

Jubilee

Introduction

Every seven years, the Jews were to observe a "sabbatical year" and allow the land to rest. After seven sabbaticals, or forty-nine years, they were to celebrate the fiftieth year as the "Year of Jubilee." During that year, all debts were cancelled, all land was returned to the original owners, the slaves were freed, and everybody was given a fresh new beginning. This was the Lord's way of balancing the economy and keeping the rich from exploiting the poor. . It was to remind people that God is a God of justice....Yet due to evil and sin, injustice seemed always to creep in and change God's just order of things...so, in the jubilee year, God steps in to demand that things be set right again in the community."

The Sabbath Year

The sabbatical year brought release and rest and was a time when the poor benefited.

Sabbath Year Release Deut 15:1-6

All debts between Israelites were to be cancelled. (Deut 15:1) but the debts of foreigners were not to be cancelled (Deut 15:2)

In this way no one would get too rich or too poor. It was a year when they were to use up what they had. But the tendency of man is now and always has been to acquire more and more, just in case, for a rainy day – and look where it got a certain farmer in one of Jesus parables.

However if any Hebrew sold themselves into slavery to another Hebrew to pay a debt, they would serve a full six years, and then be released. So you could be a slave in a Sabbath year. There was an option to remain in slavery if the slave so chose BUT you should not be a slave in a Jubilee year. It was not an option. In Jubilee all slaves were to go home and reclaim the property of their forefathers. Indeed when a slave was released the law states “do not send him away empty handed. Supply him liberally from your flock, your threshing floor, and your winepress. Give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you.” Deut 15:13-15

Sabbath Year Rest Leviticus 25:5-7

When I studied history we learnt about the four-field system, where a field was left fallow every fourth year. God declared that for his people it should be every seventh year. The main difference being that with the four-field system you had three fields to cultivate every year. With the Sabbath year, no field was to be cultivated.

The land was to rest and be uncultivated for one full year thus providing all labourers also with rest. What grew of itself (with no tending, pruning or reaping) could be used by the family or their animals but was really intended for the use of the poor of the land and the wild animals (*Lev 25:7b Exodus 23:10-11 Lev. 25:6 Lev 25:7a*)

The Year of Jubilee

After 7 periods of seven years the year of Jubilee was to take place. So there would be two consecutive years without sowing and harvesting. If the people would trust God he would ensure that the harvest on year 48 would be sufficient for three years.

Not only was the land rested, in Jubilee year it was to be released from all ownership and returned to its original owner. When Israel came into the land of Canaan, land was allotted to tribes and families. The land was the Lords, they simply had a lease on it. This land belonged to the Lord and was 'on loan' to the Israelites (Lev 25:23) but, as a family was allotted a certain piece of ground, God made the provision that even if they fell into difficult times and had to sell the land (to pay off debts, for example) it would remain their everlasting inheritance by reverting back to their ownership on the year of Jubilee.

Practically, it meant that Jubilee occurred once in every person's lifetime.

Because of this, the Israelites' financial assessment of the land was as a potential value of profit from crops (Lev 25:16) rather than as a piece of real estate.

Lev 25:35-55 outlines the legislation of Jubilee as it related to the slave. The sabbatical year preceding Jubilee had brought about the annulment of all debts, making it possible for each and every Israelite to be set free from bondage and to make a totally new start. Whether a Hebrew slave belonged to a Hebrew master (Lev 25:40-41) or a Gentile (Lev 25:47ff), he had to be released at Jubilee so that he could return to take possession of his allotted inheritance.

The OT Law is a shadow (that is, a ‘type’ or an ‘illustration’) of who the Christ was to be and what His death, burial, resurrection and ascension were to achieve for all mankind (though, for the Jew first!). The Law was given by God Himself to shadow the life and work of the One who was to come.

We find support for this in Matthew 5:17-18 where Jesus is quoted as saying

‘Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the law until everything is accomplished.’

Release & Rest

When we think of God’s ‘release’ we’re primarily thinking of the release of something or someone that’s being held captive by something that it’s not God’s intention for them to be held by. By ‘rest’ we’re thinking of the deliverance from striving and toiling that wears an individual out in their relationship with and pursuit of God.

When Jesus ministered to mankind before the cross, He proclaimed both release and rest, thus making it evident that the fulfilment of the year of Jubilee had come.

Release

Luke 4:18-19

The is an event that took place at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

He sums up His ministry in the words of Is 61:1-2 which says that He has come to

‘...proclaim release to the captives and...to set at liberty those who are oppressed...’

ending the reading with the words

‘...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord’

When we think of Jesus’ words in the light of the cross, the ‘acceptable year of the Lord’ has to primarily refer to the time of salvation that His death and resurrection was to bring in (II Cor 6:2) The fulfilment of the OT legislation of the year of Jubilee has now come. We have been set free from bondage; our spiritual debt to the Lord has been paid; and we are living in "the acceptable year of the Lord."

b. Rest Matthew 11:25-30

Salvation and spiritual insight is a matter of revelation and not doctrine - It’s God’s choice to reveal Truth to whoever He wills though it must be pointed out that it’s God’s will that it be revealed to all (II Peter 3:9).

Salvation and spiritual insight, is hidden from the wise and understanding, the ‘wise’ being the spiritually proud who consider that by what they know they stand in a right relationship before God (I Cor 1:20-29). They are often unwilling to consider the way that God chooses to accept mankind.

Jesus speaks concerning the rest that He can offer all who follow Him.

The heavy labour of the spiritually proud that achieves little inner peace is here contrasted with the wholeness and rest of the spiritually humble - because the latter come to Him, are happy to be united solely to Him and rely solely upon Him.

Legalism weighs down and produces and maintains the spiritually proud in their cause (*and creates a burden for them that it’s impossible to bear - Acts 15:10*), whereas revelation sets free, liberates and lifts up the spiritually oppressed.

