

## When the L-rd Sets the Captives Free—It is the Year of Jubilee BeHar/Bechukotai {In the Mount...} (Lev. 25:1-27:34)

♪ *Sound the trumpet everywhere, all throughout the land. Follow my decrees you must obey my commands. Gather with your families, come sing and clap your hands, it is the year of jubilee. It is the year of jubilee, when the lame shall walk and the blind shall see, when the L-rd sets the captives free, it is the year of jubilee. Sound the trumpet Yisrael let all the people hear. It is I, the L-rd your G-d, who draws you near. I have not forsaken you, so have no fear, it is the year... Sound the trumpet everywhere let the praises ring. Y'shua has redeemed mankind, salvation He brings. For by his precious sacrifice are we standing free it is the...* ♪ (Joel Chernoff)

**T**he teaching in this week's *parasha* is, perhaps, one of the many proofs that the words of the *Torah* are the words of יהוה Himself, and not the product of any man's invention. For surely no human being—who being born with an inclination toward sin which he inherited from his father Adam—could think of making part of the national constitution of a nation, a teaching which defies all normal standards of economy and flows against the tide of human societies throughout the world. Here we are confronted with some of the most sublime principles of human dignity, equality, and justice found anywhere. In this week's portion, we are taught about the Year of Jubilee where debts were forgiven, slaves set free, and property returned to the original owner.

### יובל *Shanat HaYovel- The Year of Jubilee*

The *Torah* is loaded with significant daily-life patterns of sevens. There is a weekly seven, the weekly *Shabbat*, is on the seventh day. There is another seven: the *Shemittah* (Hebrew: שמיטה, literally "release" or Sabbatical Year) is every seventh year. And in *Vayikra* 25:8-22 we read about a special event associated with seven sevens. The Year of jubilee comes at the end of every seven sets of seven years, or every fifty years. This is called in English the Year of Jubilee, its Hebrew name is *Shanat HaYovel*. According to our passage, there are three events which significantly stand out as important features in the *Yovel* Year: the release of all slaves, the return of all land to its original ancestral owner within the descendants of Israel, and the forgiveness of all debts.

### *The Torah of Freedom*

The text indicates in verse 25:9 that the *Yovel* Year is to begin with a *shofar* blast on Yom Kippur. Hence the *Yovel* year begins with the sound of a goat's horn—literally a *Yovel*. Unlike the *Shemittah* Year which reminds us of Creation, the sounding of a *Yovel* clearly reminds us of Mount Sinai. We remember that in *Shemot* 19:13 Scripture tells us that a *Yovel* as well as a *shofar* was sounded on Mt. Sinai. (Note that the name of our *Parasha* tells us that this teaching is taking place in the "Mount" i.e., at Mt. Sinai.) The *Yovel* contains three obligations: (a) that the children of Israel in bondage be set free (the same was true at Sinai upon their release from Egyptian bondage); (b) that they not sow nor harvest, just as in Mount Sinai there was no sowing or reaping; and (c) that all land revert to its original state, just as in Sinai the children of Israel possessed no fields or vineyards. As it was in Mt. Sinai, the *Yovel* called the redeemed community to the *mountain* and to the *Torah* which was given there, so the *Yovel* Year also calls us back to our roots of freedom in *Torah*. In the *Yovel*, the slave is free to be who he really is—a man who serves only His Adonai and Elohim. The land is also free to be identified by its real owner, יהוה the Elohim of Israel. But it is really by our identification with the *Torah* that we receive our real identity. It is the *Torah* also that gives us our freedom to walk in who we really are. The *Yovel* Year reminds us of that by calling us back to it.

## **Free To Be Me**

Perhaps now we are able to understand more fully what James says in his letter to other Jewish believers in *Yeshua*. He encourages us to remember to follow the *Torah*. He compares the *Torah* to a mirror. If a person reads the *Torah* and does not do what it says it is like one who looks into a mirror, walks away and forgets what he looks like. (James 1:22-25) The *Torah* is actually a description of what the righteousness of יהוה looks like on planet earth. We also know that we who are a New Creation in Messiah have been made the righteousness of יהוה in Him. Therefore, the *Torah* is said to be a mirror in which we can see what the new *me* looks like. I need to know what I look like in order to know how to behave to be consistent with who I now am.

In this analogy, James refers to the *Torah* as the “*perfect law that gives freedom*”—freedom to be who we are now. Why does he refer to the *Torah* as that which gives freedom? Many people teach that anyone who follows the *Torah* is in bondage! If we import our knowledge of Leviticus 25 and its teaching about the *Yovel* Year into James chapter one, as we should, the answer is clear. If *Torah* is followed with the proper motives and in the power of the *Ruach Elohim*, it enables us to walk a walk of freedom! It gives us the freedom to be who we now are as new creations, as redeemed people, as servants of the Holy One of Israel! (See also Galatians 2:20 and 2 Corinthians 5:17.) Shall we take this even one step further? James does. *Adonai* says in Vayikra 25:21, and in James 2:12, “*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the Torah that gives freedom.*”

He is exhorting us to follow the *Torah*, as he and his followers all did. He tells us that the *Torah* may function like a judge for us. It will ask us, “*Did you believe the Good News of the Living Torah, Yeshua the Messiah, and therefore live it out?*” Did you believe the mirror? Did you remember what you looked like in the mirror, or forget and live like something other than what you really are—a new creation, child of יהוה?

