

Freedom!

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I wonder whether you've ever been in a situation, I'm pretty sure you have, that you're longing for something that you're going through to come to an end. Because then there will be relief and freedom for you.
- So maybe it may be as simple as being stuck in your dentist's chair. And praying for that drilling and grinding to come to an end.
- Or maybe you're in year 12 this year and you can't wait for your final exams to be all over, to be done with. No reaction?
- Or maybe, some of you do know, of friends who might be going through chemotherapy. And you really want them to finish that cycle and for all the side effects to subside.
- But then when you hear your dentist or your teacher or your doctor saying, hang in there, it's nearly over.
- [1 : 0 3] Now, even in the case of the dentist, he or she is the one that's causing the pain in the first place. Then it gives you hope, doesn't it? You know that it will come to an end.
- It gives you strength to carry on because you can see that there will be a return to this happy place. A reset to your life. Well, in Leviticus today, we find that God has given them some laws so that the people have a chance for this reset.
- They are based, not surprisingly, on who God is and what his character is like and what he has done for them. And therefore, how it shapes the way they live under his rule.
- And again, we'll hear that these laws are holy, which is why we as Christians can also apply them. Especially for us today when we go through difficult times.
- Now, essentially, this chapter has two key or main observances. And they both relate to the land. And you can see that in my outline.
- [2 : 1 4] The first set of laws are about the year of the Sabbath. Year of the Sabbath. And that relates to the use of the land. How you use the land.
- The second is regarding the year of the Jubilee. And that concerns the ownership of the land. So one's the use of the land. The other is the ownership of the land. So first, with the year of the Sabbath, as the name suggests, it has to do with the seventh year.
- And so reading from verse 1, And so just like the weekly Sabbath, God gives rest to the land.
- But one in seven years, not days. And that's because, you know, once you've sown some seed into the land, the land is going to keep working, isn't it?
- Even on a Sunday. But if you give it rest for a year, then you can stop planting for a whole season. And then the land will have rest.
- [3 : 5 4] Now, as I said earlier, the law of the Sabbath year is only for the land. So animals and humans can still work. Just not the land. So if you want to milk your cows or herd your cattle, that's fine.
- But no sowing, no pruning or harvesting. Instead, they can take what they need from the land to eat. And animals, too, can graze and eat what's in the land.

Now, a few weeks ago, I noted with the Sabbath, the weekly Sabbath, that actually this was really costly, isn't it? Because for them, when you don't work, you don't produce, you don't earn.

And so it's really an expression of faith in God to keep feeding them, even when they stop work. And so this must have weighed on their minds, because then in verse 18, just forward a bit, we'll come back to the earlier verses in a while, God actually addresses this very question.

He says, follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. You may ask, what will we eat in the seventh year?

[5 : 05] We do not plant or harvest your crops, our crops. I will send you such a blessing, the Lord says, in the sixth year, that the land will yield enough for three years. While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop, and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

And so God is saying, you can actually trust me to provide, so that the crop in the sixth year will be such a bumper crop, that it will last you until the end of the eighth. But here's the condition, verse 18.

Follow my decrees, obey my laws, keep all my laws, not just the ones in chapter 25. Now I don't think that what God is trying to do is catch them out, as though if they just break that one tiny law, you know, God's going to stop, aha, I'm not going to bless you anymore, no more food for three years.

Instead, what he's doing is trying to motivate them to have faith in him, to say, have the right attitude and heart before me through these six years, and you will witness how abundantly I will bless you from the seventh to the ninth.

And again, much of what we see here is applicable to what we've looked at with the festivals. So the seventh year, as I said, is holy, consecrated to the Lord, just as the weekly Sabbath was.

[6 : 24] The picture of the rest for the land is about resting in the Lord as well, and remembering, isn't it, that God is their creator. But there are now additional principles that are brought out when the Sabbath is applied to the land.

