



FEED MY SHEEP

PUBLISHED BY JAMES W. BRUGGEMAN
STONE KINGDOM MINISTRIES
P. O. BOX 6388
ASHEVILLE, NC 28816 U.S.A.

Issue #31

June 2001

The Unknown Sabbath Laws, Part 1

Ancient Israel's songwriter-monarch, David, was inspired to utter one of the most profound truths of all time when he penned the first line of Psalm 24.

Psalm 24:1 The earth is YHWH's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.

It is profound because of the implications of its all-encompassing claim. It is an assertion of the absolute sovereignty of God. In this simple statement, the God of the Bible claims ownership of the globe. By what right does He claim this? By the right of creation!

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

To everyone except those of a criminal and communistic mindset, it is axiomatic that what one creates, one owns. And what one owns, one has the right (and responsibility) to control. God owns every *thing* and every *body* in every age and epoch. He owns the land. He owns the seas. He owns all that will ever be produced from both. He owns you and He owns me. By right of creation, He can do with us as He pleases.

Evidently, it pleased Him to "allow" the fall in the Garden of Eden. Because of it, mankind has been cursed with mortality and all that goes with it: pain and suffering, disease and decay, and all that is "evil." Philosophers and thinking men of all ages have pondered this dilemma: how can a Supreme Being, who is "good" by definition, allow or cause evil in the lives of His creation? Most are content to chalk it up as one of life's unfathomable mysteries.

Others, however, have found a magnificent answer which preserves God's absolute sovereignty and satisfies the deepest yearnings of the spiritual seeker to reconcile God's goodness with His justice.¹ *One of the bases of this magnificent answer is found in—of all places—the sabbath laws, albeit the unknown sabbath laws.*

Ask the average church-goer about the sabbath laws and he is likely to respond in some manner about going to church on Sundays (or Saturday, according to some). Ask the average minister about the sabbath, and he is likely to wax eloquent about the joy of Sunday services. Of course, it is a fine habit to assemble together on a weekly basis. But it would be rare indeed to find a minister who could discourse knowledgeably about the two sabbaths beyond the seventh day sabbath. These are the seventh *year* sabbath and the *jubilee* sabbath. They are virtually unknown in Christendom. Yet it is from these—primarily the jubilee—that flow the principles which underlie some of the most common doctrines with which our average church-goer would claim familiarity: the doctrines of grace, redemption and forgiveness.

Our purpose then, in these next several issues of FMS, is to explore and expound these two sabbath laws. Not only will this expand our understanding of the very fundamental and so-called "New Testament" doctrines of grace, redemption and forgiveness; but we will also find that the two unknown sabbath laws have very practical applications in society. For if they were to be implemented nationally, it would constitute a very positive—and major—revolution in our economic and social structure. "Economic" refers to our

wallets and purses, and therefore the seven year and jubilee sabbath laws are ones which even the non-church-goer will find of great interest and supreme importance to his personal wealth and welfare.

The seven year sabbath

While most of our study will be devoted to the jubilee sabbath (just as God's Word itself deals more extensively with it), it seems only logical that we follow the progression from the seventh day to the seventh year sabbath. Here is a curious thought just in passing: since Christian churches, sects, denominations, etc. uniformly agree on the necessity to obey the seventh day sabbath (regardless of their differences on which day is the sabbath), why do they ignore the other two-thirds of the sabbath laws?

Of the 55 verses in the 25th chapter of the book of Leviticus, only the first seven are concerned with the seventh year sabbath, the remainder being devoted to the jubilee. The actual commands of the Lord begin in verse 3:

Leviticus 25: 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 YHWH: 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.

These laws were to govern agricultural practices. Upon entry into Canaanland, Israel had an agrarian economy. The vast majority of the people were involved in the direct production of crops and raising cattle. Similarly, in the United States a century ago, nearly 97 percent of the people lived in rural areas and were involved in agriculture. Today the numbers are reversed, with only about 2 percent involved in farming. Given this status quo, does that mean God's laws are obsolete or cannot be applied in a non-farm-based economy? We think not! It may involve more study and more seeking clarity from the Lord concerning

exactly how to implement them, but we have no right to abrogate God's laws.