## **The Atonement Connection**

There is another important aspect of the *Yovel* Year which we need to consider. Why did the *L-rd* have the *Yovel* year begin on *Yom Kippur*? Why not on *Aviv* 1 when He Himself designated the New Year to begin? What is the significance of this? It seems that to understand what is going on here, we need to remember that one of the primary themes for the *Yovel* Year is the theme of freedom. We have already examined two facets of freedom which the *Yovel* Year can teach us, freedom to be who we are in Messiah and freedom to follow the *Torah*. But in order to walk in either one of these freedoms, there is a primary, more fundamental freedom everyone must experience first—the freedom from sin itself.

The *B’rit Chadasha* teaches us that we are all born sinners (Romans 3:23). Because we are born in such a state, we are, therefore, in bondage to sin (Romans chapter six). Neither following the *Torah*, nor any other religious teaching can free us from that bondage. But *Yeshua* said that He came to set us free! Indeed, He did! The *B’rit Chadasha* teaches that if we would put our trust in the finished, perfect atonement accomplished by *Yeshua*, several things happen at once. One thing which takes place is that He instantly changes us from the inside out. He makes us who were sinners into new creations. Another thing He does for us is to break the bonds of our slavery to sin! We are now free because of His atonement! The message of both is the new birth. The Day of Atonement freed man from slavery to sin and enabled him to start his life anew, at one with יהוה and with his fellow man. יהוה was painting another spiritual picture. He was teaching that there is no real freedom unless sinful man had his sins atoned for. But once this happened, he entered into a new realm of existence—real freedom to serve יהוה his *Elohim*.

## **דָּרוֹר (Dror, "Freedom")**

There are several Hebrew words translated "freedom." *Vayikra* 25:10 says that when the *shofar* is blown announcing the *Yovel* Year, we are to: "... proclaim liberty (דָּרוֹר) throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Hence, דָּרוֹר or *d'ror* is the word chosen to talk about the freedom discussed in the *Yovel* Year.

*D'ror* is a very rare word. It is only used one other time in all of the Torah. But the other usage, found in *Shemot* 30:23, can shed significant light on why the Holy One chose this word to speak of the freedom in the *Yovel* Year. In *Shemot* 30:23, the Lord instructed Moshe to make the anointing oil to anoint the High Priest. Among the elements in this oil was free-flowing *d'ror*, or myrrh, (מֵרֹרֶת דָּרוֹר). In another place in the *Tanakh*, *d'ror* also carries the connotation of free-flowing, unhindered, or free-running.

The word *d'ror* can be contrasted with its synonym *hofesh* (חֹפֶשֶׁת). *Hofesh* is used in Exodus 21:1 in reference to the *Shemittah* year where slaves also went free. But there is a difference between the *Shemittah* year freedom and the *Yovel* year freedom. This difference is indicated not only by the different Hebrew words used in each case (Exodus 21 and Leviticus 25) but also by what actually happened to the released slaves.

During the *Shemittah* year, the *hofesh* was only a qualified release since the slave, if he wanted, was permitted to stay on longer. It is interesting that in Modern Hebrew we often speak of a limited vacation from work or school as a "*hofesh*." We know that when the *hofesh* is over we will be back at it again. But the emancipation in the *Yovel* year was absolute. All slaves were to be set free, hence, *d'ror* is used.

### **Unhindered to Serve God**

We can see, therefore from the difference between these two words for freedom that the liberty in the *Yovel* year is absolute liberty unhindered from any obligations or restraints. The servant himself was not even allowed to remain on with his master no matter how well he was treated. Why? He gives us the answer in Leviticus 25:55: "*For to Me the children of Israel are servants; they are My servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt. I am Adonai Your Elohim.*"

In the *Yovel* year, *Adonai* is painting the picture of the kind of freedom we have in Him. As we previously pointed out, He is giving us a reminder of the importance of remembering who we are as His children. We are not slaves to anyone or anything else, we are His servants.

In the *Yovel* year the voluntary servant, who shuns freedom and responsibility, who acquires a master, is compelled to go free and serve the One whom it is legitimate to serve. He is relieved of the human bondage, that he might submit to the yoke of heaven alone.

Thus, the *Yovel* year is not a *hofesh*, but a *d'ror*, a year where we are running free without hindrance to be who He made us in Messiah redeemed servants of the Redeemer Himself.

Yeshua said: "<sup>18</sup>The Spirit of ADONAI is upon me; therefore he has anointed me to announce Good News to the poor; he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the imprisoned and renewed sight for the blind, to release those who have been crushed, <sup>19</sup>to proclaim a year of the favor of ADONAI" quoting Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19. He proclaimed the year of jubilee was at hand because He said: "<sup>21</sup>Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." So today, we continue to proclaim the year of favor, a *Yovel* in our midst. May it also be fulfilled in your ears...

♪ D'ror yikrah leven im bat, veyin'tzorchem kemo bavat... ♪