



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 26, 2009
Released on Wednesday, July 22, 2009**

"Spreading the Wealth"

Lesson Text: Leviticus 25:8-21, 23-24

Background Scripture: Leviticus 25:1-31

Devotional Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Leviticus 25:8-21, 23-24

8 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.

9 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.

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.

11 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.

12 For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

13 In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession.

14 And if thou sell aught unto thy neighbor, or buyest aught of thy neighbor's hand, ye shall not oppress one another:

15 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:

16 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.

17 Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God: for I am the LORD your God.

18 Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety.

19 And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety.

20 And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase:

21 Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.

.....

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

24 And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

LESSON AIMS:

Facts: to study God's program of periodic rest for people and property and for release from indebtedness every half-century.

Principle: to realize that God wants people to be free from economic oppression and to enjoy independent sufficiency.

Application: to encourage private ownership but also the means for aiding others through acts of love and charity.

INTRODUCTION:

At a certain point very early in Jesus' ministry, He returned to His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30). Luke reports that He went there "in the power of the Spirit," and He went into the synagogue "as his custom was." Isaiah the prophet was the reading for that particular Sabbath.

Jesus, considered to be a special guest, unrolled the scroll to the place we know as Isaiah 61:1, 2. There He read "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, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

After giving the scroll back to the attendant, Jesus sat down to teach about this text. The congregation was startled to hear Him say "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

Jesus had just announced a kind of "jubilee" with the beginning of His preaching, teaching, and healing ministry. In essence, He had claimed to be the Messiah, for the rabbis anticipated such a jubilee when the Messiah would come. Those gathered couldn't believe it! "Is not this Joseph's son?" they asked rhetorically. Jesus pushed back by saying "Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself" and "No prophet is accepted in his own country."

Jesus went on to apply His announcement of jubilee by mentioning God's concern for Gentiles, such as the Sidonian widow (1 Kings 17:7-24) and Naaman, the Syrian leper (2 Kings 5). In other words, the genuine Messiah's jubilee would be for the whole world, including Gentiles.

This enraged the congregation to the point that they acted as an angry mob. They attempted (but failed) to cast Him down from the brow of the Nazareth hill. How could Jesus' hometown move so quickly from treating Him as a special guest to seeing Him only as "Joseph's son" and then to having a willingness to murder Him as a false prophet? Perhaps today's study on *jubilee* will shed light on this question.

LESSON BACKGROUND:

Time: about 1444 B.C.

Place: Mount Sinai

The concept of *Sabbath* (which means "ceasing") is built into the fabric of the story of creation (Genesis 2:1-3; see Leviticus 23:3). In six days God created the world and everything in it. On the seventh day God halted His labors and declared it a "cease day."

When God "created" Israel by delivering the nation from bondage, He provided in the wilderness a Sabbath-manna (Exodus 16). On the sixth day of the week, the people collected twice their daily need. If they went out on the Sabbath, they would find none. The people had to exercise faith with regard to the Sabbath day.

In addition to the Sabbath day was the Sabbath year, described in Exodus 23:10, 11; Leviticus 25:1-7; and Deuteronomy 15:1-18. Every seventh year was a Sabbath year, during which all debts had to be canceled (Deuteronomy 15:1, 2). The Year of Jubilee, what may be called "a Sabbath of the Sabbath year," was an extension of this concept.

LIBERTY PROCLAIMED (Leviticus 25:8-12)

1. What was the Sabbatical Year?

Leviticus 25 contains laws related to the Sabbatical Year (vs. 1-7), the Year of Jubilee (vs. 8-24), the redemption of property (vs. 25-34), the law of usury (vs. 35-38), and the redemption of slaves (vs. 39-55).

The Sabbatical Year was related to the weekly Sabbath. Just as the people were to rest the seventh day after six days of work, so the land itself was to rest after six years. During the Sabbatical Year, the ground was not to be plowed or planted, and the people were to eat what had been stored up from previous harvests.

Concept of Jubilee

2. What was the Year of Jubilee? How often did it occur? (Leviticus 25:8)

The Year of Jubilee was the year at the end of seven cycles of Sabbatical years. After "seven sabbaths of years" (Lev. 25:8), that is, forty-nine years, the Year of Jubilee was to occur (once every fifty years). For most people, this meant that they would experience the Year of Jubilee only once in their lifetime.

Some scholars think that the meaning of the word *jubilee* is literally "ram's horn." This makes a certain sense, due to the fact that a ram's horn is what is to be blown to announce the jubilee. The Year of Jubilee, according to Biblical regulations, impacted ownership and management of land, the cancellation of debts, and the liberation of slaves.