Just these few verses listed above are revolutionary in scope vis à vis modern America. Even though only 2 percent of the people live on farms today, that is meaningless when we consider the obvious fact that 100 percent of the people need to eat. Imagine if next year 100 percent of the croplands, orchards and vineyards were not worked! Dozens of questions immediately enter the mind of the reader, chief among them: then what shall we eat?! It is not widely known outside agricultural circles, but America's once abundant storage of surplus grain has dwindled to roughly a 30-day supply. This shocking fact justifies all the more the question: then what shall we eat? But even setting that question aside, implementation of the above law would mean even more "bad" news, wouldn't it? For example, what about all the displaced workers? Doesn't God know that idling the land will have a "trickle down" effect in the whole economy?

If there is no wheat, rye, oats, etc., then bakeries are out of business. Thousands will be visiting the unemployment office, just from that industry alone! That then causes layoffs by the manufacturers of machinery and other suppliers to the bakery industry ...*ad infinitum*... throughout the entire economy and fabric of our society. Is there anyone who doubts that obedience to this one sabbath law will have a revolutionary impact?! Fortunately, it only *seems* bad at first glance. A fuller understanding of these laws would demonstrate the incomparable superiority of God's way over man's way in the realm of economics.

We noted earlier that the essence of the seventh day sabbath was its requirement for man to *rest his body* from its normal labors. This rest allows the body to rejuvenate itself to a great extent and hence it prevents premature failure of bodily systems and early death from disease. Similarly, the seventh year sabbath requires that the land itself be permitted to rest from its labors. The purpose of this rest is the same: to allow *the body of the earth to rest* and rejuvenate itself. Later, we will see the very same pattern applied on the societal scale. The jubilee sabbath allows *the body of society to rest* and rejuvenate itself economically. It's a clean slate for society collectively and all its members individually. Thus, echoing a common pattern in the Bible, we find the triadic pattern in the sabbath laws also: the seventh day, the seventh year and the jubilee.

Let us now examine the seven year sabbath more closely. God decreed that the land should receive a rest period every seventh year. During that time, farmers are not to work the land, neither in planting or reaping, nor in pruning vines or fruit trees. Some have suggested that the seven year sabbath means that everyone gets a one year vacation every seventh year. While that's an attractive thought, we do not find it supported by the Scriptures. The law concerns a one year vacation for the *land*, not for man.

Furthermore, these are laws applicable to the farm economy not to other industries and occupations. Indeed, even while our treasured farmers have a respite from sowing, tilling and reaping; the law does not say that the farmers are to sit around sipping lemonade for a year. While the land enjoys its rest, it would allow time for the husbandmen to fix fences, repair machinery, build more barns or other outbuildings, and perform myriad other necessary chores.

It would not be a year of *direct* agricultural profits, to be sure. But God is not trying to be rough on farmers. On the contrary, farmers and all the rest of us would be blessed for obedience to this law. But it takes faith. The long-run benefits to all the people and the profits for the farmers would far outweigh the lack of profits for one year. We will explain how later. Exodus 23 also addresses provisions of the land sabbath:

Exodus 23: 10 And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:

11 But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard.

The land sabbath law is to be applied universally across the nation during the same year. There is no provision made for staggering the land sabbaths so that one farm or one county or one state rests while the land in another is worked. Every acre in the nation rests during the same twelve month period. (The reason this must be so will be addressed presently.) During the sixth year, as seeds are dropped on the ground from the harvesting, these will sprout up in the seventh year and produce fruit or grain. It "grows of itself." Likewise, an unpruned tree or vine will still produce *some* fruit in the seventh year. But the farmer is instructed to leave it alone. It was to be available for

the poor to help themselves during the seventh year.

Actually, the poor and others were permitted to glean the remnants of fields and vineyards *every* year after the reapers had taken the first harvest. Statutes concerning this practice are found in Leviticus 19:9, 10 and Deuteronomy 24:19-22. A case history of gleaning is given in the poignant story of Ruth. (See Ruth 2.) However, in the seventh year, there would be no reapers at all. All that grew of itself across the land was to be made available to the poor, widows, fatherless and strangers without restraint.

What shall we eat then?

When Israel was wandering 40 years in the wilderness of Sinai, God told them to store up extra manna on the sixth day because they were not to work gathering food on the seventh day. He promised to provide a double portion on that sixth day. In a similar manner, God said if Israel would obey His sabbath laws for the land, He would provide such a bountiful harvest in the sixth year that it would be enough for the seventh year and the store would last until the harvest of the eighth year.

