

מקראות גדולות

The

COMMENTATORS'
BIBLE

THE JPS MIQRA'OT GEDOLOT

LEVITICUS ויקרא

*With the 1917 and 1985 English translations of
The Jewish Publication Society TANAKH, the questions of Abarbanel,
the commentaries of Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, and Nahmanides,
and selections from the Masorah and from the commentaries of
Behor Shor, Kimhi, Hizkuni, Gersonides, Abarbanel, and Sforno*

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2009 • 5770

NJPS gather in our crops?" ²¹I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. ²²When you sow in the eighth year, you will still be eating old grain of that crop; you will be eating the old until the ninth year, until its crops come in.

²³But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is Mine; you are but

RASHI 21 Three years. Including the second half of the sixth year, from the beginning of the harvest in Nisan (in the spring) until the first of the year; the seventh year; and then the first half of the eighth year. For they may only sow in the fall of the eighth year, in Heshvan, allowing them to harvest in Nisan.

22 Until the ninth year. Until the Feast of Booths of the ninth year, when the harvest of the eighth year is completely gathered in. For all during the summer of the eighth year it remains in the fields, in the barns; only in Tishrei, in the time of ingathering, is it brought home. Sometimes, in fact, the sixth year must yield sufficient for *four* years, not three—when the sabbatical year is immediately followed by a jubilee year. But vv. 21–22 are talking about the other sabbatical years, the first six of the cycle.

23 But the land must not be sold beyond reclaim. The positive commandment to return the land to its original owner is here framed in such a way as to include a prohibition as well. The purchaser is forbidden to claim the land in perpetuity. The Hebrew phrase translated by NJPS as "beyond reclaim" really means "definitively." It must not be sold in a way that definitively severs the original owner's connection with it "in perpetuity" (OJPS). **For the land is Mine.** Do not begrudge returning it. It is not even yours.

NAHMANIDES seventh year, 'What are we to eat [next year]?' ... " For it is the eighth year that they would be worried about. Since the year begins in Tishrei, in the fall, during the seventh year they would be eating the previous year's harvest, just as they did every year, until the *next* harvest, at the Feast of Weeks, and even afterward, until they were finished with all the work of winnowing the new grain. The correct interpretation of v. 21 is therefore that God will ordain an additional blessing (when the jubilee year approaches) to give them, in the sixth year, "a crop sufficient for three years"—the seventh (sabbatical) year, the eighth (jubilee) year, and the ninth year, during which they would still need to rely on the "old" grain, from the harvest of the sixth year. "When you sow in the eighth year" (v. 22) means that they should not try to hasten matters by plowing, sowing, and harvesting earlier than normal, since in any case they would "still be eating old grain" until the crops come in when they are gathered at the time of ingathering, at the Feast of Booths. Notice that the Sifra reads "three years" in two different ways: (1) the sixth, the seventh, and the year after the seventh; and (2) the seventh, the jubilee, and the year after the jubilee.

23 The land must not be sold beyond reclaim. If Rashi were correct, the verse should read, "The land must not be *bought* beyond reclaim." But perhaps he reads it as meaning "the land must not be sold *to you* beyond reclaim," as in "they may not give themselves over into servitude" (v. 42), which in fact reads straightforwardly (in context) as a commandment to the purchaser to release him in the jubilee year. In the same way, "the land must not be sold beyond reclaim" may also be a commandment to the seller that he may not sell the land outright, telling the purchaser, "I am selling it to you permanently, even after the jubilee." Even though the jubilee automatically "confiscates" the land from the purchaser, our verse may nonetheless be a warning to the seller (or to both of them) that they cannot make their deal an outright purchase. If they say that it is, they violate this prohibition, and their saying so is of no value—the land returns to the original owner in the jubilee year no matter what. Maimonides also explains it this way. The point of the rule is that, if the original deal is framed as a lease for however many years are left until

OJPS increase"; ²¹then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth produce for the three years. ²²And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat of the produce, the old store; until the ninth year, until her produce come in, ye shall eat the old store.

²³And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity; for the land is Mine; for ye are

RASHBAM 21 Sufficient for three years. The straightforward sense of the verse is that what you sow in the sixth year will support you during the sixth and seventh years. In the eighth year, you will not only sow, but you will still be eating what remains of the produce of the sixth year, right up to the beginning of the ninth year.