And in particular, when we look at the year of the Jubilee, we'll see a few extra principles that God wants to bring out. Now, one more thing before we move on. In Exodus chapter 21 and then Deuteronomy chapter 15, we actually find that there are other laws that apply on this seventh or seventh year.

So in Exodus 21, it also says that Hebrew servants are to be freed every seven years. And in Deuteronomy 15, all your monetary debts are cancelled every seven years as well.

But they are not mentioned here in Leviticus because the focus here is specifically on the land. God is trying to convey to them something about the land, which is tied to the Sabbath and the Jubilee year, that He wants them to learn and therefore put into practice.

So with that said, let's move to the year of Jubilee. So we backtrack down to back to verse 8 again. And so here are the laws. Count off seven seventh years.

[7 : 40] Seven times seven years, so that the seven seventh years amount to a period of 49 years. Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the day of atonement, sound the trumpet throughout your land.

Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you. Each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.

The fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you. Do not sow, reap what grows of itself or harvest the untethered vines. For it's a Jubilee and is to be holy for you. Eat only what is taken directly from the fields.

In this year of Jubilee, everyone is to return to their own property. So again, we see here similarities with the Festival of the Weeks.

There it was seven times seven days plus one. So the day fifty is also a seventh in the Festival of the Weeks. But here it's year fifty.

[8 : 41] That is the year of the Jubilee. That is the holy Sabbath year. And again, the symbol is of a fresh start, of a reset, a picture of a new creation almost.

But again, like the seventh year, there's no sowing or reaping. But they're allowed to eat what's taken directly from the fields. So I think the idea here is that they can forage, but they can't harvest.

So take the lemon tree in our garden as an example. It's currently heavy laden with lemons. Don't think so? It is? Yes.

Now, if it was a Jubilee year, then I'm only allowed to pluck what I need. Right? I'm having some fish, you know. Take a lemon, one lemon, squeeze it.

That's all I need, that's all I take. To reap or to harvest is to take them all off and to store and sell them. That's what they're not allowed to do on the Jubilee.

[9 : 45] Take what you need. Eat what you need. And if you think about it, if God had promised to supply them enough food in the sixth year to last them three years in the normal Sabbath cycle, then for the Jubilee, God really needs to supply them enough for four years, isn't it?

From the harvest in year 48, that needs to be enough to last them all the way to year 52, isn't it? Because they only start planting in year 51.

So this is a bigger ask, isn't it? But God is saying that he will provide. Now added to the use of the land in this, the rules about the Jubilee, are rules related to land ownership.

So not land use, but land ownership. And in this year, what God says is that all property, meaning all land, has to be returned to the original owners.

So this is based on the land that God had allotted each tribe. So remember when they first got into the land, and here's a map of it, God allocated the land. Don't worry about, you know, you can't read the thing, just go with the colors.

[10 : 56] God had allocated different pieces of land to the 12 tribes, or 11 if you don't count the Levites. And then within each tribe, there's also an allocation by clan.

And the reason for doing this, for God saying this, is that there are situations during the time that they are now in the land that Israelites find themselves separated.

Now how is this the case? We see that in verse 25. It's in the situation where an Israelite is forced to sell their property. Why? Because they have become poor.

In fact, later on in verse 39, there's even a worse scenario where the Israelites have to sell their own selves because they have become poor. Alright? Not just the land, but even themselves.

They enslaved themselves. And what happens then is, in the year of the Jubilee, the land has to be returned, and also the people are to return to the land of their original clan, which meant that Hebrew slaves too had to be freed in order for them to be able to do it.

[12 : 07] So all these laws, really from about verse 24 onwards, are then focused on protecting the vulnerable in their country. And the beauty of these laws is that because no one who buys land owns it for perpetuity, that's right, because if you buy something, you only hold it at most until year 50, and then you have to return it.

What this does is sets a cap on the price of the land. A little bit of economics here for you, but it does, doesn't it? Just think about all you people worrying about how you're going to afford to buy property in Melbourne because it just keeps going.

