

Parsha Q&A



Parshas Behar

For the week ending 20 Iyar 5758 *27 Iyar outside Israel
15 & 16 May 1998 *22 & 23 May outside Israel

Parsha Questions

1. Why does the Torah specify that the laws of shemita were taught on Har Sinai?
2. If one possesses shemita food after it is no longer available in the field, what must he do with it?
3. The Torah commands, "You shall sanctify the fiftieth year." How is this done?
4. Which two "returns" are announced by the shofar during yovel?
5. From where does the yovel year get its name?
6. What prohibitions are derived from the verse "v'lo sonu ish es amiso — a person shall not afflict his fellow"?
7. What is the punishment for neglecting the laws of shemita?
8. If shemita is observed properly, how long is the crop of the sixth year guaranteed to last?
9. After selling an ancestral field, when can one redeem it?
10. Under what circumstance may one sell ancestral land?
11. If a home in a walled city is sold, when can it be redeemed?
12. What does the word "days" mean in this week's Parsha?
13. What is considered a walled city?
14. What is the definition of a "ger toshav"?
15. To what is one who leaves Eretz Yisrael compared?
16. Why does Rashi mention the plague of the firstborn in this week's Parsha?
17. List three prohibitions which demonstrate the dignity with which one must treat a Jewish indentured servant.
18. Who supports the family of the Jewish indentured servant during his years of servitude?
19. If a Jew is sold as a servant to a non-Jew, does he go free after six years?
20. Where is it permitted to prostrate oneself on a stone floor?

Sherlox Holmes

In the mahogany study sat Dr. Watson, hunched over an open volume. On the table before him lay a plate of crumpets and a tea, cold from neglect. "Hard as brick," Watson muttered.

"Burnt crumpets again?" said world famous detective, Sherlock Holmes.

"Mr. Holmes, I didn't hear you come in," said Watson. "No, crumpets are delicious."

"What's wrong then?" asked Sherlock.

"Define the words walled city."

"Why, a city with a wall," Sherlock said.

"How old is the wall? When was it built?" asked Watson.

"You haven't told me. It could be new as the Eiffel Tower, or old as the Great Wall of China!" Sherlock said.

"Then how does Rashi know!" Watson asked. "Listen to this verse: 'And a person who sells a house in a wall city... (Vayikra 25:29).' Rashi comments: 'A city that was walled from the time of Joshua....' Why doesn't Rashi explain as you did, Mr. Holmes? 'A city with a wall, regardless of its age?'"

"Stop beating your head against the wall, Watson. Just read carefully the exact text over again."

What does Sherlock mean?

Answer:

"The phrase 'ir choma' is unique," said Sherlock. "Such an expression referring to a walled city appears nowhere else in Tanach. Literally, 'ir choma' means a 'wall city,' not a 'walled city'."

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"What's the difference?"

"Let me give you an example. What's the difference between a 'locked box,' and a 'lock box'?"

"Hmm. A locked box describes the current state of the box but doesn't tell you what type of box it is. A lock box, on the other hand, tells you the type of box, regardless of whether it's currently locked or not."

"Exactly! Here too, a walled city is one currently walled, without telling you what type of city it is. But a 'wall city' is a city whose wall defines the very character — the halachic definition — of the city. Therefore, we need to search beyond the simple definition; we need to look for a city whose wall changes the character of the city. The only possible definition is a walled city sanctified as such when Joshua conquered the Land. Understand?"

"I think so," said Vatson, "although my skull feels a bit like the walls of Jericho when Joshua conquered the land."

• *Malbim*

• *Recommended Reading "What's Bothering Rashi?" by Dr. Avigdor Bonchek, Feldheim Publishers*

I Did Not Know That!

Rabbi Yishmael said, "When the People of Israel do the will of Hashem, they will keep shemita one year out of seven. But when they do not do the will of Hashem, they will end up keeping four `shemita's' every seven years! How so? Their land will not be very productive, and so they will need to leave it fallow every other year (in order to replenish the depleted mineral supply)."

Ramban based on the Midrash

Recommended Reading List

Ramban

25:3 First Six Years
25:9 Two Kinds of "Shofar"
25:10 The Word "Yovel"
25:20 Three Year Blessing
25:23 Ban on Perpetual Sale
25:36 Two Kinds of Usury
26:1 Commitment in Hostile Environment

Sefer Hachinuch

330 Counting until Yovel
331 Call of the Shofar
337 Unfair Profit
342 National Land
343 Usury

Sforno

25:4 "A Shabbos to Hashem"

Answers to this Week's Questions

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated

1. To teach us that just as shemita was taught in detail on Har Sinai, so too, all the mitzvos were taught in detail on Har Sinai.
2. 25:7 - Remove it from his property and declare it ownerless.
3. 25:10 - At the beginning of the year the Beis Din declares, "This year is kadosh (sanctified)."
4. 25:10 - The return of the land to its original owner, and the "return" (freedom) of the slave from slavery.
5. 25:10 - From the sounding of the shofar. A ram's horn is called a yovel.
6. 25:17 - One may not intentionally hurt people's feelings, nor give bad advice while secretly intending to reap benefit.
7. 25:18 - Exile.
8. 25:21,22 - From Nissan of the sixth year until Sukkos of the ninth year.
9. 25:24 - After two years following the sale, until yovel. At the beginning of yovel it returns to the family automatically.
10. 25:25 - Only if one becomes impoverished.
11. 25:29 - Only within the first year after the sale. Afterwards, even in yovel, it does not return.
12. 25:29 - The days of an entire year.
13. 25:29 - A city that has been surrounded by a wall since the time of Yehoshua.
14. 25:35 - A non-Jew who lives in Eretz Yisrael and accepts upon himself not to worship idols.
15. 25:38 - To one who worships idols.
16. 25:38 - The prohibition against taking interest is accompanied by the phrase, "I am Hashem your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Rashi explains that just as Hashem discerned in Egypt between those who were firstborn and those who were not, so too will Hashem discern and punish those who lend with interest, pretending they are acting on behalf of others.
17. 25:39-43 - a) Do not make him perform humiliating tasks; b) Do not sell him publicly; c) Do not make him perform unnecessary jobs.
18. 25:41 - His master.
19. 25:54 - No. If he is not redeemed with money, he must wait until the yovel to go free.
20. 26:1 - In the Mikdash.