

**Lev. 25:29** If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the redemption period shall be a year. <sup>30</sup> If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, the house in the walled city shall pass to the purchaser beyond reclaim throughout the ages; it shall not be released in the jubilee. <sup>31</sup> But houses in villages that have no encircling walls [וּבְתֵי הַחֲצֵרִים אֲשֶׁר אֵין־לָהֶם חֹמֶה סָבִיב] shall be classed as open country: they may be redeemed, and they shall be released through the jubilee. <sup>32</sup> As for the cities of the Levites, the houses in the cities they hold—the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption. <sup>33</sup> ° Such property as may be redeemed from the Levites—houses sold in a city they hold—shall be released through the jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their holding among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup> But the unenclosed land about their cities cannot be sold, for that is their holding for all time.

**Lev. 6:9** What is left of [the meal offering] shall be eaten by Aaron and his sons; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes, in the sacred precinct; they shall eat it in the enclosure [בְּחֻצְיָו] of the Tent of Meeting.

**Lev. 6:19** The priest who offers it as a sin offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in the sacred precinct, in the enclosure [בְּחֻצְיָו] of the Tent of Meeting.

**Gen. 25:16** These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names by their villages and by their encampments: twelve chieftains of as many tribes.—

Nahum Sarna, *Genesis* (JPS Torah Commentary)

**16.** All twelve Ishmaelite tribes are said to have lived in “villages,” a mode of life also characteristic of the tribes of Awim and Kedar, according to Deuteronomy 2:23 and Isaiah 42:11. The Hebrew word used in these passages, *hatser* (pl. *hatserim*), corresponds to the technical term *hatsarum* (pl. *hatsiratum*) employed in the Mari texts for the settlements of pastoral nomads. From Leviticus 25:31 and other biblical references, it is clear that the “villages” were unfortified encampments, often dependent on neighboring towns.

**Deut. 2:23** So, too, with the Avvim who dwelt in villages in the vicinity of Gaza.

Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy* 1-12 (Anchor Bible)

The *hšrym*, open, unwalled villages, are characteristic of nomadic or seminomadic settlements, especially in the Negev; cf. the place-names in the tribe of Simeon (Josh 15:25f.), and see also Gen 25:16 and Isa 42:11. For the term *hšr*, see Malamat 1963.

Baruch Levine, *Leviticus* (JPS Torah Commentary)

**31. But houses in villages that have no encircling walls** The term used here for “villages,” Hebrew *hatserim*, has an interesting history. It was originally a pastoral term, synonymous with “tents.” Deuteronomy 2:23 relates that the land of the Ammonites in Transjordan was once populated by a people who lived in *hatserim*. According to Isaiah 42:11, the Kedemite tribes lived in such encampments in the vicinity of Petra. In the genealogy of Genesis 25:13ff., the clans of Ishmael, who were related to the Kedemites, lived in *hatserim* and *tivot*, “circular encampments.” Here, reference is primarily to agricultural villages, where there were houses, not tents, and fields, not pastureland.

e-mail: [torah-talk@earthlink.net](mailto:torah-talk@earthlink.net)

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/>

iTunes: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

contribute: <https://www.paypal.me/mcarasik> or @Michael-Carasik on Venmo

Commentators' Bible: <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/jps/9780827608979/>

Biblical Hebrew: <https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/biblical-hebrew-learning-a-sacred-language.html>

© 2022 by Michael Carasik, except for translations from *Tanakh*, by permission of JPS.

Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus* (Anchor Bible)

31. *hamlets*. *ḥaḥsērîm*. Compare *paṣḥayā'* (*Tg. Onk.*), *kupěrnayyā'* (*Tgs. Ps.- J., Neof.*; cf. *Tg. Neof.* margin *prwwylyyh* [= Greek *peribolaion*]); *epaúlesin* (LXX). The term is attested in Gen 25:16; Deut 2:23; Isa 42:11; Neh 12:29, and in Joshua, where the cities allotted to the tribes include *ḥasērêhem* 'their villages' (Josh 15:32–62; 16:9; 18:24, 28; 19:6–8, 15–16, etc.).

