



Shabbat Behar/Behukotai May 16, 2009-22 Iyar 5769

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SABBATH IN MALIBU

On Sabbath May 9 I had the pleasure of preaching in the Malibu SDA congregation in California. It is a small new plant and this was my first visit with them. A few SDA members decided some months ago to meet in Malibu to start a new congregation there. With great courage, they started to rent a public school and they meet there every Sabbath. They were interested in my visit because they said to me that every Saturday afternoon they visit the community going door to door and about 80% of the people visited there are Jews. They want to be better equipped for these meetings. I have already given them some input and they have asked me to come back next year for a three-day training seminar



NEXT SABBATH IN PALM SPRINGS

It is with great pleasure that I will be visiting Palm Springs (California) congregation on May 16 to promote our Ministry there. Palm Springs has a large Jewish community and I hope that our members will be effectively trained to reach their Jewish neighbours. I will be happy to meet some of our readers in the SDA congregation:

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A NEW HEBREW CD FROM RACHEL HYMAN IS COMING SOON



Many of you may remember last year when Rachel Hyman's first Jewish music CD, "Hebrew Psalms of Light" came out. If you haven't got a copy of it yet, I strongly encourage you to get one. Rachel's next CD entitled "Famous Jewish Songs" will be released this coming June. Rachel is now officially beginning her first musical tour in California. She will be touring there from June 7th to August 7th before her next tour in New York. If you are in the California area and would like Rachel to hold a concert at your church, you can contact her through her website. Rachel will be using her concerts in the churches to bring about an awareness of our need to reach the Jews with the gospel. Rachel's new website is:

<http://www.racheljoyhyman.com/rachel/> I invite you to visit this website. You will have a very good example of her spiritual gift as a singer for the Lord.

DAY OF JOY IN ISRAEL

Sergey, the rabbi-pastor of our congregations in the south of Israel (Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beer Sheva, Arad etc...) gave us the news that this next Sabbath will be a Sabbath of Tevilah (immersion service) for them. I hope that I will receive some pictures to share with you. It is a good opportunity to pray for our Ministry in Israel.

OVERVIEW



BEHAR

LEVITICUS 25:1 - 26:2

The Torah prohibits normal farming of the Land of Israel every seven years. This “Shabbat” for the Land is called “shemita”. After every seventh shemita, the fiftieth year, yovel (jubilee) is announced with the sound of the shofar on Yom Kippur. This was also a year for the Land to lie fallow. G-d promises to provide a bumper crop prior to the shemita and yovel years. During yovel, all land is returned to its original division from the time of Joshua, and all Jewish indentured servants are freed, even if they have not completed their six years of work. A Jewish indentured servant may not be given any demeaning, unnecessary or excessively difficult work, and may not be sold in the public market. The price of his labor must be calculated according to the amount of time remaining until he will automatically become free.

The price of land is similarly calculated. Should anyone sell his ancestral land, he has the right to redeem it after two years. If a house in a walled city is sold, the right of redemption is limited to the first year after the sale. The Levites’ cities belong to them forever. The Jewish People are forbidden to take advantage of one another by lending or borrowing with interest. Family members should redeem any relative who was sold as an indentured servant as a result of impoverishment.

BECHUKOTAI

LEVITICUS 26:3 - 27:34

The Torah promises prosperity for the Jewish People if they follow G-d’s commandments. However, if they fail to live up to the responsibility of being the Chosen People, then chilling punishments will result. The Torah details the harsh historical process that will fall upon them when Divine protection is removed. These punishments, whose purpose is to bring the Jewish People to repent, will be in

seven stages, each more severe than the last. Sefer Vayikra, the book of Leviticus, concludes with the details of erachin—the process by which someone vows to give the Beit Hamikdash the equivalent monetary value of a person, an animal or property..

SABBATICAL YEAR

This Shabbat we read the two Parshiot, Behar and Bechukotai. With this reading we conclude the third Book of the Torah, the Book of Leviticus (Vayikra).

Parshat Behar begins with the mitzvah of letting fields rest during S’hmita (Sabbatical year): The torah states: “And the L-rd spoke to Moshe on Mount Sinai saying: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them. When you come into the land which I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath unto the L-rd. Six years you shall sow your field and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its produce. But a Sabbath of solemn rest shall be in the seventh year; you shall not sow your field and you shall not prune your vineyard...” Whatever grew in the seventh year belonged to everyone equally.

As to the question, “What shall we eat the seventh year?” G-d promises, “I will command My blessings upon you in the sixth year and the earth will produce food for the three years.”

The number seven is significant in Judaism. Shabbat is the seventh day. The seventh month is the month of Rosh Hashana, Kippur and Tabernacle Feasts. The seventh year is S’hmita. After seven S’hmita years is the “Jubilee” year (“Yovel”).

