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The Sabbath Year

25: 1-7

The Sabbath year DIG: Who owns the Land of Isra'el? What would be the direct costs of this year-long Sabbath? What effects might such land management have on Isra'el's economy? On their relationship with ADONAI? Why did that take faith for three years?

REFLECT: What most excites you about the Sabbath Land principle? If implemented today, would your life change? What would it mean for the poor and the needy? Can you imagine spending a whole year studying the Scriptures and teaching God's Word to your children?

Parashah 32: b'Har (On Mount Sinai) 25:1 to 26:2

(See my commentary on Deuteronomy, to see [link click Af](#) - Parashah)

The Key Person is Moshe.

The Scene is the Tabernacle in the wilderness of Sinai.

The Main Events include instruction upon entering the Land, to take Shabbat, leave fields fallow the seventh year, and observe Jubilee the fiftieth year by returning all property to the original owners; special guidelines for a relative or the poor person himself to redeem what was sold; houses in walled cities redeemable only the first year; houses redeemable by Levites at any time; no charging interest from any of God's people; no harsh treatment for hired servants; Israelites selling themselves to strangers redeemable or set free at Jubilee; children of Isra'el as God's own servants; no idols; and commands to keep Shabbat and revere the Sanctuary.

The mitzvot of parashah b'Har grants us a glimpse of a different kind of economy. It is not Western capitalism. Neither is it socialism or communism or any other type of economic theory currently practiced in the world. **God's** economy is one in which faith takes precedence over profit; **Sabbaths** are placed before harvests; the individual is more important than the bottom line; family heritage is prized above expansion and growth; and

ADONAI is the owner of both land and human resources. In the economy of Torah, loans are made without interest, and debts are forgiven every **seven years**. **The poor** and the needy are continually at the center of concern (see **Deuteronomy** [Cy](#) - **The Year of Release**). It is a completely different kind of approach, and one that requires a generous portion of faith and trust.

Several of the mitzvot of **Leviticus 25** belong to an ideal Torah economy that does not exist in our world, but all of these mitzvot find some practical application in our lives even today. Furthermore, these mitzvot of Torah economics are undergirded by deep spiritual fundamentals. Here we learn the mitzvot of remission and release, the institution of the kinsman redeemer, the sovereign proprietary rights of **YHVH**, **His** claim upon our lives, and every present concern **He** has for every individual. Here we learn that though redemption may be delayed, **God** sets a deadline for the final **Day of Jubilee**.⁴⁸⁴

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Thus far in the Torah, the word **Shabbat** or other derivatives from its Hebrew root, frequently translated as **rest** (noun or verb), has been used over twenty-five times, and its usage is not over yet! It is, perhaps, one of the most frequent and primary teachings of Torah. Our present parashah opens with, still, another usage of this word. Only this time it does not refer to a specific day, as in previous passages. Instead, the present verses teach us about **a seven-year cycle** which the text calls **a Shabbat**. Moreover, this **Shabbat** is not primarily designated for people like **the seventh-day Shabbat**. This unique **Shabbat** is for **the Land** which **YHVH** gave to the people of **Isra'el**. They were instructed to let **the Land rest** every **seventh** year as a **Shabbat** for **ADONAI**.⁴⁸⁵

ADONAI spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the Land I am going to give you, the Land itself must observe a Sabbath to ADONAI. For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the Land is to have a year of Sabbath rest (a *Sh’mittah*, meaning *the final year in the seven-year cycle, or the Year of Release*), a Sabbath to ADONAI. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The Land is to have a year of rest. Whatever the Land yields during the Sabbath year will be food for you - for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who lives among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your Land. Whatever the Land produces may be eaten. (25:1-7). Just as the weekly Sabbath rest is an act of faith in God, so too the Sabbath Year is an act of faith (see [Ep - Trusting God](#)).

Rest! Rest! Rest! The Sabbath Year and the weekly Shabbat both share several things in common. First of all, they share a common Hebrew root between them translated **rest**. The main idea behind this root is that of **rest**, although other possible translations are *to cease* and *to desist*. Since this **seven-year** cycle is also called a **Shabbat**, it would, therefore, follow that whatever can be said about the weekly **rest** would also be said concerning **the seven-year rest**. Hence, by designating a **rest** every **seven years** as well as every **seven days, the Holy One** is continuing to emphasize that the primary nature of our relationship to **Him** is that of complete and absolute **rest**.

