



שבת הארץ

בס"ד

CHICAGO RABBINICAL COUNCIL MONTHLY SHEMITTAH NEWSLETTER

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The cRc is proud to present a monthly newsletter series on *shemittah*. Each edition will feature Rabbi Dovid Cohen as well as one of the cRc Dayanim.

The Borders of *Eretz Yisroel*

by Rabbi Dovid Cohen

Administrative Rabbinical Coordinator, cRc Kosher

Olei Mitzrayim and Olei Bavel

Shemittah applies to all the lands of *Eretz Yisroel* which were captured when the Jews first came into *Eretz Yisroel* including land captured on the eastern side of the Jordan river (עבר הירדן); those lands are referred to as what was conquered by the "עולי מצרים." The Jews who returned to *Eretz Yisroel* after the exile of the first *Beis HaMikdash* settled less of the land, and those lands are referred to as the lands of the "עולי בבל." All *halachos* of *shemittah* apply to the lands of the עולי מצרים, but the *issur d'rabannan* to eat *sefichin** does not apply to the lands that were not captured by the עולי בבל. In practice, the only area in which we can take advantage of this leniency is areas on the eastern side of the Jordan river.

* *Sefichin* are vegetables and seeds which grow during *shemittah* that are forbidden *mid'rabannan* even if they have grown by themselves.

Continued on page 2

A Special Blessing

by Rabbi Yisroel Langer

Dayan, cRc Beth Din

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The Torah, in the beginning of *Parshas Behar*, commands us in the mitzvah of *shemittah*. This mitzvah requires every farmer who lives in *Eretz Yisroel* to allow their land to lay fallow during the *shemittah* year. The *possuk* then reassures the farmer that his land will be blessed upon fulfilling the mitzvah of *shemittah* as it says:

ונתנה הארץ פריה ואכלתם לשבע...

(ויקרא כה:יט)

"And the land will give forth fruit
and you will eat and be satisfied..."

Rashi explains that the special bracha mentioned here is that a more moderate amount of food will satiate a person. The next *possuk* expresses a question that a farmer may possibly have.

וכי תאמרו מה נאכל בשנה השביעית...

(שם כה:כ)

"If you will ask, what will we eat

Continued on page 3

The Borders of Eretz Yisroel (continued from page 1)

Identification of Borders

Tanach and the Gemara provide many details of the borders of Eretz Yisroel for the עולי מצרים, but over the many generations, when few Jews lived in Eretz Yisroel, the location of many of these places became forgotten or disputed. An early *sefer* on this topic is *Kaftor Vaferach*, written in 1322 by Rav Ishtori Haparchi after he spent seven years researching the sources and crisscrossing Eretz Yisroel to understand its geography. [Geography is only one small part of this *sefer*, which covers a wide variety of *halachos* pertinent to Eretz Yisroel.] Since then, there have been many others.

One significant question which arises in this topic is the reliance on Arabic names of cities. *Kaftor Vaferach* studied the names used by the local populace and compared those with names given by Chazal or the Torah. In other words, just as we all assume that the country which Chazal refer to as Suria is roughly in the same place as the modern state of Syria, *Kaftor Vaferach* did the same for many cities. For example, he identified Cheshbon based on the Arabic "Chusban."

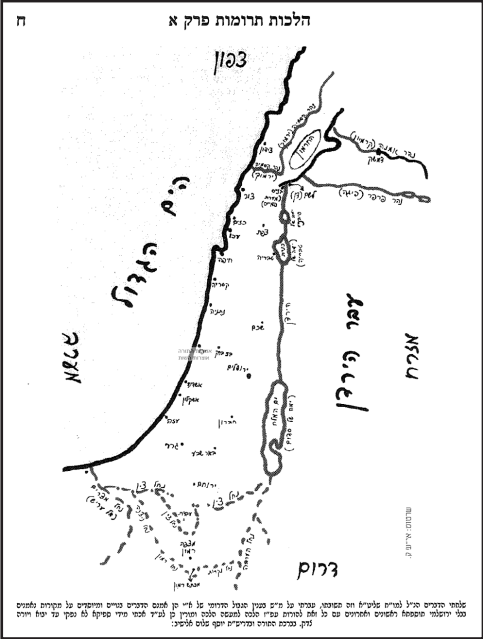


Chazon Ish was not as comfortable with this approach, and argued that names are not reliable, because over time cities were destroyed and rebuilt, which sometimes involved relocating or renaming a city. At face-value, this means that there are few, if any, places which can be identified with certainty, and one must be *machmir* on all areas other than those which are surely out of Eretz Yisroel. However, *Mishnas Yosef* suggests that Chazon Ish only intended this statement for a specific application he was discussing, and not as a broad rejection of relying on Arabic names. Nonetheless, there are those who adopt a more conservative approach based on the simpler understanding of what Chazon Ish wrote.

The strict approach was not only limited to the identification of cities by their Arabic names or through archeological evidence. It was even applied to the Chazal-based proofs which Rav Chaim Kanievsky suggested to identify the borders of Eretz Yisroel. When he presented his conclusions to his father-in-law, Rav Elyashiv, the latter responded that despite the strong proofs, there remains a level of uncertainty and no lenient conclusions can therefore be drawn based on the map.



Map from the sefer *Halichos Shviis* (Rav Yosef Efrati)



Map from the sefer *Derech Emunah* (Rav Chaim Kanievsky)



Southern Border Map from the sefer *Mishnas Yosef* (Rav Menachem Mendel Mendelsohn)

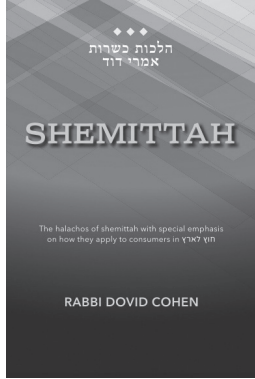
Thus, tremendous efforts have been made to plot out the borders and cities mentioned by the Torah and Chazal. Some rely on this to make *halachic* decisions regarding the borders of *Eretz Yisroel*, but others rarely rely upon this for anything more than a contributing factor regarding specific *shailos*.