At a wedding we recite “Sheva Brachot” - “seven blessings.” In preparation for receiving the Torah on Shavuot, we count Sefirah (omer) for seven weeks.

The patriarchs (Abraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov) and matriarchs (Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel, Leah) total seven. Moshe Rabeinu (Moses) was the seventh generation from Abraham (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kehat, Amram, Moshe). Indeed, our sages say, “The seventh is favored.” In a practical way how do we know if this year is the year of S’mita or not. The Jewish people do it in an easy way. This year is in the Jewish calendar the year 5769, this number cannot be divided by 7, then we are not in a Sabbatic year. the next one will be in 5775, that means in 2014-2015.

WHY A SABBATICAL YEAR

I am thinking about four reasons why G-d ordained that Israel have a Sabbatical Year.

1. One reason is that we should devote that year to Torah study and spiritual elevation. It is very common in American Universities today to grant a sabbatical period (quarter, semester or even a year) to their professors in order for them to concentrate on some specific studies, research, or writing.

2. It is good for the fields to rest and not to be submitted to intensive agriculture which exhausts the ground and makes it less and less productive.

3. Not to work in the fields during the sabbatical year strengthens one's reliance and dependence on G-d. During the other six years one may attribute their success to their own hard work. By resting during the seventh year, we must rely completely on G-d. Thus, our faith in G-d becomes stronger.

4. Through the Sabbatical year we can better appreciate the needs of the poor who do not have their own field and must continually rely on the mercy and generosity of others. This leads to a better understanding of the importance of giving charity and helping the needy.

in their seasons and the land shall yield its produce, the trees of the field shall yield their produce and your threshing shall reach vintage and the vintage shall reach into the sowing time; and you shall eat your bread in fullness and satisfaction and you will dwell in safety in your land. And I will give peace in the land..." (Lev 26:3-5). After describing the many blessings which will come as a result of observing G-d's commandments, the Torah describes the punishments which will befall the Jewish people if they (G-d forbid) abandon G-d's commandments.

Twice in the Torah (in this Parsha and again in Deuteronomy, Parshat Ki Tavo), we find a detailed description of punishments - called "Tochacha" - for not observing the Torah.

However this punishment does not mean that G-d abandon his people or cancel his covenant with Israel. In this parasha we have this statement from G-d "Yet, even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or spurn them so as to destroy them, annulling My covenant with them: for I the LORD am their God." (Lev. 26:44).

HELP, PLEASE

The last comment lead us to this statement of the Torah: "And if your brother will become poor and his means will fail you shall uphold him..." Rashi explains, "Do not wait and let him go down until he falls completely for then it will be difficult to raise him. You must uphold him at the time when he begins to fail." The famous rabbi give the following parable: "This is similar to a burden which has shifted upon a donkey and is weighing the animal down. While the donkey is still standing even one person can shift the load back into place and keep the donkey up. But once the donkey collapses, even five people may not be able to raise it back up again."

Thus, the Torah commands us not to wait until the other person is completely destitute. But we must try to help them at the earliest possible opportunity.

BLESSINGS & PUNISHMENT

Parshat BeChukotei begins, "If in My statutes you will walk and My commandments you will keep and do them; then I will give your rains

HONESTY IN BUSINESS

Of the many mitzvot found in Parshat B'har is honesty in business. The Torah says, "And when you will sell to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor... you shall not wrong one another and you shall fear your G-d, for I am the L-rd your G-d."

Although the Torah already prohibited stealing, G-d again stresses this prohibition relating to business as it is easier to rationalize such behavior in business.

Our sages say that being careful and observant in the mitzvot associated with business and relationships between one person and another have a profound affect as to one's relationship with G-d. This is why the Torah says, "And you shall not wrong one another and you shall fear your G-d!"

In other words, dealing honestly will strengthen one's fear of G-d. The true barometer to one's being G-d fearing can be judged by their honesty in their business dealings and relationship between them and others.

HELP THE POOR

The Zohar tells the following tale: A poor man approached Rabbi Yitzchak and asked for help so that he can feed his wife and children. Rabbi Yitzchak himself was a poor man and had very little. “A half a maah (a very small amount) is all I have. How will you be able to buy food with such a small amount?” asked Rabbi Yitzchak.

“I too have half a maah on me, together with your half I will be able to buy a bread to feed my family,” replied the poor man. Rabbi Yitzchak gave him the coin.

That night Rabbi Yitzchak had a dream. In it he was thrown into the ocean and was about to drown when he noticed his teacher Rabbi Shimon standing with stretched out hands to save him. But try as he may, he couldn’t reach to grasp Rabbi Shimon’s hand. Suddenly the poor man appeared, and brought him to Rabbi Shimon.

Rabbi Yitzchak related his dream to his students. “Fortunate is the one who helps the poor,” he told his students. “For ultimately, it will save the giver in a time of need.”