The word derives from a primitive Semitic root "surround." Old Babylonian *ḥasāru* 'fold, pen' can include a human enclosure; compare Ugaritic *ḥzr* 'enclosure' and Old South Arabic *ḥdr* 'dwelling' (Orlinsky 1939; Malamat 1962: 146–47; Hamp 1986). The most extensive archaeological excavation of villages—settlements outside urban centers—has been done in the region of Samaria (Finkelstein 1988).

*that have no encircling walls*. An explicative clause, it was written at a time when the term *ḥāsērîm* meant only "courts," at least in this legislator's circle.

Avraham Malamat, "Mari and the Bible," *JAOS* 1962

When dealing with the Old Testament one should take into consideration that two separate roots have merged into Heb. *ḥāsēr*: a.) proto-Semitic \**HZR*; Arab. *ḥazira(t)*; probably Aram. *hutra*, "enclosure (for sheep), court, "; b.) proto-Semitic \**HDR*; Arab. *hadara*; "dwell(ing), settle(ment)," used primarily for humans and not for animals. It is this latter root which yields the Heb. plural *ḥāsērîm* [in contrast to *ḥāsērôt* which goes back to (a)], a special type of unwalled village as defined expressly in Lev. xxv, 31: "and the houses of the *ḥāsērîm*, which have no walls around them, shall be reckoned as belonging to the country field."

Avraham Faust, "The World of P: The Material Realm of Priestly Writings," *VT* 2019

Many scholars have therefore suggested that the existence of a city wall constituted a major difference between villages and towns, and that villages—*ḥašerim*—were unwalled. This difference seems to be further supported by the frequent combination of *ir* and its *ḥašerim* (above), often translated as city and its villages. We have already seen, however, that (1) Iron Age Israelite villages (like their urban counterpart) were surrounded by walls (hence the term "have no walls around them" is not likely to be applied to them) and (2) that the word *ir* should not be translated as a city (in contrast to its meaning in Modern Hebrew), but rather as a settlement. This word therefore designates any concentration of houses, *including a village*. The word *ḥašerim* in Leviticus 25 is therefore contrasted with a 'walled settlement' and not a 'walled city', which makes perfect sense since we have seen that Iron Age villages were also typically walled, just like cities. The houses of the *ḥašerim* are therefore not houses in villages, as villages are included with the other walled settlements in the above verse (and the reference to a wall in relation to settlements in the verses is not a legal requirement in my view, but rather simply a description of the common reality). Hence, the *ḥašer* is something that is built and has houses, but is not a settlement. If not a village, however, what are the *ḥašerim* whose houses are contrasted with the houses in settlements?

In the late Iron Age, mainly from the later phases of the 8th century and onward (becoming more predominant in the 7th century), a new type of human habitation became common in a number of regions, but mainly in the vicinity of Jerusalem—isolated farmsteads. The establishment of hundreds of farmsteads in Jerusalem's hinterland was a result of the city's growth, which required intensive production of food in its immediate vicinity, as well as of broader economic developments. These farmsteads typically included a dwelling unit, mostly a large four-room house, along with additional structures or caves used for storage, and installations, typically cisterns and wine-presses, all located in the middle of the agricultural area. The houses of the *ḥašerim* that are mentioned in Leviticus 25 are therefore the unwalled farmsteads around Jerusalem (i.e., "that have no walls around them").

...

It is immaterial whether people obeyed the law, or even knew about it. Given that the phenomenon of unwalled *ḥašerim* was limited in scope both chronologically and to a large extent also geographically, the law should be understood against the background of the Jerusalem hinterland during the late 8th-early 6th centuries BCE, and is reflecting the emergence of the farmsteads phenomenon there.

e-mail: [torahtalk@earthlink.net](mailto:torahtalk@earthlink.net)

web: <http://mcarasik.wordpress.com/>

iTunes: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/torah-talk/id291683417>

contribute: <https://www.paypal.me/mcarasik> or @Michael-Carasik on Venmo

Commentators' Bible: <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/jps/9780827608979/>

Biblical Hebrew: <https://www.thegreatcourses.com/courses/biblical-hebrew-learning-a-sacred-language.html>

© 2022 by Michael Carasik, except for translations from *Tanakh*, by permission of JPS.