IBN EZRA implying to them that the year does indeed begin in the spring, in Nisan. But this is no proof. "Our crops" might just as well refer to the crops that "our" land brought forth on its own. Should they argue that this would be called not a "crop" but "aftergrowth," they would be contradicted by v. 12, telling us to eat the "crop" produced by the field on its own. (The same Hebrew word is used in both cases, as you can see in OJPS, which translates it as "increase.") While they are at it, let them inform us what they would do in the case of the jubilee year. According to the Karaites, they could not sow in the sixth, seventh, or the eighth year, but only in the ninth, meaning that there would be no harvesting until the *tenth* year. Why wouldn't the text mention this? But v. 21 says only that the sixth year will provide enough for *three* years, not for four. In my view, "it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years" (v. 21) means what it says: "I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year" to give you enough for another year, the seventh, and in the case of the jubilee year still another, the eighth—nothing additional to that.

21 It shall yield. The verb is unusual. Compare *mesharat* of 1 Kings 1:15, where the expected two *ts* elide into one to make the word easier to pronounce. [E]

22 Old grain. OJPS translates more literally; "old" is not an adjective here, but another object of the preposition "of" (which NJPS omits)—"of the former crop itself." See my comment to the similar usage in Exod. 25:19.

23 Beyond reclaim. As with its rhyming synonym, *keritut* (Deut. 24:1), the first *n* of this word *tzemtit* is part of the root. A verb from this root is found in Ps. 94:23,

[E] The normal form of our verb would not have two *ts*, so it is unclear why Ibn Ezra chooses this comparison.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 21 I will ordain My blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it shall yield a crop sufficient for three years. If, as Maimonides thinks, the sabbatical year is simply about giving the land a rest, it is hard to see how this could help (Abarbanel).

22 When you sow in the eighth year. By contrast with the "three years" of v. 21, where the eighth year must be a jubilee year, here the eighth year is simply the first year of a new sabbatical cycle (Bekhor Shor).

וְצִוִּיתִי אֶת־בְּרַכְתִּי לָכֶם בַּשָּׁנָה
הַשְּׁשִׁית וְעָשַׂת אֶת־הַתְּבוּאָה לְשֵׁלֶשׁ
הַשָּׁנִים: 22 וּזְרַעְתֶּם אֶת הַשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁמִינִת
וְאָכַלְתֶּם מִן־הַתְּבוּאָה יָשֹׁן עַד הַשָּׁנָה
הַתְּשִׁיעִת עַד־בּוֹא תְּבוּאָתָהּ הָאֲכָלוּ יָשֹׁן:
23 וְהָאָרֶץ לֹא תִמְכַּר לְצַמְחַת בְּיַד־י
הָאָרֶץ בְּיַגְרִים וְתוֹשְׁבִים אִתְּם עַמְדִי:

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + How can we possibly "sow in the eighth year" (v. 22) when that is the jubilee year? + Shouldn't "the land must not be sold beyond reclaim" (v. 23) have come right after vv. 13–16, where selling the land is discussed?

NJPS strangers resident with Me. ²⁴Throughout the land that you hold, you must provide for the redemption of the land. **OJPS** strangers and settlers with Me. ²⁴And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

²⁵If your kinsman is in straits and has to sell part of his holding, his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold. ²⁶If a man has no one to redeem for him, but prospers and acquires enough to redeem with, ²⁷he shall compute the years since its sale, refund the difference to the man to whom he sold it, and return to his holding. ²⁸If he lacks sufficient means to recover it, what he sold

וּבְכֹל אֶרֶץ אֲהוּזְתְּכֶם גְּאֻלָּה תִתְּנִי לְאֶרֶץ: ס
 כִּי־יָמוּךְ אָחִיךָ וּמָכַר מֵאֲהוּזְתּוֹ וְגָאֵל גְּאֻלוֹ הִקְרִיב אֵלָיו וּגְאָל אֶת מִמְכָּר אָחִיו: וְאִישׁ כִּי לֹא יִהְיֶה־לּוֹ גְּאֹל וְהִשְׁיגָה יָדוֹ וּמָצָא כִּדְי וְגְאֻלָּתוֹ: ²⁷וְהִשָּׁב אֶת־שָׁנָי מִמְכָּרוֹ וְהָשִׁיב אֶת־הָעֶדֶף לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר מָכַרְלּוֹ וְשָׁב לְאֲהוּזְתּוֹ: ²⁸וְאִם לֹא־מָצָאָה יָדוֹ דֵּי הָשִׁיב לּוֹ וְהָיָה מִמְכָּרוֹ בְּיַד הַקְּנִיָּה

²⁵If thy brother be waxen poor, and sell some of his possession, then shall his kinsman that is next unto him come, and shall redeem that which his brother hath sold. ²⁶And if a man have no one to redeem it, and he be waxen rich and find sufficient means to redeem it; ²⁷then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; and he shall return unto his possession. ²⁸But if he have not sufficient means to get it back for himself, then that which he hath sold shall remain in the hand of him

RASHI 24 Throughout the land that you hold. Your "holdings" or "possessions" (compare OJPS) include not just land, but also your buildings and your Hebrew slaves.