Of course, this concept sounds rather simple, but, in fact, most people fail to see it. In both Jewish and Gentile circles, many people are locked into a mindset which tells them that they must be continually doing mitzvot (or good works) in order to begin, maintain, or earn a proper and eternal relationship with **ADONAI**. However, beginning with the Torah’s teaching about offerings (see [Ah - The Offerings from the People’s Perspective](#)) and covenant (see [Df - Covenant Loyalty to ADONAI](#)), and continuing to the teaching about the once-for-all sacrificial atonement accomplished by **Yeshua** (see the commentary on Hebrews [Cd - Messiah’s Sacrifice Was Once for All Time](#)), the message which **God** has been trying to communicate to sinful mankind is that all we need to do is simply **rest** our souls, our lot, our life into **His** hands by faith. This is why the writer to the **Hebrews** tells us: **Now we who have believed [in Yeshua] enter that rest . . . There remains, therefore, a Sabbath rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God’s rest from his own work, just as God did from His (Hebrews 4:3 and 9-10).** In other words, our relationship with **the Eternal One** can be summed up in one phrase: **a Shabbat rest!** And that **rest** can only be entered into by faith/trust/belief in **Messiah**.⁴⁸⁶

ADONAI's Shabbat: But the similarity between the two kinds of **Shabbat rests** goes beyond that of merely **rest**. A careful reading of **Chapter 23** reveals the fact that there is at least one **Shabbat** included in each of the feasts (mo'adim). But none of these **Shabbat** days are called **a Shabbat to ADONAI**. Only **the seventh-day Shabbat** and **the Sabbath Year** share this designation. In the case of the weekly **Shabbat**, it is called **ADONAI's** because it was **He** who first ceased from **His** work and **rested** (see the commentary on **Genesis Aq - By the Seventh Day God Had Finished His Work**). Thus, **Shabbat** was **God's** ideal from the beginning. **He** set the precedent. **He** established the pattern. **He** laid down the principle.

However, here, in Parashah 32, **ADONAI's Shabbat** carries with it one additional feature: **it** is not first and foremost *people* that were the object of **the Shabbat**, but *the Land*. This raises an interesting question. To whom does the real estate called **the Land of Isra'el** actually belong? If the politicians could answer that question, it would solve a vast majority of the contemporary world problems! All the politicians would have to do is read the Torah. The answer is clear - **the Land of Isra'el** belongs not to the Jewish or Arab people primarily. It belongs to **Ha'Shem Himself!** It is **God's Land!** **He** owns this treasured **Land**, **YHVH** has the right to decide who may or may not live in it.

As we know, the Torah indicates that **the LORD** gave **the Land of Promise** to the children of **Isra'el** to live in as an inheritance (**Genesis 12:7**). With this in mind, the idea implied by the institution of Shamittah can easily be seen. It is a tribute from **the Jewish people** who, every **seven years**, give back **their** homeland to **the One** from whom **they** received it. This expresses the conviction that the country can become the complete property of **the Israelites** only insofar as **God** grants it to them. Moreover, since **ADONAI** is the owner of this **Land**, **He** is the One who decides what should be done with **the Land**. **It** is not the absolute possession of man; it belongs to **God**, and is to be held in trust for **His** purposes.

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that **You** are the best caregiver to watch over all that we count as ours, whether people, property, or time. **You** know how to best care for each one. When we relinquish our right to control our own lives and instead trust and follow **You**, then we can have peace. We need to plan for our future and yet when things seem to go a different way than what we had hoped for, we can rest in **You** and follow **Your** ways in all we do.*

***You** who planned how to place the stars in their perfect orbits are **the Master Planner!** **You** tell of the future kingdoms in **Daniel 2** and **7** and each detail has come to pass exactly as **You** have said. **Revelation 19** foretells how **You** will return from heaven with **Your** bride*