There's a natural cap there, because year 50, everything goes back for nothing, so it places a cap on the price, doesn't it? And you see that in verse 14. If you sell land to any of your own people or buy land from them, do not take advantage of each other.

You are to buy from your own people on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And they are to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. When the years are many, you are to increase the price.

But the closer you get to the Jubilee, when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what is really being sold to you is the number of crops. Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God.

[13 : 28] I am the Lord your God. For those of you who are doing finance or whatever, work in finance, this is really a present value annuity calculation, isn't it?

Of the income stream. It's a capitalized value of the lease. Alright? Finance 101. And because the land is to be returned eventually, that is, year 50, it will always be returned, God then also provides for the land to be redeemed early.

That is, you can do an early buyback of the land. A person or family member has a right to buy back the land that he has sold under duress. So, whilst 14 to 17 verses 14 to 17 deal with the initial sale, when we get to verses 23 and 24, it deals with the reverse transaction, the buyback.

And so we read, Now, Now, why is there all this emphasis on ownership of the land and use of the land?

Well, because, in those days, agricultural land is a family or a clan's primary source of income. Right? The land allows them to grow crops, which then allows them to feed themselves and their livestock.

[14 : 57] And that's how they, you know, become rich or gather wealth. God provides for them primarily through the land.

The land is a vehicle for God's blessing. And so that's why, later on, there is a distinction made to houses that are sold in a walled city. Right?

There it says, If you sell a house in a walled city, you have one year to redeem, and after that, it's not redeemable. Why? Because a house in a walled city is not income-generated.

Right? Just as your home is not income-generated. But the rest of the chapter provides for the redemption of land. And also, redemption of slaves, those who have sold themselves in desperation.

Because selling the land wasn't enough, they sold themselves. They, too, can be redeemed. So what we have here is a system that is not only fair, but has a lot of focus on generosity and grace as well, because it reflects who God is.

[16 : 04] That God cares for his people. And in particular, those who are poor. Now, incidentally, those of you who are into politics, I just want to say, this is not a communist system, is it?

Because not everyone gets the same. It's also not a welfare system. Right? Because there are no free handouts. But rather, it's a system which allows those who have fallen on hard times not to get a hand out, not to get a hand out, but a leg up.

That is, gets them back on their feet so that they can then work again and start to gain wealth or earn money. It's also not a fully capitalist system, I must add, because there is generosity and grace in it.

And that's why we see that there's a great focus on the poor. A large chunk of the chapter, from verse 23 onwards, is focused on the vulnerable. And so four times, first in verse 23, but then if you look again, verse 35, 39, and 47, there are references to the fellow Israelite who becomes poor.

God has very specific commands for Israel to take care of them. Look after those who are poor among you, God is saying. So what is the general principle then for all of these laws?

[17 : 28] Well, I think the overarching principle is right there, which we heard in verse 17. It says, Do not take advantage of each other. That is, treat each other fairly, and particularly if you're more powerful than another, and you're in a transaction with them, you do not take advantage of them because of your power.

As for the poor and vulnerable, God gives even more specific instructions in verse 43, 46, and 53. He says, Do not rule over your fellow Israelites, those who are poor, ruthlessly.

That is, don't use your power, and they're lacking power, to rule them harshly. And the reasons underlying these principles are also given in the chapter.

And there are three of them, and all related. The first was back in verse 23 again. The reason why you do these things is because the land, although given to Israel, still belongs to God.

So the verse says, The land must not be sold permanently because the land is mine, and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. Yes, God has given you the land, given your tribe or clan the land, but ultimately the land still belongs to me, God says.

[18 : 52] Thus, I have a right to require you to return it to the tribe I gave it to in the first place. Whether you own land given to me by you directly, or you've bought it from someone, you are to hold it lightly as though foreigners and strangers residing in my land.

Now, as a response, however, as a counsel to that, God then also promises to provide for them abundantly. That is, if they observe the Sabbath and Jubilee years, God says, Because this is my land, I will give, I will bless you abundantly.

