

**November 25, 2018 - Lev. 25:(1)-14-34 - Sabbatical year and Jubilee regulations**  
**Torah Reading: Leviticus 25:(1)-14-34 - Sabbatical year and Jubilee regulations**  
**Psalm 89:1-5**  
**Haftarah: Isaiah 24:2-8, 13-15**  
**Ezekiel 18:7-14, 31-32**

### **Sabbatical Years and the Jubilee Year**

**Leviticus 25:1-2** - "And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD."

The Sabbatical cycle is also called the *Shemittah* or "release"

**Leviticus 25:3-4** - "Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard."

### **Land 'Declared Ownerless'**

**Leviticus 25:5-7** - "That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat."

The interpretation of this is remarkable. Anything that grows on its own out of the fields or on the vines "it must be rendered ownerless, [and available] for everyone [to take at will]." — [Be'er Basadeh] i.e. you can eat it, but so can anyone else. Its no longer considered "your" field. You could not store it, or sell it.

Rashi - Although I have prohibited the produce [of the Shemittah year] to you, I did not prohibit you to eat it or to derive benefit from it, only that you should not treat it as if you were its owner. Rather, everyone is deemed equal [regarding the use of the Shemittah year's produce]-you, [your slaves,] and your hired worker and resident, and even your animals.

### **Debts Cancelled**

In **Deuteronomy 15:1-11** we learn that debts were also canceled during the Sabbatical year. With this warning: "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee."

Over time, the rabbis created ways to get around the canceling of debts, so that loans could still be repaid during a Sabbatical year.

Deuteronomy also tells us that additionally, the book of the Law was to be read to the people each Sabbatical year.

### **The Jubilee Year**

**Leviticus 25:8-9** - "And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land"

**Leviticus 25:10** - "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family."

Rashi - This verse does not mean that the owner must return to his field, but that the ownership of the field returns to the one who had sold it (Mesiach Illemim).

"ye shall return every man unto his family" - i.e. the slave

### **Like a Sabbatical Year**

**Leviticus 25:11-12** - "A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field."

Rashi interprets the 50th year as separate from the 49 years:

Rashi - Thus, two holy years are found right next to each other-the forty-ninth year [in each cycle] is Shemittah and the fiftieth year is Jubilee.

Other rabbinical scholars said the Jubilee year was included in the 49th year.

### **Return of Land to Original Owners**

**Leviticus 25:13-14** - "In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession. And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbor, or buyest ought of thy neighbor's hand, ye shall not oppress one another:"

Rashi - "you shall return, each man to his property" - mentioned a second time. Why? to include one who sold his field, and his son arose and redeemed it, that it reverts to his father in the Jubilee. — [Torath Kohanim 25:28]

## Ye Shall Not Oppress One Another

"ye shall not oppress one another" - this also mentioned twice - here and again in verse 17. Why? One refers to oppression concerning money. The other concerns all other kinds of oppression, even hurting someone's feelings or taking advantage of weakness in any way.

Miamonides: "If he is a penitent, say not to him, 'Remember your former deeds'... or if he is a proselyte and comes to study the Law one must not say to him, 'Shall the mouth that ate unclean and forbidden food come and study the Law, which was uttered by the mouth of God?'"

**Leviticus 25:15-17** - "According to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbor, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God."

"you shall fear your God" - If you say, "Who can tell whether I had evil intentions [when I talked to my fellow in an insulting manner? Perhaps I did so in order to make him feel remorseful and repent his ways]." (see Be'er Basadeh). Therefore, it says, "and you shall fear your God."-The One Who knows all thoughts-He knows. Concerning anything held in the heart and known only to the one who bears this thought in his mind, it says "and you shall fear your God!" - [B.M. 58b]

Rashi - Thus, if there are [only] a few years [left until the next Jubilee year], and this one sells it for a high price, the purchaser has been wronged. And if there are many years [left until the next Jubilee year], and he will eat many crops from it [until Jubilee-if the purchaser had purchased the land for a low price], the seller has been wronged. One who sells his field is not permitted to redeem it in less than two years, it must remain in the purchaser's possession for exactly two years to the day, even if there are three crops during those two years, for example, if he sold it to him with crop standing in it [and then the ensuing years brought two more yields of produce.

## Promise of Fruitfulness

**Leviticus 25:18-19** - Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety.

Rashi - [All the days of desolation while you are in the land of your enemies -] the land will rest and appease its Sabbaths" (**Leviticus 26:34**). And the seventy years of the Babylonian exile [when the land remained forcibly at rest], corresponded to the seventy years of Shemittah not observed by Israel, [and thus came to rectify and "appease" them]

## The Challenge of Faith

**Leviticus 25:20-22** - "And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store."

Rashi - Now, there were occasions when it would need to yield for four years, namely: in the sixth year preceding the seventh Shemittah, when they would refrain from doing work on the land for two consecutive years, the seventh year and the Jubilee year. Our verse, however, refers to all the other Shemittah years [i.e., the first through sixth cycles of Shemittah]. — [see Ned. 61a]

## Stewardship not Ownership

**Leviticus 25:23** - "The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me."

Despite God's promise to give the land to Abraham and his seed, the land did not belong to individual Israelites. They were sojourning with God, who is the real owner. Israelites were stewards of what belonged to Him.

