

# ONEG SHABBAS

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## When Vineyards Keep You From Going to War

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When going to battle, you likely want to have soldiers who are not distracted or otherwise not fully present. Fortunately, Moses, in this week's Torah portion, recognizes this need (especially since he, himself, had been involved in multiple battles) and allows for men in certain circumstances to absent themselves from arranging for war. While two of the three examples Moses provides are not surprising, one is certainly unexpected (Deut. 20:5-7):

(5) Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. (6) Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never somethinged it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. (7) Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet taken her [into his household]? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another take her [into his household as his wife]."

While one can clearly imagine that a new house that is undedicated is certainly something that will stay on a man's mind, as well as a betrothed, but not yet married wife, it is certainly curious that a planted vineyard should cause someone's mind to be distracted. Yes, I fully acknowledge that the word חללו is currently untranslated in the passage above, but we will return to that word. However, what do these three matters have to do with each other?

There is a fascinatingly insightful teaching in the Talmud on these three (Sotah 44a):

"that has built" (Deuteronomy 20:5), "that has planted" (Deuteronomy 20:6), and "that has betrothed" (Deuteronomy 20:7) - The Torah teaches this in the way that people behave: A man builds a house, then plants a vineyard, and afterwards marries a woman. And even King Solomon said in his wisdom: "Prepare your work outside, and make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house" (Proverbs 24:27); "Prepare your work outside" - this is a house; "And make it fit for yourself in the field" - this is a vineyard; "And afterward you shall build your house" - this is a wife.

(ה) וְדַבְּרוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים  
אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר מִי־הָאִישׁ  
אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בַּיִת־חָדָשׁ וְלֹא  
הִנְכִּיחוֹ יָלְךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ  
פְּרִימוֹת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ  
אֲחֵר יִחְנַכֶּנּוּ: (ו) וּמִי־הָאִישׁ  
אֲשֶׁר־נָטַע כְּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוֹ  
יָלְךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימוֹת  
בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר  
יַחְלִלֵנּוּ: (ז) וּמִי־הָאִישׁ  
אֲשֶׁר־אָרַשׁ אִשָּׁה וְלֹא לָקַחָהּ  
יָלְךְ וַיֵּשֶׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימוֹת  
בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר  
יִקְחֶנָּה:

תנו רבנן: "אשר בנה",  
"אשר נטע", "אשר  
ארש", לימדה תורה  
דרך ארץ: שיבנה אדם  
בית, ונטע כרם, ואחר  
כך ישא אשה. ואף  
שלמה אמר בהקמתו:  
"הכן בחוץ מלאכתך  
ועתדה בשדה לך אחר  
ובנית ביתך". "הכן בחוץ  
מלאכתך" - זה בית,  
"ועתדה בשדה לך" -  
זה כרם, "אחר ובנית  
ביתך" - זו אשה.



Returning to the vineyard, what could be so important about a vineyard that would prevent the full attention of someone from going to battle? Obviously, the production of wine, as readers of this publication would know. However, a bigger question is what is the timeline on these three activities? For marrying an already betrothed wife, that does not take much time to enact. For an already built house that only needs dedicating, also not a lot of time to execute. However, this leaves us with a vineyard: how much time will this person be delayed from taking to the battlefield?

In order to answer this question, we need to figure out this word of חללו - how do we understand it? There seem to be two linguistic understandings of this word amongst the Medieval rabbinic commentators.

Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (a/k/a Rashi) (1040-1105) and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (a/k/a Ramban) (1194-1270) understand it to refer to redeeming the grapes and making them redeemed. Rashi wrote: לא פדאו בשנה ולא רביעית, שהפרות טעונין לאכלן בירושלים או לחללן בדמים ולאכל הדמים בירושלים "has not yet redeemed it in the fourth year of its growth, for the fruits had either to be eaten in Jerusalem or to be given a non-holy character, by exchanging them for money and the money's worth to be consumed in Jerusalem." Rashi is referring to the commandment to set aside fourth-year fruit for The LORD (Lev. 19:24), and that it can be eaten from the fifth year and beyond (Lev. 19:25).



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Ramban explains this

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understanding as צוה הכתוב (ויקרא יט כד) שיהיה כל פריו קדש הלולים שיהללו את השם הנכבד בשמחה והיא ויתכן שיהיה פירוש ולא חללו שלא עשאו חולין והוא הפדיון Scripture commanded that all the fruits thereof [of the fourth year] shall be holy, for giving praise unto the Eternal, that they should praise the Glorious Name at that celebration. It is possible that the meaning of ולא חללו is that he has not made it plain/secular referring to the 'redemption', which our Rabbis have mentioned."