Though we do not have any details in the Old Testament concerning any particular Jubilee Year observed during the old dispensation, it does find fulfillment in the New Testament. When Christ spoke in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, He alluded to the Year of Jubilee when He said He came to "preach deliverance to the captives,... to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19; cf. Isa. 61:1-2).

3. When was the trumpet blown to begin the Year of Jubilee? (v. 9)

It was on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)* - the tenth day of the seventh month - that the trumpet was sounded to announce the beginning of the Year of

Jubilee. On our calendar this would occur in late September or early October. It came ten days after the Jewish new year, known as Rosh Hashanah.

The seventh month, in which the day of atonement occurs, is in reference to the cycle of the Israelite religious year, although this particular month eventually becomes the first month of the Jewish civil year. The greatest of releases in ancient Hebrew experience is to be the annual release of sins on this day. The tabernacle (or temple) is to be sanctified once again, and the people are to have their collective sins atoned for by means of the high priest's sprinkling of goat blood on top of the ark covering. What better time, then, to begin the Year of Jubilee in signaling, in part, the release from debts?

4. What was the significance of the Day of Atonement? How does this relate to New Testament believers? (v. 10)

A full explanation of the Day of Atonement is found in Leviticus 16:29–34 and 23:26–32. The Day of Atonement was the only day on the Israelite religious calendar that required the people to fast. It was on this day that the high priest offered a sacrifice for himself and for the people and entered into the holy of holies (16:11–19). After that, he laid his hands on the scapegoat (vs. 20–22), symbolically transferring the sins of the people to the goat. The goat was then taken to the wilderness, never to return.

All of this depicted the removal of the guilt of the people. From the New Testament perspective, however, we realize that it is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin (Heb. 10:4); only Christ can do that (9:28).

On this special occasion, the Israelites were to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land" (Lev. 25:10). This meant that all slaves were to be set free during the Year of Jubilee (vs. 39–55). It also meant that property sold during the previous fifty years had to be returned to the family that originally owned it. In a sense, property was not really sold, only leased. This meant that families who fell on hard times could start over. People who were sold into slavery to pay debts could also begin anew. This would prevent any one person or group from gaining a monopoly on the land. It was, in fact, a means of maintaining a level of equality among the Israelites.

"They were now free citizens, living in their own land, which itself was a gift of God, but being bound to Him by a covenant relationship. . . They were not to think in terms of accumulating vast holdings of property over periods of time lest they succumb to the materialism of the surrounding nations" (Harrison, *Leviticus*, InterVarsity).

5. What was a time when you longed for a fresh start? How did things turn out?

We are surrounded by people who have seen us at our best and at our worst. Sometimes we are embarrassed by our past mistakes. Middle-aged adults may look at their lives and feel a lack of accomplishment. We live with regret and may think that if we had another chance, we would do better. We would make better friends, make better career choices, and spend our money and time more wisely. The idea of "fresh start" to many folks primarily conjures up the idea of declaring bankruptcy to get out of a financial mess.

From the Christian perspective, we have a fresh start every day, for our relationship with the Lord is ever new. We also know that while the past is less than perfect, we can be forgiven completely. We can receive constant renewal and revival through the Holy Spirit.

6. With regard to sowing and reaping, what were the people to do during the Year of Jubilee? (vs. 11-12)

Like the Sabbatical Year (vs. 4-6), the Year of Jubilee was a time when systematic sowing and reaping were forbidden. One might wonder what the people were to eat during this time, but with foresight, they could have begun saving some crops for the time when they would not be allowed to farm the land. Just as crops were stored during the years of plenty in Joseph's time (Gen. 41:46-57), so the people could plan ahead for the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:21).

The Jubilee Year was to be holy, meaning it was to be different, set apart for special celebrations and obligations. "By this means God is clearly reasserting His ownership of the land, and emphasizing the importance of keeping it holy. In turn, the legislation reminds the Israelites that they are to trust the God who delivered the nation from Egypt in earlier days and provided His chosen with a land in which to live, a trust that extends to His provision for the nonproductive years of the sabbatical and jubilee" (Harrison).

The provision that they could "eat the increase thereof out of the field" (Lev. 25:12; cf. vs. 6-7) appears to have been a stipulation that it was permissible to eat crops that grew spontaneously in the field. If this is correct, the people were forbidden from planting and harvesting, but not from eating what grew naturally from seed that was left in the fields due to unharvested or rotting crops.