Rashi - Do not be selfish about the land [hesitating to return it to its rightful owner at Jubilee], because the land does not belong to you. - [Torath Kohanim 25:39]

## Redemption of Land Must Always be Allowed, and Aided

**Leviticus 25:24-28** - "And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession."

## Different Rules for Houses in a Walled City

**Leviticus 25:29-31** - "And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee. But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them shall be counted as the fields of the country: they may be redeemed, and they shall go out in the jubilee."

## Levite Lands and Houses

**Leviticus 25:32** - "Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubilee: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for it is their perpetual possession."

The practical outcome of the Jubilee Year properly observed would be that no one could monopolize ownership of the land, and there would be a more equal distribution of wealth.

## Jesus Embodies the Meaning of the Jubilee Year (Luke 4:17-21)

**Luke 4:17** - "And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

19 "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

20 "And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.

21 "And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Jesus declared Himself to be the embodiment of Jubilee.

Normally, someone would read no less than three verses of the Haftarah. But it was allowed to "skip" with the prophets, and Jesus left off the end of verse 2 about "the day of vengeance of our God," because it was not yet to be.

Jesus is our Jubilee, because though we have been slaves to sin, God has released us. As the "land" consisting of earthen vessels, we are restored to our rightful owner. Our debts are erased, so we are no longer "debtors to the flesh" (**Romans 8:12**).

Letting the land lie fallow points to a life of faith, in which we know that God gives us our daily bread, and that man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

It points to that day when creation itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (**Romans 8:21-22**) and the "rest which remaineth for the children of God" (**Hebrews 4:9-16**)

## Other New Testament References to Sabbatical Years

**John 4:35** - "Say ye not, 'There are yet four months and then cometh the harvest?' behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white [ripe] already for harvest."

There is no known proverb in Jewish literature which refers to a four-month season from sowing to harvest. This period typically requires six months. At the time of the statement, it was the month of May, a month or so into his ministry. The fields were ready to be harvested, but because it was a Sabbatical year, the next harvest would be in Tishri in the fall.

Jesus was saying that despite the Sabbatical year, the presence of the Messiah means the harvest is now - pointing to the grain around them as an illustration.

This could mean that the first year of Jesus' ministry occurred during a Sabbatical Year. The year 26/27 A.D. was a Sabbatical Year. According to Daniel's prophecy, Messiah the Prince would arrive 490 years after the "decree" or word to return and rebuild Jerusalem. There is great discussion about this, but it's probably the decree of Artaxerxes to Ezra in 458 B.C. Jesus would have been baptized 490 years later in 26/27 A.D. This means he was crucified after his 3 1/2 year ministry around 30 A.D., "in the midst of the week" according to Daniel:

**Daniel 9:27** - "And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease..."

The week of "confirming the covenant" would continue after his death and resurrection with Pentecost and the 3,000 saved, and end with the stoning of Stephen, the persecution of the church and the calling of Paul in 33/34 A.D.

## More on the Sabbatical Cycle

*Shemittah* - The seventh year of the Sabbatical cycle, the year of release or rest for the land.

The first cycle started in the fifteenth year after they crossed the Jordan River. It took seven years to conquer the land, and seven more to make the divisions and settle.

Although there are traces of the Jubilee Year being observed (**1 Kings 21:3; Isaiah 5:8, 37:30, 61:1-3; Ezekiel 1:1, 7:12; Micah 2:2**) before the exile, the Sabbatical year is never mentioned. The Jewish tradition explains that the 70-year exile in Babylon allowed the land to make up the lost Sabbatical years. (**1 Chronicles 36:21**)

After the return from exile, the Sabbatical year was strictly observed - at least as a

religious ordinance - but the Jubilee Year was not.

Jubilee Year - from "Yovel" - a calling out or loud cry, either of joy or mourning, sound made with the ram's horn to begin the Jubilee Year.

**Leviticus 25:10** - "And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family."

"unto all the inhabitants thereof" - The rabbis maintained this meant "all those who were meant to be living there" in the specific area their tribe was allotted. After the Assyrians deported the 10 northern tribes, the Jubilee Year was neglected.

Later, a different rabbinical opinion asserted that the Jubilee is observed as long as there is a partial representation of each tribe, even if most of the tribe is not in Israel.

Josephus often cited Sabbatical Year observance, but never that of the Jubilee Year. In fact, there is no historical record, biblical or extra-biblical, that Israel ever actually observed the Jubilee Year properly.

The Sabbatical Year (but not the Jubilee Year) was mentioned in the people's solemn oath in the time of Nehemiah (**Nehemiah 10:31**).