He is pointing towards the following text (*Mishnah Ma'aser Sheni* 5:4):

How does one redeem the fruit of the vine in its fourth year? The owner puts down a basket in the presence of three [people] and says: "How many such baskets would a man wish to redeem for himself for a sela on condition that the costs [to produce the fruit] shall be on his house?" And then he puts down the money and says: "Whatever shall be picked from this may it be exchanged for this money at the price of so many baskets for a sela."	פיצד פודין נטע רבעי, מניח את הסל על פי שלשה, ואומר, כמה אדם רוצה לפדות לו בקלע על מנת להוציא וציאות מביתו. ומניח את המעות, ואומר, כל הנלקט מזה, מחלל על המעות האלו בכך וכך סלים בקלע
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Conversely, the other linguistic approach is articulated by Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1092-1167) and Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (13th century), who related: לשון חללים וכבר היה מנהגם לחול בכרמים כמו "The word is the language of dancing. It used to be customary to dance in the vineyards, as we find of the daughters of Shiloh. As such, they planted vineyards and they danced."

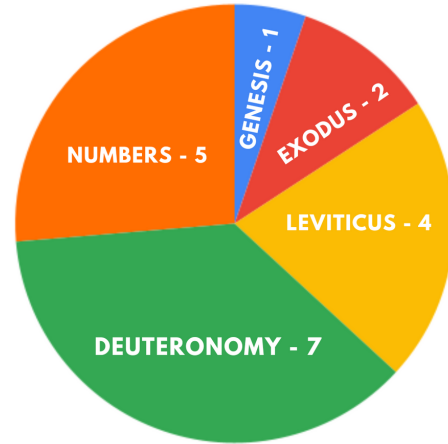
The scriptural verse to which he (and also Ibn Ezra) are referring is that of Judges 21:20-21:

So they instructed the Benjaminites as follows: "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards. As soon as you see the daughters of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the daughters of Shiloh, and be off for the land of Benjamin."	ויצו את בני בנימן לאמר לכו וארבתם בכרמים וראיתם והנה אם יצאו בנות שילו לחול במחלות ויצאתם מן הכרמים וחספתם לכם איש אשתו מבנות שילו ודלקתם ארץ בנימן
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When we consider these two approaches to understanding this word, there are two separate aspects that are important: linguistic and temporal. Regarding the linguistic connection, the reference to Leviticus 19:24 of הלל is a different word, where the ה is in place of the נ, which seems weaker than the reference to Judges 21:21 in that it not only uses the language of לחול, but also specifically being in vineyards. This, then, has an affect on the temporal aspect: whereas the desacralizing approach of Rashi and Ramban mandates waiting up to four years, the dancing approach of Ibn Ezra and Hizkuni is simply a matter of dancing.

### Appearances of Vineyard in the Torah



What is appealing to this approach is the temporal aspects of the man whose house is already built, but only needs to dedicate it and the man who is already betrothed, but simply needs to execute the wedding. These are one-time acts that do not involve a lot of time similar to the notion of a one-time dancing that does not involve a lot of time before returning to the ranks of the army.

While this should be satisfying, I think there's another aspect to consider, which is mentioned by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855): מלשון חולין, שלא פדאו, או יהיה פירושו מלשון תחילה, שלא החל לבצור בו. "From the language of desacralizing, that this man has not yet redeemed it. Or its explanation is from the language of initiating, that he had not yet begun to harvest his vineyard. And they are [relating to] the same matter: that one does not have the permission to harvest his vineyard if he has not yet redeemed it first."

While I am not convinced of his understanding that follows in the footsteps of Rashi and Ramban, I do like his mention of תחילה beginning. This reminds me of one of the three understandings of a similar word in the same verse as we first encounter vineyard in the Torah (Gen. 9:20):

Noah, the tiller of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ויחל נח איש האדמה ויטע כרם

While there are multiple ways (I know of 2-3) to understanding the word ויחל in this verse, one/two of the approaches is to consider it in the sense of "beginning". Whether or not these verses are connected, I do think it is worth considering the aspect of "beginning" for our verse.

While the Rashi and Ramban model has its supporters, I am presently leaning towards the other model, yielding the following for Deuteronomy 20:6:

Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never dancingly-inaugurated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. ומי האיש אשר נטע כרם ולא חללו ילך וישב לביתו פרימות במלחמה ואיש אחר יחלנו

While "dancingly-inaugurated" his vineyard may neither be the smoothest nor simplest translation, it seems to work well with both the scriptural linguistic similarity, as well as contextual temporality compared with the other situations which prevent men from going to war. After all, wine/vineyards are worth celebrating!

L'chaim 🍷