This is mine to give, and I will do it if you observe my laws. Now, secondly, God then says also to practice the principle of redemption and release, because that's a picture of what God has done for them, for them in Egypt.

That is, He has already redeemed them and released them from slavery, taking them out of Egypt. They only live in Canaan because of what God has done for them. This land that they have is what they have, only because they are now free, and God has given them that freedom, from Egypt.

And so, verse 38, He says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. And so, thirdly, the third reason, even though God now has now freed them from slavery, God also says that Israel belongs to Him as His servants, or literally the word there is as His slaves.

[20 : 24] And so, verse 42 and 55, God says, The Israelites are my servants, or slaves, whom I brought out of Egypt. And so, as fellow slaves of God, you're all slaves.

Whether you're rich or poor in the land now, you're all fellow slaves of God. So, therefore, don't lord it over each other. Even if some of you might end up being slaves to another, let not those who rule rule over the other harshly.

So, these are the three reasons, then, that underline this overarching principle of not taking advantage of one another. Now, interestingly, if you look at the rest of the Bible, or if you look at the history books, there is actually no evidence found to indicate that Israel practiced the Jubilee.

Right? So, we have chapter 25 here, and then the rest of the Old Testament, no reference that this was ever practiced. Now, in the book of Ruth, there was a picture of redemption with Boaz.

Yeah? In Jeremiah 34, there was actually an account of the release of slaves for the seventh year. Except, it was actually accounted only for it to be reneged on.

[21 : 38] That is, there was some incident where they decided they maybe want to release the slaves, and then when they did it, they changed their minds and they took it back. So, really, there is no evidence here that Israel practiced these laws in chapter 25.

And if you think about it, that is because it is really hard, isn't it? Just think, I don't know how many of you own land, but if you own land, that is probably the most valuable thing to you, right?

There is some survey recently that said about 50 to 80% of our wealth is in our principal property. You know, the richer you are, the less, but, you know, a large proportion of our land, of our wealth is owned in our home and our land, isn't it?

So, think about it, that next year is the year of Jubilee, and you're going to return all this for nothing to the original owner. Not easy, is it?

It's not easy to comply with the law. And, it's very tempting, isn't it? If you're the more powerful and rich person, you know, this is the poor guy that had to sell you the land, you know, it's very easy to just not do it.

[22 : 46] He has no power. Maybe he's some slave, I don't know where he's gone, somewhere, I can't find him, sorry. No, I'm going to keep the land, isn't it? Unless your heart is pure and you want to obey the Lord, there's really nothing stopping you, is there, from making, from giving back the land to the poor.

And, so I think once the people forgot that all this land and wealth was God's in the first place, not theirs, and that the only reason that they have it is because God had freed them from slavery, then it was very hard, wasn't it, for them to show the same grace and compassion that God has shown them.

Now, you know, this is all description of Israel, but I think a lot of these principles apply today as well, because our God has not changed.

And, furthermore, I think as Christians, we have a greater reason to obey as well. Not the specifics about the land, but the principles, isn't it? Because for us, God has not released us from physical slavery, bad as it is, but he has released us from spiritual bondage, which is far worse.

And so when Jesus came, which is what Vanessa read for us in that second reading, he declared that in him the year of jubilee has actually come. So he declared in Luke 4 that he's the fulfillment of Isaiah 61, which is what he read, where it is written, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

[24 : 19] He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then after he read, he said, today the scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, that is, fulfilled in him.

And this year of the Lord's favor is really a reference to the seventh year of jubilee, I think. And the poor that he's talking about has echoes, doesn't it, to chapter 25 of Leviticus.

Now, of course, Jesus isn't talking about redeeming the land, but he's talking about releasing sinners from spiritual slavery. And so, if today you're sitting here and you feel like you're one of those captives, right, you're in a situation where you're really suffering financially, physically, emotionally, relationally, there's a lot of hard stuff going on in your life and you're almost hanging up hoping that you might have some jubilee year where you just, there's a reset and you can get back to where you were, then let me encourage you firstly to lift your eyes to Jesus because he has already set us free through his coming.