Jesus' phrase 'come to Me' in Matthew 11:27 implies a revelation of who the Son is before it's possible to find the needed rest. Therefore, revelation and not legalistic observance comes first before lasting peace and rest can be received.

To put it another way, 'rest' comes along as part of the package of a relationship with God and isn't something that can be striven for and worked towards.

The yoke which Christ bids His followers carry is freedom from any type of legalistic religion and harmony with the simple obedience that comes by revelation.

Instead of 'working' at being converted, it becomes a matter of 'rest' and is, therefore, a fulfilment of one of the two aspects of the year of Jubilee.

Practising release

Jesus proclamation of these aspects of both release and rest didn't stop with just words. Jesus went about practising what He taught the people and brought both these to people's lives. Firstly, Jesus effected release. From sickness and demons, but above all from bondage to sin as in the case of the paralytic though the roof.

Practising rest

Secondly, Jesus also brought rest from the misconception that a legalistic salvation was what God required. He went about proclaiming that salvation was to be received into a person's life rather than being earned as demonstrated for example by the sinful woman who visited the dinner party organised by Simon the Pharisee. She went on her way after Jesus forgave her sin and sent her away in peace.

Jesus' death on Calvary provided the means whereby release and rest became readily available to all.

The year of Jubilee began on the Day of Atonement (Lev 25:9) when, annually, the nation's sins were dealt with (Lev 16:16) so that a covenant relationship continued to exist between themselves and God.

It's necessary that we live in the reality of the Day of Atonement - forgiveness - before we can experience both aspects of Jubilee rest and release.

[The practicalities of our Jubilee in Christ](#)

[i. A release from materialism](#)

Inner peace

Materialism is the belief that only matter is real or important and so, as a consequence, there's the rejection of spiritual things. It's the rejection of God for the possession of something earthly. It's a devotion to and a desire for earthly things and a rejection of all spiritual things that have no earthly point or advantage. It's a trust in things that are transient with a distrust of God. It's a reliance upon earthly possessions for security.

In Luke 18:18-30 we find Jesus dealing with the 'rich young ruler' where he says 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God'. This is not a condemnation of rich people in general but a warning. The rich young ruler was alright trusting in God so long as he had earthly security. When that was challenged, he had to make a choice - either trust wholly in God or trust in material things.

Jesus is certainly not condemning the rich and it would be wrong of us to think that He's trying to teach His disciples that it is a sin to be such - but it's a sin to seek security in anything material.

The Jubilee legislation taught Israel not to be dependent upon or to find security in the accumulation of possessions - each Israelite would end up in the same financial state in which he began the previous fifty years (even if the man died, the family name was to be perpetuated through his sons and they would inherit the father's land - Deut 25:5-10), thus freeing the Israelites from any grip that materialism had over them.

Imagine the relative pointlessness of accumulating both property and slaves. In the year of Jubilee the persistent toil to achieve materialistic ends was forbidden(Lev 25),

Striving after earthly possessions has got nothing to do with living for God - however much we would like to spiritualise it - because there's always a selfish desire for us to make our lives easier than they currently are. At the end of the day, we'll either have anxiety or be devoted to the things of the Kingdom and in promoting the Gospel - or both.

God intended His people to have peace in their hearts and enjoy life, not to be taken up with the accumulation of transient, earthly riches that could give no lasting satisfaction. When you come to the realisation that the cross of Christ cannot be grasped then, if the cross is the most valuable 'possession' of your life, material objects begin to lose their appeal.

Jesus talked at some length to His disciples about materialism in Matthew 6:25-33, concluding with the words '...seek first [God's] Kingdom and His righteousness [that is, right-standing] and all these things [material possessions] shall be yours as well'

God will provide for a believer's needs - but needs aren't what a believer should be striving for and wasting his energy on.

If we're to escape the grip of materialism on our lives, we must serve God and not put a false trust in our possessions.

ii. A care for the brethren

Giving/care

The Jubilee legislation had as an underlying principal that other people and not self-possession are important. Man, created in God's image (Gen 1:26) is to be safeguarded, cared for and looked after. By removing the Israelites' heart from potential materialism, it opened up the way for them to use all for the benefit and welfare of their brethren

'Love God...Love man' is the sole basis of the Law (Mtw 22:34-40).

Though Israel never fully attained what God had planned for them, it doesn't nullify the purpose of God in the giving of the Law. This care for the brethren was God's intention also in the early Church.

The believers forsook any heart-commitment to material things, sharing all things for the maintenance of the poor among them (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32-35), even selling land that was under their ownership (Acts 4:36-37). Even a group of believers in one region were committed to another in a different area because of the common bond that existed in Christ (II Cor 8:3-4).

Such care for the poor amongst the ranks of the Church can only fully exist when the realisation comes to individuals that our eternal treasure of and in Christ is of far more value than any transient, earthly possession. When the believers had their possessions plundered (probably through persecution), they accepted it 'joyfully' because they looked to the surpassing value of their eternal possession in Christ (Heb 10:34).

A non-materialistic society is one that voluntarily makes others rich at their own expense, following the example of Christ who, though he was rich, became poor, so that by His poverty we might become rich beyond measure (II Cor 8:9).

Conclusion

The year of Jubilee commanded in the OT legislation sees its ultimate fulfilment in the person and work of Jesus Christ who brought in release and rest wherever He went - something which the early Church continued to bring in after His resurrection and ascension.

If we have trusted Christ as our Saviour, we are living today in a spiritual "Year of Jubilee". We have been set free from bondage; our spiritual debt to the Lord has been paid; we are living in "the acceptable year of the Lord."

May you experience the blessing of real Jubilee **Release** and **Rest**.