Obviously, when the seventh year was finished, they would have had to plant in the spring of the eighth year and then wait three to six months before they could harvest and have new food again. They would have to exist nearly a year-and-a-half on the sixth-year harvest. But God knew all about that, so therefore He promised that the land would produce a double portion the sixth year. How much of a test of faith was this for the Israelites? Not much, really; because in the wilderness, they had no choice. They had come out of Egypt into the desert and were totally dependent on YHWH for *all* their daily food and water. In reality, they had no choice but to believe God when He said He would provide a double portion of food on the sixth day. It should have been quite easy for them to rest their bodies from the labor of food gathering on the sabbath day for two reasons: first, there was nothing to gather! — no manna fell on the sabbath. Secondly, their eyes could see that He had already provided a double portion on the sixth day. So, for 40 years, while it did not really require much faith, the Israelites nonetheless witnessed God's miraculous provision.

Later, when they came into Canaanland and began farming, they found it was indeed a land "flowing

with milk and honey,” i.e., a very productive and fertile land (at that time). When the seventh year rolled around, they did have a choice. This was not like the wilderness where no manna fell on the sabbath. In Canaanland, they could have gone right ahead and done their normal planting, and the land would probably have brought forth somewhat in the seventh year. But just as in the wilderness, it would really not require much faith at all to believe God would provide for the seventh year. God put the onus on Himself. The sixth day and the sixth year comes before the seventh, and therefore it is up to God to “lay His cards on the table” first. In other words, if He provided a bumper crop in the sixth year, it really would not take much faith to not plant in the seventh year, seeing the extra year’s worth of food right before one’s eyes. The Israelites most likely observed this seven year sabbath all the days of Joshua. After that, well,...

In our opinion, it would only take disobedience one time to bring a curse instead of a blessing. And this brings us back to the reason why the entire nation must implement the land sabbath in the same year for maximum effectiveness and blessing.

Blessings of obeying the land sabbath

Today in America, we thank God there is a growing organic farming movement. These folks do their best to produce the most nutritious food possible. They do not apply artificial (chemical) fertilizers to the land, nor do they apply chemical pesticides to the land or crops. Unfortunately, the vast majority of corporate and family farmers do both. They also use hybrid seeds bought from near-monopoly seed companies. Thus, most of America’s farmers are not only dependent upon God for good weather, but they slap Him in the face (albeit ignorantly) by ignoring His laws for the land. And many of them must get loans to buy the seeds, the fertilizer and the pesticides.

The hybrid seed companies point to much greater harvests in terms of bushels per acre using their hybrids. A true statement, but the disadvantages are enormous. First, as noted, the farmer cannot get seed “for free” from the current crop. Hybrids do not reproduce well, if at all. Secondly, abundant evidence exists to show there is a drastic drop in the nutritional value of crops produced “artificially,” i.e., with hybrid seed, chemical fertilizer and pesticides.

The amazing and awe-inspiring truth is that if

farmers were to implement the land sabbath, there would be no need for artificial fertilizers and pesticides. Allowing the land to lie fallow on the seventh year serves exactly the purpose God told us it would: it rests (and rejuvenates) the land. The reason farmers have turned to chemical fertilizers for the past number of decades is because the soil has been depleted of essential nutrients. Why? Because preceding generations of farmers did not let the land lie fallow on the sabbath year. Had they done so, the soil would have been recharged and full of nutrients to provide another six years of abundant and nutritious harvests.

Allowing the land to rest also breaks the insect-pest cycle. When in the seventh year the land is devoid of crops for the pests to prey upon, their numbers are cut drastically and they would not be a significant problem. Furthermore, healthy crops are much less susceptible to devouring pests. It should be obvious now why the land sabbath must be done on a national basis. Bugs do not recognize fences and map boundaries. If one farmer rests his land and his neighbor does not; it will do nothing to eliminate the pest cycle.

Consequently, with the implementation of the land sabbath law, farmers would no longer need to purchase hybrid seeds or chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The harvests would be abundant as well as incredibly nutritious, and—we would wager—more tasty, too! So while farmers would give up one year’s profits in seven, the blessing of the other six would far outweigh the loss. If a given farmer were truly in dire financial straits (very unlikely when God’s economic system is fully implemented), he could always obtain other employment during that seventh year. There is yet another very important aspect of this unknown sabbath law, which we shall address in the next FMS.

ENDNOTE

1. This student-teacher has set forth his own understanding of this discovery in a progressive train of studies which fill four albums of audiotapes: collectively entitled *God’s Plan For Man*. See syllabus by that name on this website.

Feed My Sheep is a part of the teaching ministry of James W. Bruggeman and is sent out freely upon request. The tithes and gifts of those who are fed by it make it possible for us to continue in ministry. Gifts may be sent to P.O. Box 6388, Asheville, NC 28816.