Since the Year of Jubilee followed a Sabbatical Year, there would have been two straight years when crops would not be planted. Some, however, accept "the 'leap year' view that the Jubilee was a short year only 49 days in length inserted into the seventh month of the 49th year" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

Since the Bible provides no clear evidence regarding the actual practice of the Year of Jubilee, we do not know how all this played out in the history of Israel. Prophetic rebukes concerning land-grabbing and oppression of the poor most likely indicate that the Jubilee Year was not being practiced in later history (cf. Isa. 5:8; Amos 8:4-6; Mic. 2:2).

LIVES PRESERVED (Leviticus 25:13-21)

7. How did God restrict undue advantage among the Israelites? (vs. 13-17)

As mentioned previously, an important provision during the Year of Jubilee was to return land to its original tribal owners. While the word "possession" might include other property, most think that this referred primarily to land.

Behind this provision was the concept that God owned everything. What the Israelites seemingly possessed was actually on loan from God. "For this reason the land of Canaan was assigned to the Israelites by tribes, and those who settled on it regarded themselves at best as tenants rather than outright owners" (Harrison).

We too need to remember that "the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof" (1 Cor. 10:26) and that "we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Tim. 6:7).

Whether buying from or selling to a neighbor, the Israelites were to be fair and honest in their dealings (Lev. 25:14). As Christians, we must be extremely honest in spite of the fact that some will try to defraud us. We must not succumb to the temptation to do to others as they have done to us!

Since purchasing property was not a permanent transaction, the number of years the property was going to be used prior to the Jubilee had to be taken into consideration. If the Jubilee was in the distant future, the price could be increased. If it was not far off, the price was to be decreased accordingly (v. 16).

Since most know what is fair in a business deal, people should not be taken advantage of or be guilty of taking advantage of others. God's instructions were simple: The Israelites were to show their fear of God by not cheating each other. Being reminded that this was God's Word and that the Almighty should be feared would have been a powerful motivation to obey.

8. What promise did God make concerning their physical well-being during this time? (vs. 18-19)

As is often seen in the Old Testament, keeping God's commands is directly linked to physical blessings. Israel was promised that they would live in their homeland in safety if they were careful to obey God's Word.

While the general principle stands that God blesses people who obey Him, we must not take promises that were made specifically to Israel and apply them broadly to all Christians. While followers of Christ are promised that their needs will be met (Matt. 6:33; Phil. 4:19), we should not be deceived by those who claim that health and wealth are entitlements for obedient children of God. Throughout the world, many believers suffer want and have very little compared to even the average unbeliever in America.

Even though Israel would not plant or harvest during the Jubilee, they would have their store from the forty-eighth year and the land would also yield voluntary produce, and they would eat their fill. While such promises provided assurance for their physical welfare, modern believers also know that God provides for our earthly needs and our heavenly ones. Our needs will be met (Matthew 6:33; Philippians 4:19), and He has "blessed us with all spiritual blessings ... in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

9. What would the people eat during the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years? (vs. 20-21)

Those hearing about the Year of Jubilee for the first time would naturally wonder what they would eat during both the forty-ninth and the fiftieth year. While we may not face this particular question, we may be tempted to doubt that God will provide in other circumstances. Nagging questions may pop up: Will we be able to pay all our bills if we tithe? Will God take care of us if we refuse to comply with a boss who demands we do something unethical? Will God meet our needs should we decide to go to Bible college or seminary?

God's answer for the ancient Israelite was that the year before the land was to be given a two-year rest, He would bless them with enough food to last three years. If they would trust God and obediently allow the land to rest, His prior blessings upon them would be sufficient.

We find the same principle in the New Testament. It is abundantly clear in Christ's Sermon on the Mount that God will supply the needs of His people. Since life is more than food and clothing, we exhibit a lack of faith when we worry about such things

(Matt. 6:25-34). Since God takes care of birds and flowers, He will certainly take care of us. His care for us is not automatic, though. For our part, we are to put the Lord and His kingdom first in our lives.

LAND POSSESSED (Leviticus 25:23-24)

10. Why did God call the people of Israel "strangers and sojourners?" (vs. 23-24)

Although the people would possess the land, here again they were reminded that it belonged to God. For that reason, the land could not be sold permanently. God referred to them as strangers, or foreigners, who were staying as His guests.

Stipulations for the "redemption for the land" (Lev. 25:24) are contained in the verses following our lesson text. If, for example, a man had to sell his land because he fell on hard times, he or a family member had the right to redeem it at a future time when his financial resources would allow such a transaction (vs. 25-28). All these provisions were designed to promote fair dealings in Israel and to provide real opportunities to start over for those experiencing financial hardships.