Southern Border

One very significant area in which knowing the borders of *Eretz Yisroel* is relevant is in identifying the southern border of *Eretz Yisroel*. The Torah describes it as stretching from the southeastern tip of the Dead Sea to a body of water called *Nachal Mitzrayim*, which is assumed to refer to Wadi El Arish. The Torah also provides five points between these two ends, and all agree that some of these points are further south than the two endpoints.

There are a number of approaches as to where these five waypoints are, and in practice many who try to identify them come to reasonably similar conclusions. However, others take a much more conservative approach and say that anything above the 30°

latitudinal line is considered within the possible borders of *Eretz Yisroel*. That opinion – which sees *Eretz Yisroel* as stretching almost all the way to Eilat – is based on a statement of Rambam written in a very different context. There are significant questions on the proof from Rambam but nonetheless some follow that approach. The disputed area, known as the Northern Arava, stretches approximately forty miles from north to south.



A comprehensive treatment on the subject of *shemittah* is available in the recently released *sefer*, *Shemittah*, by Rabbi Cohen.

For more information on the *sefer*, please visit ShopcRc.org.

A Special Blessing (continued from page 1)

during the seventh year if working in the fields is prohibited..."

The Torah answers the question

וצויתי את ברכתי לכם בשנה הששית ועשת את התבואה לשלש השנים. (שם: כא)
"Hashem will bring extra blessing to the crops of the sixth year, and it will be enough to last for three years."

A literal reading of the *posuk* seems to indicate that the blessing of an overabundance of crops in the sixth year is hinged on the farmer asking the question, "What will we eat in the seventh year?" Why does the question need to be asked in order for one to be a recipient of the *bracha*? Wouldn't Hashem provide this *bracha* regardless?

The *Sforno* explains that there are two different blessings that the Torah is relating to us. For those farmers that have complete trust in Hashem, and don't even question the *mitzvah* of *shemittah*, the Torah gives the *bracha* of

ונתנה הארץ פריה ואכלתם לשבע...
 (ויקרא כה:יט)

"And the land will give forth fruit and you will eat and be satisfied..."

This is a *bracha* in which one becomes miraculously satiated by a smaller quantity of food. If someone places his full reliance on Hashem, and obeys His commandments, even when doing so defies nature, Hashem will, in return, assist that individual in a supernatural manner. However, farmers who keep *shemittah*, but exhibit less *bitachon* in Hashem as they ask, "מה נאכל בשנה השביעת" "What will we eat in the seventh year?" will receive a more ordinary *bracha*, having surpluses of produce in the sixth year. Although they too will have what to eat, it will come with much effort as they will have to harvest and store the overabundance of grain.

We find this same concept with the *Bnei Yisroel* in the *midbar*. Prior to the sending of the *meraglim*,

Continued on page 4

A Special Blessing (continued from page 3)

Rashi (*Devarim* 1:8) tells us that Hashem's original plan was for the *Bnei Yisroel* to enter *Eretz Yisroel* and take over the land without the need to go to battle. However, once they displayed a lack of *emunah* in Hashem by asking for *meraglim* to spy out the land, they no longer were worthy of taking over *Eretz Yisroel* in a miraculous fashion, and instead had to fight many years to conquer it from the Canaanim who were living there.

Most of us are not farmers residing in *Eretz Yisroel*, and don't face the exact challenges of *shemittah*

that they face. The lesson of *shemittah*, however, is vital to all of us. We all have our own personal set of challenges. For some of us, our observance of *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov* or *Chol Hamoed* may be challenged by the monetary demands of our family. Others may needlessly sacrifice precious time that could have been used studying Torah or doing *chessed*, in order to accumulate more wealth. *Shemittah* is a lesson to us all, trust in Hashem, fulfill His commandments, and He will take care of us in ways that we could never imagine.

Did you know?

IS THIS YEAR SHEMITTAH?

Shemittah occurs every seven years, but there are two opinions how those years should be counted.

Rambam (*Hil. Shemittah V'yovel* 10:4-6) personally favors one method which would mean that this year, 5782, would not be *shemittah* but rather would be the third year of the *shemittah* cycle. However, he notes that the common custom is to follow the *Geonim's* opinion, and he defers to that position saying:

שהקבלה והמעשה עמודים גדולים בהוראה ובהן ראוי להתלות.

Tradition and common practice play an important role in the halachic decision-making process, and one should rely on the precedent that they set.

Accordingly, in practice, all of Jewry accepts that this year, 5782, is *shemittah*.

YOVEL

After seven cycles of *shemittah*, the Torah mandates an extra year of *shemittah* which is known as *yovel*. *Yovel* is only practiced when two conditions are met:

1. Members of each of the twelve *shevatim* (tribes) are in *Eretz Yisroel*.
2. The *shevatim* must be living in the cities divinely designated for them.

Those conditions were only met for 800 years, from the year 2504 until 3303. In turn, when *yovel* is not counted, the *halachos* of *shemittah* are only Rabbinic in nature. (Rambam, *Hil. Shemittah V'yovel* 10:8-9)



The Chicago Rabbinical Council (cRc) founded in 1932, is comprised of approximately 150 member rabbis from across the United States, Canada and Israel, and strives to convene a unified voice for the Orthodox Rabbinic of greater Chicago. The cRc provides a wide array of Jewish services including kosher certification, an internationally recognized Beth Din (Rabbinical court), along with community education, programming, and services.

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