HONESTY IN BUSINESS

the Talmudic sage Reb Chanina earned his livelihood from selling honey. Once instead of giving bee’s honey, he filled the customer’s jar with fruit honey by mistake. Next time he saw the customer, he told the customer that he mistakenly gave him fruit honey.

The customer replied that he was happy with the honey he got. Yet, Rabbi Chanina felt that he transgressed on the mitzvah of honest business practice, for he didn’t give him what he thought he wanted. So, not wanting to have any gain from money earned in a misleading way, he donated the profit of the sale to charity.

MAR UKVA’S CHARITY

Mar Ukva’s neighbor was a poor person. Each day, Mar Ukva threw the sum of four zuzim through a hole in his neighbor door so that he would not know his identity.

One day, Mar Ukva and his wife stopped by the neighbor’s house to drop in the four zuzim. But as they did, the poor man opened the door. Afraid that he would be embarrassed seeing his benefactor, Mar Ukva and his wife ran and hid in a large oven used for baking bread. The coals in the oven were still hot and Mar Ukva burnt his feet. However, his wife’s feet were not affected at all. She suggested that he place his feet on hers to avoid further pain.

“We both give charity, so why is it that my feet burnt while yours didn’t?” asked Mar Ukva

His wife replied: “The reason is that you perform the mitzvah of charity by giving the poor money. But they cannot benefit from this immediately for they must still buy food. But I am in the house and when a poor person comes for help, I give them food which they eat right away and benefit immediately!”

Mar Ukva’s charity was legendary. Every Erev Yom Kippur, he would send a poor person a certain amount of money. Once, he send the money with his son, but the boy came back with it. He told his father, “The person doesn’t need your money! When I came to his house, I saw him eating a festive meal and drinking good wine!”

“I didn’t realize what this man’s needs were,” Mar Ukva said to his son. “Obviously he needs more than what I give him.” Mar Ukva immediately doubled the amount and told his son to bring it to the person!

Before Mar Ukva passed away he asked that an accounting of all the money he distributed for charity be brought before him. It amounted to a very large sum. Yet, Mar Ukva wasn’t satisfied. “I’m taking too little with me for such a long journey!” he stated. He then took half of his possessions and distributed it to charity.

EDITOR

A newsletter published by the
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HAFTARA

Jeremiah 32:6-27

BESORAT YESHUA

Mark 3:1-30

HAFTARA: In this text of Jeremiah we have an illustration of the year of Yovel. “**Jeremiah said, ‘The word of the LORD came to me: Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, ‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours’”** (Jer. 32:6-7).

However, Jeremiah wanted to be certain that this revelation was truly from God. It was a strange order. Jeremiah had received the revelation from God that the people of Israel would be deported to Babylon, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. There was no sense in buying a property now. It would be better to keep these seventeen shekels of silver and to use them in Babylon where they would be living. It was very strange. The Lord had to confirm to Jeremiah that this revelation was true. And it was confirmed by his cousin. “**Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the LORD, and said to me, ‘Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself.’ Then I knew that this was the word of the LORD”** (Jer. 32:8). He obeyed and bought the land.

“**And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, and weighed the money on scales.** (Jer. 32:9-10).

Why did the Lord want Jeremiah to spend this money in Jerusalem, to buy land that would be taken by the Babylonians? “**Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, both this sealed deed of purchase and this open deed, and put them in an earthenware jar, in order that they may last for a long time. For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land “** (Jer. 32:14-15).

The main message of this purchase is that there is hope. God is not going to abandon his people or to reject them. He wants to teach them a lesson. He wants to push them to fulfil his mission which is to share the knowledge of God. That is why this money was not lost. **OUR HOPE IS IN THE LORD.**

PARASHA: Our text of Leviticus is about the Sabbatical year. Through the action of Israel on the Sabbatical Jubilee year, God wants to teach to Israel the right way to keep the Shabbat. “**You shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. ... In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.... When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. ... You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God “** (Leviticus 25:3).

If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, ... (Leviticus 25:25-26).

BESORAH: It was very important to do good on the Sabbatical year and the jubilee year. Yeshua inaugurated a time of Jubilee and he wanted to illustrate in his way how to keep the Shabbat in this freedom time. “**Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They watched him to see whether he would cure him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, ‘Come forward.’ Then he said to them, ‘Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to kill?’”** (Mark 3:1-4).

The Shabbat is to be a blessing for all human beings and it is allowed to do good on Shabbat. That’s why Yeshua wanted to heal this man on Shabbat. It is true that he could have healed this man any day of the week, however it was a good time to demonstrate God’s love on Shabbat. Most Christians today don’t keep the Shabbat because they have not understood the freedom and the blessing of the Shabbat in the Mashiach. They just see the Shabbat through how they see the Jewish keeping of that day. It is time to come back to the true keeping of the Shabbat taught by the Mashiach, in words and in actions.

