

The Year of Jubilee Leviticus 25

Read Romans 8:18-25. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”*

Have you felt this groaning? – the realization of the corruption of this present world and longing for the next? The older I get the more I can relate to these things as I see the world in its bondage to corruption – even my own flesh. Things aren’t yet the way they should be. But there’s a day coming – a day when all of creation, including us, will be set free from its bondage and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. A preview of that day shows up in our passage today...

This morning we are going to look at Leviticus 25, which tells us all about an amazing thing called The Year of Jubilee. After seeing the story of a man who cursed the name of Yahweh in chapter 24, we get back to God’s regulations for the people of Israel concerning their calendar, holy days, and appointed feasts. In chapter 23 we saw how the weekly Sabbath formed the basis for the Jewish calendar. They were to work for 6 days and rest on the 7th – it was a Sabbath unto the Lord.

This principle of a 7th day Sabbath was then carried over into the annual feasts as well. They were to observe a 7-day feast in early spring called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Then there were two harvest feasts which were to be 7 weeks apart. Then, in the 7th month, they were to observe 3 more feasts, making a total of 7 feasts on the Jewish calendar. So when it came to God’s

pattern for his people and how they were to structure their time, you can see 7's all over the place, all stemming from the original pattern of the 7th day Sabbath – all pointing them to their Creator and the 7 days of creation.

When you get to Leviticus 25 you see this Sabbath principle pop up again, only now it has to do with years instead of days, weeks, or months. The chapter begins with instructions about a Sabbath year of rest for the land. Every 7 years the people were to allow the land to rest. They weren't to plant any crops or prune their vineyards but allow the cropland to rest from the previous 6 years of production. In this Sabbath year, God would declare a blessing and the non-cropland would produce enough food for the people and animals to eat. So the principle of the Sabbath was to be carried out in a yearly cycle.

But there's still one more Sabbath rest that was to be in God's regulations for his people, and it's called the Year of Jubilee. This was another year-long Sabbath for the land that took place the year after the 7th Sabbath year, which would have been in the 50th year, and most of chapter 25 tells us the details of what was supposed to happen in this amazing year. I want to show you those details and how they reveal the heart of God for his people, then look at how well Israel kept it, and how Jesus came to fulfill it and become the ultimate Jubilee for all of his people.

Read Leviticus 25:8-12.

“You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. ¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. ¹² For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.

So the Year of Jubilee was to be another Sabbath for the land, but it was also to be a year of liberty for the people, and specifically for the poor in the land who had fallen on hard times, and we'll see more about that in the upcoming

verses. It was to be proclaimed on the Day of Atonement during the 49th year by the sounding of the trumpet throughout the land. Jubilee and trumpet or more specifically “ram’s horn” were closely related – the same Hebrew word is used for both. But the idea behind the Jubilee and the ram’s horn that announced its coming was that of liberty – freedom, restoration, return. Amazing things were supposed to happen during the Year of Jubilee.

Read Leviticus 25:13-17.

“In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. ¹⁴And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. ¹⁵You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. ¹⁶If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. ¹⁷You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the Lord your God.

So in this year of jubilee, as you read between the lines a little bit (and you will see it more clearly later in the chapter), those who were poor, who ended up having to sell their property at some point during the past 50 years due to hardship, were supposed to return to their land and have the opportunity to buy it back at a fair price depending on how many crops were harvested by the current owner. In this way, those who came upon hard times and had to sell their property had the opportunity every 50 years to get it back.

This seems like a foreign concept to us because we think of land ownership much differently than what God was doing with the people of Israel. When God brought them to the Promised Land he was going to divide the land according to tribes, clans, and families. Each would be given an allotment of land and they would become God’s stewards of the land, but God was the sovereign landowner. In this way, all tribes and families would be blessed by the allotment of land and God wanted that blessing to continue for all the people from generation to generation so that it didn’t end up with just a few wealthy families being blessed by the land while the rest were subject to them. Leviticus 25:23-24 says: *“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. ²⁴And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.”*

It was to be a very different mindset than we have today, where we look at ourselves as landowners, not just stewards for God or government. We aren't stewarding the land for someone else, we're stewarding it for ourselves. Thus we don't think of returning land to the person we bought it from every 50 years, but that's what was supposed to happen in Israel. It was a demonstration of God's equity, justice, and mercy.