*, and with the sword coming out of your mouth you will destroy all opposition. You are **the King of kings** and what a joy it is to give our hearts and our possessions for **the King's** use. **You** are so gracious. When I give to **You**, **You** are pleased and will have an eternal reward for me. More important than having a beautiful home and many possessions here on earth, is to love **You** dearly now and to one day have a beautiful heavenly home with **You**. It is a joy for me to place all my possessions in **Your** care and to give generously to **You** - my loving and wonderful **Heavenly Father!** In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*

May we add one additional application to this idea? Since **the Land** belongs, in reality, to **the Holy One**, then those who are granted permission to live in it, must live in it according to the conditions which **He** has laid out. Thus, Torah must be the rule of life for its residents. Furthermore, those who rule this **Land** may not give it to others whom **ADONAI** does not designate as legal residents. This hold true no matter which generation is present here, but especially the current one whose inclination so far has been to let others rule sections of **the sacred Land** which **the Holy One** has stipulated only for **the children of Isra'el** and those who are Torarh-legal sojourners with **Isra'el**.⁴⁸⁷

Made for mankind: Before we leave our discussion of **the Sabbath Year**, there is another important point to make. **Yeshua Messiah** tells us that **the Sabbath** was **made for man, not man for the Sabbath** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Cy - The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath**). Among other things, this would teach us that **Shabbat** has certain benefits for mankind, if we observe it unto **the LORD**. So, the same would also hold true for **the Sabbath Year**. We ask then, what benefits can **the Sabbath Year** have for us?

One obvious benefit is that the text indicates that the farmers get a whole year vacation. **Leviticus 25:4** indicates that every **seventh year** the farmers were **not to sow, reap, nor prune for one year**. In fact, **verse four** says that **the seventh year the Land is to have a year of Sabbath rest, a Sabbath to ADONAI**. The same phraseology is also used to describe **the rest** on **Yom Kippur**.

Another benefit is that **the Sabbath Year** affords **the Israelites** an opportunity to see how much **God** can increase our faith. Some would no doubt ask, "But how would we **eat**?" The answer is "Fear not! **YHVH** has this one covered! In **Leviticus 25:21** **He** tells us: **I will order my blessing on you during the sixth year, so that the Land brings forth enough produce for all three years**. **The Word of God** says that **He** would abundantly bless **them** in **the sixth year** so that **the Land** would produce enough for the **three years** to follow: the sixth, **seventh**, and the first year of the next cycle of **seven**, when **they** began

to plant again.⁴⁸⁸ **Until the produce of year two came in, they would eat the old, stored food (25:21-22). Harvested grain could last quite well for at least seven years (Gen 41:1-19 and 47:13-26).** Just as the weekly **Sabbath rest** is an act of faith in **God**, so too **the Sabbath Year** is an act of faith (see **Ep - Trusting God**). However, the fruit and grain which grew by itself without plowing or sowing (common in Isra'el) in **the Sabbath Year** could be picked and **eaten**, but not stored.

Spring

Fall

Year six: God's blessing: reap the barley wheat

Year six: God's blessing: reap the

Year seven: Shabbat rest for the Land

Year seven: Shabbat rest for the Land

Year one: God's blessing: sow the barley wheat

Year one: God's blessing: sow the

Year two: Eat the newly harvested crops

Year two: Eat the newly harvested crops

Another benefit is that by letting **the land rest** for **a year**, it might tend to increase **its** health and ability to produce by replenishing **it**. Many have criticized the Jewish people for letting their **land rest** for **a year**. But in doing so, they do not understand the meaning of this unique mitzah, which, among other things, saves the soil from the danger of exhaustion.

A final benefit of **the Sabbath Year** is that because people would be **resting** that **Year**, there would be lots of time to study **the Scriptures**. **Deuteronomy 31:10-11** tells us that **at the end of every seven years, during the festival of Sukkot in the year of Sh'mittah, when all Isra'el have come to appear in the presence of ADONAI at the place He will choose, you are to read this Torah before all Isra'el, so that they can hear it.** Can you imagine spending a whole **year** just studying **the Scriptures** and teaching **God's Word** to your children?⁴⁸⁹