The concept of a year of jubilee is one that resonates quite well with people of faith, hearing that all debts will be paid in full, and that those in bondage or captivity will be released. The announcement of the year of jubilee was to be delivered to Ancient Israel on *Yom Kippur*. It would symbolize that all debts to the Lord and one's fellow were completely gone. Just as the corporate sins of Israel were being dealt with, so every fifty years was it God's intention for the people to experience various physical releases and a fresh start:

"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. 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. 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" (Leviticus 25:8-10).

The concept of a jubilee is expounded upon by the Prophet Isaiah, who declared that a *sh'nat-ratzon l'ADONAI* (שְׁנַת־רַצוֹן לַיהוָה) would come, along with considerable restoration to the downtrodden:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners; to proclaim **the favorable year of the LORD** and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to grant those who mourn *in* Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting. So they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified. Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations; and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations" (Isaiah 61:1-4).

This prophecy is highly important, because when Yeshua stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth, and quoted from this text, He made an affirmative declaration that He was indeed the Messiah of Israel:

"And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 'THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.' And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, '**Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing**'" (Luke 4:16-21).

As is quite frequent with Messianic fulfillment of prophecy, the essential reality of the year of jubilee—only here regarding a great release of the debt of sins—is now present in

⁶¹ For further consideration, consult the various entries on the Prophets in *A Survey of the Tanach for the Practical Messianic* by J.K. McKee.

the lives of Believers. More by far is yet to come, as we do await Yeshua's Second Coming, His return to judge the world, and the establishment of His Kingdom from Zion. But in order to be a part of His coming Kingdom, we have to be those who have had the good news of salvation proclaimed to us, and the release from bondage to sin enacted within our lives!

Many questions arise in my heart as I meditate on *B'har*. I think the key to evaluating these questions is whether we each have greater faith than those who preceded us. Would we have honored the Sabbatical years and the jubilee had we been one of the Ancient Israelites?

More importantly, has a release from the penalty of sins been declared over us (cf. Colossians 2:14)? Can we rejoice in that the Lord has given us a new life of communion and fellowship with Him? Can we declare with confidence what He has done within us, and how Yeshua's work at Golgotha (Calvary) has transformed us? Are we at all committed to making sure that people are not consumed by that future day of vengeance foretold in the Scriptures?

If your faith in the Holy One of Israel is real, then your personal jubilee has been secured by the sacrificial death of the Messiah. **Your thankfulness can be exemplified by leading others to their own personal faithful jubilee!**

B'chuqotai בְּחֻקֹּתַי By My Regulations "Remember the Land"

Leviticus 26:3-27:34
Jeremiah 16:19-17:24

B'chuqotai brings the Book of Leviticus to completion. For ten portions, the Torah student has been learning about many aspects of the Levitical priesthood. This includes instructions about the various offerings,⁶² the establishment of the priesthood,⁶³ the laws of purification,⁶⁴ the Day of Atonement,⁶⁵ various prohibitions about heathen customs,⁶⁶ laws of holiness,⁶⁷ and the appointed times of the Lord.⁶⁸ Now, as the listing of instructions comes to a close, ch. 26 focuses our attention on the blessings of obedience versus the consequences of disobedience, and ch. 27 closes with details about voluntary contributions for the maintenance of the sanctuary. Among the things we are considering in our Torah portion for this week, one verse really jumped out at me:

⁶² Leviticus 1:1-7:38.

⁶³ Leviticus 8:1-10:20.

⁶⁴ Leviticus 11:1-15:33.

⁶⁵ Leviticus 16:1-34.

⁶⁶ Leviticus 17:1-18:30.

⁶⁷ Leviticus 19:1-22:33.

⁶⁸ Leviticus 23:1-26:3.