11. How should our perspective change when we remember that God owns all the land?

We are taught routinely that buying land is a good idea since, as the old saying goes, "they're not making any more of it." Yet this lesson gives us the larger perspective that all land is ultimately the Lord's (also Psalm 24:1). We are merely stewards of it. We realize that all of our land holdings will pass to others at our deaths.

The concepts of Sabbath and Jubilee years, when the land was to lie fallow, should have given the Israelites the same outlook. To obey those traditions was to release an individual's control over a field, returning it to God. We adopt this mind-set when we refuse to engage in undue worry about our needs (Luke 12:22-34).

12. How do these principles apply to Christians today?

Just as God called the Israelites foreigners, so we who trust in Christ are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13) because our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). As people of faith, our heart is with our treasure in heaven (Matt. 6:19-21), and we yearn for our spiritual homeland (Heb. 11:14-16). Our hope is not in this world, "for here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (13:14).

The greater opportunity for people today is that none need wait any portion of fifty years to be free from sin and to have the new life Christ gives. It is always there waiting for them, and nothing but pride delays their moment of jubilee.

The waiting period between Jubilee Years for Israel was a long time. Nevertheless, it came about once in every generation. Again, as we compare this event with the spiritual event of salvation, we can be very thankful God does not wait for fifty years before releasing us from the debt we owe.

Jesus Christ saw to it that the debt was paid, and now all one need do is believe and with confession and repentance come to Him. The Year of Jubilee foreshadowed the great spiritual blessing Christ brings. Jesus' power over sin and death has set us free from the slavery of sin. Jesus is our Jubilee in every way!

PRACTICAL POINTS:

1. Just as God had Israel release people from their debts, so He sets us free from a debt we cannot pay (Lev. 25:8-10).
2. An extended time set apart to God may be foreign to us, but is just what we need (vs. 11-12).
3. All our business and social transactions should be conducted in the fear of God (vs. 13-17).
4. When obedience to God seems to run counter to our needs, He will provide (vs. 18-21).
5. Understanding that everything we have really belongs to God is the basis for a right relationship with Him (vs. 23-24).

CONCLUSION:

Jubilee was to be the year in which (1) liberty was proclaimed for all Israelites who were enslaved for debt; (2) the remission of debt occurred; (3) land was restored to families who had been compelled to sell it in the previous 49 years; and (4) the land had to lie fallow. This is described fully in Leviticus 25:8–55 and referred to in Leviticus 27:16–25 and Numbers 36:4.

Jubilee thus was in large part God's loudspeaker of care for the poor. God has always been concerned for the poor. This is why the farmer was commanded not to glean the corners of his field (Leviticus 19:9, 10; 23:22; Ruth 2:2). The harvest in such areas was to be left for the poor. Jubilee was God's gift to the destitute and despairing, providing them a fresh start. Can this practice teach us something today?

The "servant" of Isaiah has a jubilee-like ministry to restore Israel to the "land" (see Isaiah 35, 42, 58, 61). Jesus saw himself as that servant when He announced His jubilee ministry to those of His hometown (see the Introduction). But they rejected Him. Even so, Jesus inaugurated His ministry with the concept of jubilee in mind; forgiveness of the sin debt and restoration of relationship to God were key features of the proclamation of the kingdom. The first-century church proclaimed Jesus' idea of a kingdom characterized by a jubilee spirit (see Acts 4:32–37). The thought of "restoring" was jubilee vocabulary (Acts 1:6; 3:21).

As the church proclaims the eternal jubilee available in Christ, she needs to discern if she is practicing an earthly jubilee ideal as Jesus would have us do. Yet as we engage in prayer and soul searching in this regard, we will be careful not to "read into" the New Testament an Old Testament law that was operative only for ancient Israel.

The jubilee principle as stated by Paul to the Corinthians is this: "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" (2 Corinthians 8:14-15). Practicing this ideal is easier when we embrace the fact that we are only "strangers and pilgrims" here (1 Peter 2:11).

PRAYER:

Our Father, teach us to forgive as we have been forgiven, to give as we have been given to, and to love as we have been loved. In the comfort of Your sovereign provisions and the name of our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER:

Practice both the eternal and earthly ideals of jubilee in Christ.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON:

When it came to the sins of complaining and ingratitude, Israel was unrelentingly guilty. By the time the people of the Exodus arrived at Kadesh-barnea, they had grown tired of the manna God provided each morning but the Sabbath. They were crying out for meat.

Next week's lesson is "**Complaints and Cravings**" and focuses on the Israelites murmuring at Kadesh-barnea and its effect on Moses. Study Numbers 11:1-35.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY:

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Footnote: * For more information on Yom Kippur (Question #3) go to:
http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall_Holidays/Yom_Kippur/yom_kippur.html

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