You must provide for the redemption of all of them. See B. Kid. 21a. But the straightforward purpose of the phrase is to introduce

the next section, about the man who "has to sell part of his holding" (v. 25). He (or a relative) may redeem it as soon as two years have passed, and the buyer cannot prevent this.

25 If your kinsman is in straits. This teaches that one may not sell one's land except when impoverishment obliges him to do so. **Part of his holding.** But not all of it. This teaches proper behavior—even "in straits" one should keep at least a single field for oneself. **His nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his kinsman has sold.** The buyer cannot prevent this.

26 If a man has no one to redeem for him. Is there any such thing as a Jew who has no one to redeem for him? It means a man who has no one able to redeem for him.

27 He shall compute the years since its sale. There were X years remaining until the jubilee, and you paid me Y amount of money, equaling such-and-such a sum per crop. You've eaten the crop yourself for three or four years—subtract their value from the total and take the rest. **Refund the difference.** Between the purchase price and the value of what the buyer has already gotten. **To the man to whom he sold it.** He deals only with the original purchaser. [F]

28 If he lacks sufficient means to recover it. We derive from this that the purchaser is under no obligation to let the original owner redeem part of the property. **Until the** [F] If it was subsequently resold at a higher price, that is not his concern.

NAHMANIDES the jubilee, the lessee is not upset when he must return the property to its owner. If he thinks he has bought it outright, though, he will find returning it extremely difficult. Though such a supposedly "outright" sale would have no legal effect whatsoever, those who contracted it would still be whipped for violating the King's decree. In my view, however, "the land must not be sold beyond reclaim" is not a prohibition, but an exhortation to practice the jubilee year as prescribed and not feel bad about it—for the land is Mine and I do not want you selling it outright as you do with other things. That is the Sifra's point when they say: **You are but strangers resident with Me**—do not imagine that you yourselves are the point of it all. "You are ... with Me," and it is enough for a slave to be like his master. As long as the land is Mine, it is yours as well. But the True interpretation of "the land is Mine"—literally "to Me"—is like that of "Tell the Israelite people to bring gifts to Me" (Exod. 25:2). That is what the Sages meant by saying, "it is enough for a slave to be like his master." For the jubilee applies to world history as well. One who is enlightened will comprehend this. [I]

24 Throughout the land that you hold. I do not think Rashi is correct to suggest that this is an introduction to vv. 25-28. In my view, "the land that you hold" means "the land that I am giving you to hold"—that is the land in which **you must provide for the redemption of the land** during the jubilee year. As in Isa. 48:20—"Go forth from Babylon, flee from Chaldea! Declare this with loud shouting, announce this, bring out the word to the ends of the earth! Say: 'The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!'"—"redemption" refers to getting one's servant out of the hands of those who hold him: "I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage" (Exod. 6:6). Here too, "you must provide for the redemption of the land." I wish to deliver the land out of the hands of those to whom I did not give it as their portion. Since, as v. 23 reminds us, all the earth is His, we must be told here that redemption in the jubilee year pertains only to the land of our holdings, not to all the world. But it does apply "in all the land" of our holdings. That means that it does apply in the part of our holdings that is on the east bank of the Jordan, not only in "the land of the Lord" west of the Jordan, where the sanctuary is located.

[I] See the end of Nahmanides' comment to v. 2.

ABARBANEL'S QUESTIONS + What does "you must provide for the redemption of the land" (v. 24) have to do with the commandments about the jubilee?

RASHBAM 24 You must provide for the redemption of the land. You must "grant" (OJPS) a seller the right of redemption (if he wishes) even before the jubilee year.

27 Refund the difference. The years remaining until the jubilee year, whose produce he has not yet consumed. The "difference" is the number of years in excess of those whose produce he has consumed.

IBN EZRA "the LORD our God will annihilate them" irreversibly. **For the land is Mine.** That is one heavy-duty reason! Moses said the same thing in his prayer: "O Lord, You have been our refuge in every generation" (Ps. 90:1). You are like a permanent refuge, though "One generation goes, another comes" (Eccles. 1:4). Just so, "the land is Mine"—**you are but strangers resident with Me.**

24 The land that you hold. Both the land you inherited in Canaan as well as the land of the Amorites. [F]

25 In straits. Literally, he is "low"; but it simply means that he is "waxen poor" (OJPS), that is, impoverished. **His nearest redeemer.** The closest of his kin.

28 What he sold. Hebrew literally phrases this as "his sale," and there are in [F] On the east bank of the Jordan. See Numbers 32.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS 26 If a man ... prospers and acquires enough to redeem with. He is not allowed to borrow the money to redeem himself (Bekhor Shor).