Remembering with Joy

MAY 20 • Bible Study Guide 12

Bible Background • LEVITICUS 25
Printed Text • LEVITICUS 25:1–12 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 50:1–5

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EVALUATE the implications for land ownership in Israel in the year of Jubilee; ASPIRE to reflecting biblical values in giving; and DESIGN a plan for faithful sharing of personal wealth.

In Focus

Justin couldn’t believe what he was seeing. All of his five senses were overwhelmed. He had never seen poverty like this before. As he walked through the different makeshift shacks and huts in the slums, his heart began to break. The children that approached him were smiling, yet they barely had clothes to wear. His mission trip was showing him a side of the world that he had only seen on TV. As he walked into the house of one of the leaders, they began a conversation. The leader’s name was hard to pronounce, so most of the mission team just called him Jay. Jay began to explain the situation to them: “The way we gauge whether we had a good or bad day is how many meals we have eaten. Some people have just a breakfast kind of day or just a breakfast and dinner kind of day. When you have three whole meals that is something worth celebrating.” “Wow,” Justin said. Jay continued, “Our land is filled with abundant resources to provide everything we need to live. It breaks our hearts and pains our stomachs, to see the very food we labor to produce is taken away and shipped off to other countries because of trade regulations. Laziness isn’t keeping us in poverty, it’s greed and injustice.” Justin shook his head. Right then Justin committed to doing what he could to help those who did not have enough. Life is not about hoarding and accumulating goods for our own personal gain. What can we do to make sure everyone has enough?

Keep in Mind

“And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family” (Leviticus 25:10).

Words You Should Know

A. Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10–12) yobel (Gk.)—Ram’s horn, trumpet, jubilee year.

B. Hallow (v. 10) qadash (Heb.)—To dedicate, make sacred or holy.

Say It Correctly

Jubile. joo-bi-LEE.
Sojourneth. so-JER-nith.
KJV

Leviticus 25:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying,
2 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.
3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;
4 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.
5 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.
6 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.
7 And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.
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 jubile 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 jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.
11 A jubile 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.

NLT

Leviticus 25:1 While Moses was on Mount Sinai, the LORD said to him,
2 “Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. When you have entered the land I am giving you, the land itself must observe a Sabbath rest before the LORD every seventh year.
3 For six years you may plant your fields and prune your vineyards and harvest your crops,
4 but during the seventh year the land must have a Sabbath year of complete rest. It is the LORD’s Sabbath. Do not plant your fields or prune your vineyards during that year.
5 And don’t store away the crops that grow on their own or gather the grapes from your unpruned vines. The land must have a year of complete rest.
6 But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own during its Sabbath. This applies to you, your male and female servants, your hired workers, and the temporary residents who live with you.
7 Your livestock and the wild animals in your land will also be allowed to eat what the land produces.
8 “In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all.
9 Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram’s horn loud and long throughout the land.
10 Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan.
11 This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don’t gather the grapes from your unpruned vines.
12 It will be a jubilee year for you, and you must keep it holy. But you may eat whatever the land produces on its own.
The People, Places, and Times

Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is considered the most important holiday in the Jewish calendar. Usually celebrated in mid-September or mid-October, this holiday was the day that the high priest went beyond the veil in the Temple to atone for the sins of Israel. The high priest would take the blood of a young bull and sprinkle it over the mercy seat, which was on top of the Ark of the Covenant. There he would confess the sins of the nation. On this day, the Children of Israel were required to “afflict their souls,” which is believed to mean fasting (Leviticus 23:27, 29, 32).

Trumpet. This instrument was usually created out of a ram’s horn. Moses also commissioned straight metal trumpets as well (Numbers 10:10). These trumpets were not musical instruments, but were used to signal a proclamation or warning to the people. Their use was mostly for announcing public events such as war, a call to worship, or even claims to kingship ( Judges 3:27; Isaiah 27:13; 1 Kings 1:34).

Why do you think the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is considered the most important holiday in the Jewish calendar?

Background
Leviticus is a book filled with laws that governed how the Israelites, and particularly the priests, were to approach God. It is about holiness and how an unholy people could have a relationship with a holy God. These laws included instructions for how to offer sacrifices and also for how to remain ritually clean in various circumstances.

The book also contained laws concerning the required feasts and holy days in the Israelite community. Leviticus 25 speaks of one of these holy days: the Year of Jubilee. In the Year of Jubilee, giving the land rest and freeing others from bondage is not only good, it is also a requirement for communal holiness. In God’s eyes, we must take care of the land and our brothers and sisters.

Do you think the abundance of laws turns people off from reading the book of Leviticus? Why or why not?

At-A-Glance
1. Give the Land Rest (Leviticus 25:1–5)
2. Let God Provide for You (vv. 6–7)
3. Proclaim Liberty (vv. 8–12)

In Depth

1. Give the Land Rest (Leviticus 25:1–5)
Moses is speaking to the people of Israel regarding the command for them not only to personally take a Sabbath, but also grant the land a time of rest as well. For six years, the Israelites are to work the land, and on the seventh year, the land is supposed to have rest, without sowing or plowing, nor pruning or gathering of the harvest. The land is supposed to lie still.

