

Background on Jesus and the Jubilee Year

Whether or not Jesus' ministry occurred during a Jubilee Year is debated by scholars.

But there is no doubt that the early Christians believed they were living in a new Kingdom of God governed by the features of the Jubilee Year. Christ had said as much when He read the passage from **Isaiah 61:1-2** at the synagogue in Nazareth.

The rabbis were divided on whether the words were those of the prophet Isaiah or of the Messiah, but Jesus left us no doubt.

"To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" is interpreted by Rashi as the "year of reconciliation" or "the year of atonement to the Lord." It could also mean "satisfaction."

Some scholars think this was a reading for the Day of Atonement

Luke 4:17 - "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has 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, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

Luke has "and recovering of sight to the blind" where Isaiah has "and the opening of the prison to them that are bound" - but both could describe the blinking prisoners coming into the light from the dungeon. (Think of Plato's allegory of the cave)

Also, see **Isaiah 49:9** - "say to the prisoners, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Show yourselves.'"

Or **Isaiah 42:7** - "to open the eyes of the blind, to bring prisoners out of the dungeon, and those sitting in darkness out from the prison house."

"to set at liberty them that are bruised" is from the LXX version of **Isaiah 58:6**

Although it was later forbidden to skip backwards to other passages while reading from the prophets, Jesus may have over-ruled this tradition while claiming a large swath of Isaiah to be pointing to His Messiahship.

These words of Isaiah outline the character of the Kingdom that Jesus was bringing into the world, and the passages from Leviticus 25 that describe the Jubilee Year, expand on it.

God's Economy

The **Leviticus 25** descriptions of the Jubilee Year commands are not only spiritual but economic in nature. The Jubilee Year disrupts attempts to amass wealth and to "join house to house, lay field to field, till there is no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the land." (**Isaiah 5:8**)

These instructions (along with other commands about gleanings for the poor, etc) are in line with the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet" (**Exodus 20:17**), and the description of Israel in the wilderness: "He that gathered much had nothing left over, and he that gathered little had no lack" (**Exodus 16:18**)

In Acts, the first Christian community is described: "Neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all thing in common." (**Acts 4:32**)

This is almost word for word how the Rabbis described possession of land during the Jubilee Year: Fields "would be rendered ownerless and available to everyone."

If there was indeed a Jubilee Year observed, it would explain this:

Acts 4:34-35 - "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need."

This was a typical response of those who had received possession of ancestral lands during a Jubilee Year. Jews in the Diaspora would return to Jerusalem, receive ancestral lands, sell them and then return home. Christians may have seen this as an opportunity to build up God's Kingdom instead.

If we "lay up treasures in heaven" we won't have to "take thought" in worrying about our "fields" because we, like the fields during the Jubilee, "lie fallow" and rest. What will we eat in the year of release? God knows our needs.

Although the scriptures are not concerned with capitalism, socialism or any other economic system, they tell us how to live within whatever system we find ourselves.

"He that hasteneth to be rich hath an evil eye and considereth not that poverty shall come upon him." (**Proverbs 28:22**)

God's Kingdom economics bends toward equality:

2 Corinthians 8:14 - "For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality: As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack."

"Give me neither poverty nor riches, lest I be full and deny thee and say 'who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of the Lord in vain." (**Proverbs 30:8-9**)

Paul explains that we work not to "make a living" but to be able to give:
"That he may have to give to him that needeth" (**Ephesians 4:28**)

Hebrews 13:5-6 - "Let your manner of life be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have, for He saith, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'"