He has proclaimed the year of the Lord's favour, the jubilee. You see, just like the Israelites could look back to Canaan and see God freeing them from slavery, we too can look back to the cross, to what Jesus has done for us, to what he's proclaimed, the year of jubilee, to find that we too have been released.

And freed from sin. What Jesus has done on the cross is not free us from physical masters, but free us from the master of sin, the penalty of sin, and our slavery to obey sin's demands.

[26 : 14] And so as long as we put our faith in Jesus and turn away from our selfish living, we have now entered the promised land spiritually that is God's kingdom. We are adopted as children of God, sons of God, co-heirs with Jesus Christ and sharing in his rich inheritance.

Now, and unlike the jubilee year, because you know the jubilee year is great. Year 50 comes, we wait at 49 years, year 50 comes, and 52 weeks later, it's over.

But unlike the year of jubilee, when we become a Christian, our blessings of the jubilee continue forever for the rest of our lives. And these blessings are way better than the physical blessings that Israel enjoy.

Because we have the power of the Spirit, the blessings of the Spirit, access to God through Jesus Christ. And none of this we have to actually pay for ourselves and redeem.

Because Jesus is our Redeemer. He paid for it with his own life on the cross. And so friends, even though life may be difficult now, what's more important is to realize, firstly, our true freedom from sin and death.

[27 : 30] And you know, if you're here today and you're not yet a believer in Jesus and you haven't sorted this out, then let me urge you to do it. To have the debt of our sins cancelled. To have your relationship with God restored.

Now is the time to come to find that place of rest and restoration. By turn away from your old way of living and turning to Jesus by faith.

But then, when we've done that, and we as Christians, we know that even as we've believed in Jesus, there are still times in our life, isn't it, where it's possible to struggle, to have suffering in our life.

Well, if you think about it, the Israelites had that similar situation as well, isn't it? They may have been freed from slavery, but when they got into the land, there were still some of them that became poor.

And probably not to their own fault as well. So likewise, we may be Christians and yet still face challenges in life, whether it's hardship or health or precious in life.

[28 : 33] But just as the Israelites could look forward to the year of Jubilee when they will be released, so too we can look forward to a final Jubilee, which is the new creation.

Because that's when Jesus will come back and we will have our final restoration, a new creation. And once and for all, everything will be reset and we will enjoy that forever.

But for now, what we need to do is draw strength and take comfort so that we hang in there and not lose hope. Because we know that we are nearly there.

The end is near. Just hang on. All of us, when we believe in Jesus, will experience the rest that God has already achieved through Him in the cross.

But in the meantime, for those of us who are feeling like, you know, life is not too bad. It's not the best. But yeah, I'm pretty blessed.

[29 : 36] Well, the instruction in Labricus chapter 25 tonight is that if that is you, then look out for your fellow Christians. Don't take advantage of one another.

Rather, share and treat each other generously and graciously look at each other and realize that we're all fellow servants of God. That you know, everything that we own, none of it is ours anyway.

We don't deserve any of that. It's not like, oh, we were smarter or we worked harder and therefore we needed, we got this blessing that we actually deserve. No, all of it came from God.

It is His treasures, His possessions. And so we know that then let's show the same grace and compassion that the Lord Jesus showed us and extend it to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

And let's keep doing it. And I know many of you are doing it. So keep doing it until the final jubilee occurs. Let's pray. Father, thank you that the Lord has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, accomplishing it in His death.

[30 : 48] Thank you that through Him we are released from sin and death. Strengthen us, comfort us in the knowledge of this when we go through trials and burden. And please help us to show compassion, generosity and grace to others.

Help us not to take advantage of each other but instead to put up the interests of others ahead of ourselves. And Father, forgive us.

Forgive us when we do these things out of selfishness. In the name of Jesus, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.