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D., since there was no Sanhedrin to give the pronouncement and Israel was scattered in exile again, the Jubilee Year was impossible. (It was the Sanhedrin's blast of the shofar on Yom Kippur that signaled the entry of the Jubilee year). The shofar (ram's horn) is now blown in the synagogue as a memorial of the Jubilee Year at the close of Yom Kippur each year.

Tradition says that the year following the destruction of the second Temple was the first year of a seven-year Sabbatical cycle (or it was at the "going out of" the current Sabbatical year itself, the wording could mean either)

While the Torah ordinarily counts months starting from Nissan (in the spring), the years of this cycle begin with Rosh Hashanah, at the start of the autumn month of Tishri.

### **Jubilee and the Day of Ezekiel's Vision**

**Ezekiel 40:1** - "In year twenty-five of our exile, on Rosh HaShanah (New Year's Day), on the tenth of the month, in year fourteen after the city was smitten—on that very day the hand of the LORD was upon me and He brought me there."

So how can it be both New Year's Day, which is at the first of Tishri, and the tenth of the month?

Although Rosh HaShanah is always celebrated on the first of Tishri, there was one time when the New Year moved nine days later to the tenth of the month. That was in a

Jubilee year. **Leviticus 25:9** says that the Jubilee year was to be announced by the blowing of the shofar on the tenth of Tishri, the Day of Atonement. Since in all other years the (agricultural) year started on the first of Tishri, it follows that Ezekiel's vision was at the beginning of a Jubilee year. The Talmud agrees that Ezekiel saw his vision on the Day of Atonement at the beginning of a Jubilee year (Arakin 12a).

Ezekiel's statement that the year was both the 25th year of the captivity he shared with Jehoiachin and also 14 years after Jerusalem fell cannot be reconciled with the usual 586 B.C. date for the fall of the city. It is, however, consistent with a date for the fall in the summer of 587 B.C. and a date on the tenth of Tishri, 574 B.C., for the vision.

-- See <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2015/07/25/Evidence-for-Inerrancy-from-a-Second-Unexpected-Source-The-Jubilee-and-Sabbatical-Cycles.aspx#Article>

Thus the last Sabbatical Year before the Jubilee Year is actually one-year-and-ten days long. This is also the same number of days that Noah was protected in the Ark (**Genesis 7-8**).

Josephus wrote about a Great Cycle of 600 years—(Antiquities, 1, 3:9.) This 'Great Cycle' is equal to 12 jubilee cycles. From the time of Ezekiel's vision in 572 B.C. a Great Cycle of 600 years would bring us to 27/28 A.D., the beginning of Jesus' ministry. (Alternately, if 574 is the date for Ezekiel's vision, it would be about the time of Jesus' crucifixion). Either way, it's fascinating.

(See <https://design-of-time.com/chronoj.htm>)

### **Other Old Testament References to the Jubilee Year:**

**Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17** - Despite the Jubilee Year proclamation of freeing slaves and debtors, the people caused them to return to servitude, so God "released" them into death by the sword of the Babylonians. The land then "rested" by being bereft of inhabitants.

In fact, the Talmud indicates the First Temple was destroyed in a Sabbatical year:

"It is said, The day on which the First Temple was destroyed was... at the end of the seventh [Sabbatical] year..." (Arakin 11b).

**Ezekiel 46:17** - Ezekiel talks about "the year of liberty" in relation to the prince's gifts to his sons during the ideal Temple era.

### **Historical references to Sabbatical Years**

Josephus records that when Antiochus besieged Jerusalem, the city's provisions ran out because it was a Sabbatical year: "what fruits of the ground they had laid up were spent; and the land being not ploughed that year, continued unsowed, because it was the seventh year; on which by our law, we are obliged to let it lie uncultivated."

Josephus also notes that both the Greeks and the Romans allowed a reduction in taxes on the Jews during Sabbatical years.

There is an opinion in the Talmud that the Jubilee is not an “in-between-cycles year,” but rather that it is the first of the next 49-year cycle, and thus not designating it as a Jubilee would not impact the calculation of the Sabbatical cycles.

### **Jubilee Lists**

The early church historian Eusebius notes a series of jubilee years “calculated according to the Hebrews” from the 45th year of Abraham up to the second year of Roman Emperor Probus in the early 3rd century.

The Babylonian Talmud says [the prophet] Elijah told Rabbi Judah, brother of Rabbi Salla the Pious, that the world had “no fewer than 85 jubilees, and in the last, the Son of David will come. Another passage notes that Rabbi Judah “went to Abaye and asked him...” Abaye was a younger contemporary of Eusebius who died in 338 A.D. Eusebius claimed that the 81st jubilee coincided with the ministry of Jesus. Moses died at the end of the 50th jubilee, and in the 51st Joshua = Jesus took over.

This is similar to the Book of Jubilees, written 160–150 B.C., in which the jubilees are periods of 49 years (seven "year-weeks"), into which all of time has been divided. Jerome also mentions jubilees calculated “according to the Hebrews” but offers no dates.