This rest was to happen for a whole year. This Sabbath rest for the land was a display of the reality of the Israelites’ position as stewards of the land and not its owners. God gave them the land as a gift, and therefore they were charged to take care of it. Christians are to have this perspective in every area of life; we are stewards and do not own anything. This should cause us to pause and remember the God who is the source of all of our gifts.

Since most of us do not have an agricultural lifestyle, how can we practice this command of allowing the land to take a sabbath?

2. Let God Provide for You (vv. 6–7)
While the previous verses state that no gathering was supposed to happen, many commentators have reflected that organized agricultural practice is in view. Otherwise, the allowances of vv. 6–7 contradict what the Israelites are commanded to abstain from in vv. 4–5. What Moses is saying to the Israelites is that they are to
abstain from organized agricultural production and only eat from the fields what is necessary for sustaining their lives. These verses are a reminder that God has provided everything necessary for us. Our task is not to slave and grind constantly in order to live. Many of our endeavors are driven by selfish ambition and greed. God provides for all of His children and we are to enjoy and remember that He, not we, sustains life.

Would it be hard to obey the command to cease from work?

### 3. Proclaim Liberty (vv. 8–12)

The Israelites are to not only give the land rest, but also proclaim liberty to the enslaved. After seven Sabbaths of years (49 years), they were to blow the trumpet on the Day of Atonement and signal an emancipation of all slaves and the return of property taken as payment for debt. This Year of Jubilee would have the same instructions regarding the land as other Sabbath years—no organized agricultural labor was to take place, but the people would eat from the uncultivated increase to sustain life.

No record of biblical history indicates that the Israelites actually practiced the Year of Jubilee. In fact, the prophet Jeremiah says that punishment from God came to Israel because they failed to give the land rest. The command to practice a Sabbath of Sabbaths highlights the importance that God places on the common good as opposed to the selfish pursuit of individual gain.

Do you believe it would be beneficial to have a national program to free people from debt? Why or why not

### Search the Scriptures

1. What implication is there for us today that God set aside every seven years to give the land rest (Leviticus 25:4)?
2. Since the Israelites were only allowed to eat what the field produced on its own during the Year of Jubilee, what does this say about their reliance on God (v. 12)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. In light of the instructions to the Israelites regarding the Year of Jubilee, what would God’s Jubilee include in our time?
2. What can we learn about God’s desire for our relationship with Him, others, and our property and employees from the institution of a Jubilee Year?

### Lesson in Our Society

Economic equality and care for the earth are very controversial topics. As African Americans, these issues are very important to our history and our present. As descendants of slaves, we have been overlooked when it comes to a collective share in our country’s wealth. Many have advocated for reparations to no avail. At the same time, our standard of living is higher than most of the world’s just by virtue of living in the United States. Additionally, our country exploits other communities globally for resources and labor in order to provide luxuries to satisfy our greed.

Both of these problems can be solved through the faithful distribution of wealth. The Bible has a prescription: share so that no one has too little while others have more than enough. God’s design for human flourishing is that everyone has enough. This can be championed through fighting for equitable and ethical business practices and legislation. It can also be championed in our own lives by distributing our abundance to the poor and destitute. God wants us all to have enough.

How does this lesson motivate you to care for the earth or fight for economic justice?

### Make It Happen

- Using a Monopoly board, discuss how the rules of the game would change if based on Leviticus 25.
- Evaluate whether you have more than enough in the areas of food and clothing and decide whether to donate the excess to a charity organization, or to someone right in your church.
- Commit to sponsor a child through Compassion International: www.compassion.com.
Follow the Spirit
What God wants me to do:
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

Remember Your Thoughts
Special insights I have learned:
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
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More Light on the Text

Leviticus 25:1–12
1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying.
After leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai three months later under Moses’ leadership. The building of the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant was completed the second year after their departure from Egypt (Exodus 40:17). From the Tabernacle, the Lord gave Moses the laws.

2 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.
Some laws were to be implemented right there in the desert, but other laws had to be practiced once in the Promised Land. The Lord decided to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham after they stayed in a foreign land as slaves for four hundred years (Genesis 12:7, 15:13–21). Now they were in the wilderness, expecting to take possession of the land. The Lord therefore gives them instructions, as the real owner of the land, how to live in and take full advantage of all the blessings linked to it. The Israelites must not work the land during the sabbatical year; it should be left fallow. The sabbatical year is built on the concept of rest after six days of work, as God did in Creation (Genesis 2:1–3). The will of God by this concept is to free the people from continuous labor so they could enjoy their new land and His blessing. It also acknowledges God’s ownership of the land and boldly demonstrates the people’s faith in Him for their food.