The next few verses explain what the people were supposed to eat in the year of Jubilee because it piggy-backed on another Sabbath year, which meant there would be two years without planting or harvesting. What God told them is that if they obeyed his statutes, he would declare a blessing, and in that last year before the double-Sabbath years, the crops would produce so bountifully that there would be enough to eat for 3 years instead of just 1.

The middle of the chapter goes into more details about how the year of Jubilee was supposed to work for those who sold houses in cities and for the Levites who weren't given an allotment of land like the rest of the tribes because they were to serve as priests and be supported by the rest of the people. But then we get to a couple sections of regulations in the second half of the chapter that really express God's heart of compassion for the poor and how the Year of Jubilee was to be a fresh start for them.

Read Leviticus 25:35-38.

"If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. ³⁶ Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. ³⁷ You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. ³⁸ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

This shows what was to happen to those who faced a second level of hardship where not only did they have to sell some or all of their land, but even after that they couldn't make ends meet. For people in that situation, their neighbors who had prospered were to let them live in their community. They were to support them and lend to them without interest or profit. They were to help them get through their hardship and get back on their feet again. So again

we see God's heart of compassion and equity for all the people. Coming on hard times didn't mean you should end up being taken advantage of. You should be helped by your neighbors and restored.

But sometimes this wasn't even enough, and the people would face a third level of hardship...

Read Leviticus 25:39-43.

"If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: ⁴⁰ he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. ⁴¹ Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. ⁴² For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.

So this is pretty clear that Israelites who reached the deepest level of hardship, where they not only had to sell their land, but also couldn't support themselves, even with the help of their neighbors, were to be hired as workers so they could earn their keep and not treated as slaves. The big difference was that that a hired worker did not become the permanent possession of the one he worked for and was to be released in the year of Jubilee, where slaves did become the possession of the one who bought them and wouldn't be released. They were still to be treated fairly, but they were considered to belong to their master.

The last few verses go on to give details of what was to happen if an Israelite became poor and sold themselves to a wealthy immigrant. Basically it's the same idea as if he sold himself to a fellow Israelite, only if he was sold to an immigrant he could be redeemed by a relative as soon as he was sold, and if he wasn't, he would be set free in the year of jubilee.

So you can see that God's intent, and the goal of these regulations about the year of jubilee was liberation, compassion, and a fresh start for the poor – all across the nation of Israel. I think it would have been an amazing experience for the people. The poor would have been waiting, groaning, longing for the Year of Jubilee.

The problem is... it probably never happened. I kept hearing from different sources after describing the amazing things about the year of jubilee, that there's no evidence that Israel ever actually did it... No trumpet call, no proclamation of liberty, no return of property to the poor, or poor to their property. You don't read about it happening in the Bible. No Jubilee for the people of Israel for centuries. What happened is what always happens – the land of Israel became divided between the rich and the poor, just like the nations around them. The rich took advantage of the poor and took their land and the poor faced ongoing hardship, ongoing groaning, longing, waiting.

This happened for centuries. But then there came a man, a carpenter from Nazareth. An amazing man who did miracles and healings and set people free from demons and disease. A righteous man who called people to repentance because the kingdom of God was at hand and showed them a new way to life.

One Sabbath, near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, Luke 4 records that he went to his hometown and was invited to speak in the synagogue. And this is what it says in Luke 4:16-21: *“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”*

The Year of Jubilee had finally come and it came in the person of Jesus. Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind. He came to liberate the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He did that throughout his years of ministry. But more importantly and permanently he did that when he suffered and died on the cross. Because of the cross, freedom, forgiveness, and God's favor didn't last

for just one year or three, it lasted forever for all who turned to him back then and who turn to him today.

Everyone who follows Christ begins to experience a new life of Jubilee. Jesus died on the cross to cancel our debt, to pay our ransom, to redeem us from sin, and to set us free. Through faith in him we are forgiven and welcomed as citizens of God's eternal kingdom and members of his household. We have an eternal dwelling place in him, never again to become slaves to sin, guilt and condemnation.

And the good news is that this freedom and belonging isn't just in this life, there's a final Jubilee that's yet to come when the trumpet sounds and Christ returns and we rise from the dead, set free from these bodies of flesh forever to receive glorified bodies fit for eternity in the kingdom of our beloved Savior. Christ is our Year of Jubilee and we have many reasons to worship him this morning!

If you've never been set free, you can turn to him this morning – your sins can be forgiven and you can enter eternal life. Simply put your faith in Jesus and begin to follow him.