

# Shmitta: The Curse, and the Promise?

*Keva-Hazon Shmitta Learning, 5773, with Rabbi Ari Hart*

*“Exile comes upon the world on account of the failure to observe the Shmitah.” Pirkei Avot (Ethics of our Fathers) 5:11*

## **Source 1: Genesis 3:17**

**17**To Adam He said, “Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’

Cursed be the ground because of you;

By toil shall you eat of it

All the days of your life:

**18**Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.

But your food shall be the grasses of the field;

**19**By the sweat of your brow

Shall you get bread to eat,

Until you return to the ground—

For from it you were taken.

For dust you are,

And to dust you shall return.”

## **Source 2: Genesis 4:1**

Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gained a male child with the help of the Lord.” **2**She then bore his

brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. **3**In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from

the fruit of the soil; **4**and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, **5**but to

Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. **6**And the Lord said to Cain,

“Why are you distressed,

And why is your face fallen?

**7**Surely, if you do right,

There is uplift.

But if you do not do right

Sin couches at the door;

Its urge is toward you,  
Yet you can be its master.”

**8** Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. **9** The Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” **10** Then He said, “What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground! **11** Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. **12** If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth.”

**13** Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is too great to bear! **14** Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!” **15** The Lord said to him, “I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him.” And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him. **16** Cain left the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, **east of Eden**.

**17** Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then **founded a city**, and named the city after his son Enoch. **18** To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methusael, and Methusael begot Lamech. **19** Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah. **20** Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in **tents** and amidst **herds**. **21** And the name of his brother was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all who **play the lyre and the pipe**. **22** As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all **implements of copper and iron**.

- *What are the different curses that run through these texts?*
- *How might the Torah’s call for shmittah that we explored last time respond to these curses?*
- *What are we “cursed” with in the early 21st century?*
- *How could a 21st century shmittah be a response?*