3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; 4 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.
Just as humans need rest, the land also needs a rest of one year after six years of being plowed. The sabbatical year is meant to honor God. Sowing and pruning of vineyards was forbidden. As a theocracy, a nation governed by God, Israel integrated God in all the aspects of their lives. There was no separation between sacred and secular life as we have today. Besides the spiritual aspects of rest, lying a land fallow also has benefits in that it reduces the quantity of harmful mineral deposits in the soil. This legislation about the land is both good agricultural and ecological practice. This one year period allows the land to replenish its nutrients and be more fertile for the other six years to come.

5 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. 6 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, 7 And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.
“We that which groweth of its own accord” (Heb. safiakh, sah-FEE-akh) is a reference to what grows naturally the season after seeds fall to the ground. While verse 5 says that they shall not reap nor gather the grapes of the vine, verse 6 states that what grows by itself should be food for the slave, the foreigner, the land-owner, and
even domestic and wild animals. These two verses seem to contradict, but the intent is made clear when one realizes what was forbidden is the regular harvest work involving the servants and storage. There should be no organized farming, sowing, pruning, or reaping. What grows by itself in the seventh year does not belong to anyone in particular, but has been given by the Lord for the benefit of all. The sabbatical year therefore also served as a time of alleviating the suffering of the poor.

This cycle of seven years is seen several other places in the Old Testament Law. The sabbatical year was a year of freedom for slaves (Exodus 21:2; Jeremiah 34:14). Unfortunately, Israel fails to keep the instructions of the covenant, which is part of the reason for their deportation to Babylon (Jeremiah 34:16–21). Debts were to be canceled during the sabbatical year (Deuteronomy 15:1–3), and the Law should be publicly read during the Feast of Tabernacles (Deuteronomy 31:10–12).

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.

Seven Sabbaths of years, or seven cycles of sabbatical years, were times of celebration. On the Day of Atonement, a trumpet was blown to mark the beginning of the Year of Jubilee. The English word “jubilee” is derived from the Hebrew word used here, yovel (yO-VEL), which means ram or ram’s horn. The Israelites used the ram’s horn as a trumpet, sounded at the beginning of the year. It is from the same root as the name Jubal, the first person ever to play the harp and the flute (Genesis 4:21).

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

The Year of Jubilee was a proclamation of freedom throughout the land of Israel. As in a sabbatical year, slaves were released. “Liberty” (Heb. deror, deh-ROAR) designates an edict of release and refers to the freedom granted to those bound by servitude. The Hebrew word carries the idea of flowing freedom of movement. This idea of freedom for the captive remains a key issue with God, as Jesus proclaims in His first public sermon that He has came to set the captives free (Luke 4:18).

Jubilee also granted a redemption of property. God, who owns the whole earth, granted the land to Israel as an everlasting possession. Each tribe, clan, and family’s land was not secured by individual military prowess, but rather divided by sacred lot. The rest of Leviticus 25 (vv. 13–55) details how land, houses, debts, and slaves should be dealt with in light of the Year of Jubilee. For example, the jubilee requires any purchaser of land to return it to the original owner, so the purchase price must be proportional to the number of years to the next jubilee (vv. 15–16).

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

Scholars debate whether the forty-ninth year, which is a sabbatical year (v. 8), and the fiftieth year, which is a jubilee year (v. 11), are the same. If they were two different years, it means that the people had to leave the land unplowed and unharvested for two consecutive years. However, the Hebrews, along with several other cultures of the region at the time, counted inclusively, so that it is likely the forth-ninth year was the Year of Jubilee. As in the sabbatical year, sowing and reaping were not allowed during the jubilee. But, again like the sabbatical year, what grows by itself from the previous harvest constitutes food. The people are not to work diligently in a harvest to make sure all the crop was brought in, but they could bring in enough to satisfy themselves for the year.

The whole Year of Jubilee was to be seen as holy (Heb. qodesh, ko-DESH) for the Israelites, meaning it was set apart for God. This was a year to remember how God provided for their physical needs (land and harvest), as well as for their economic needs (freedom from slavery and return of property). The sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee were a program of agricultural economy and social justice meant to reduce social inequalities and promote a community of mutual support.
Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher
Theme: Remembering with Joy
Song: “Blessed” by Fred Hammond
Devotional Reading: Psalm 50:1–15

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY
Keeping the Sabbath Yields Good Crops
(Leviticus 26:3–6)

TUESDAY
Lands and Houses Shared with All
(Acts 4:32–37)

WEDNESDAY
Bear Each Other’s Burdens
(Galatians 6:1–5)

THURSDAY
I Will Maintain Covenant with You
(Leviticus 26:9–13)

FRIDAY
Fairness in Buying and Selling Property
(Leviticus 25:13–17)

SATURDAY
Helping One Another Face Difficulties
(Leviticus 25:35–38)

SUNDAY
Sabbatical Year and Year of Jubilee
(Leviticus 25:1–12)