



FEED MY SHEEP

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

Issue #33

August 2001

The Jubilee Laws, Part 1

FOR THE SAKE OF CONTINUITY as we introduce this month's topic, let us recall the passage which has been the focal point of our studies for the previous two issues, Leviticus 25:3-7. All Christians are fully aware of the seventh *day* sabbath, regardless of which actual day of the week they believe is that sabbath. But very few Christians are familiar with two other sabbaths commanded by God to be observed: the seventh *year* sabbath and the 49th/50th year jubilee sabbath.

The two previous issues were titled *The Unknown Sabbath Laws*. This is a continuation of that study, but since the jubilee sabbath is such a major topic with far-reaching—yea, I daresay—cosmic ramifications, it is only fitting to have a separate title. With the seventh verse of Leviticus 25, God had concluded the instructions for the seventh year land sabbath and so He continues right on in verse 8 to set forth an even higher level of sabbath law. It is a multiple of the seven year sabbath.

Incidentally, notice that a “higher level” is characterized by a multiple, in this case, a multiple of years. We discern this as an example of a general principle of prophetic interpretation, the application of which will be noted many times in ensuing studies.

KJV Leviticus 25:8 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.

Does God stutter? Not hardly! He repeats the calculation and instruction three times in that verse to in-

sure that we clearly understand that a jubilee period is 49 years, not 50. Then why did we ourselves use the term “49th/50th” in the opening paragraph? We shall explain shortly. Before we continue quoting and begin expounding the laws of jubilee, we ought to remember that it would be difficult to overstate the importance of these laws. These were not just ceremonial or ritual ordinances, now abolished in Christ. These were not merely for the Israelites in the Old Testament times. These sabbaths are every whit as valid and incumbent upon Christians as is the seventh day sabbath.

Furthermore, these laws have astounding prophetic significance which cannot be understood properly without understanding the literal, physical level first. But even the implementation of the literal level of these laws will have deep and profound impact upon every level of modern society. These laws are not merely to be confined to the interior of church buildings. Jubilee laws concern the economy and the basic structure of society. The present world economic system is upside down. The jubilee laws will set it aright.

By advocating the implementation of God's laws for the economy, we are advocating nothing less than the most overwhelming and awesome (yet peaceful) revolution the world has ever seen. It will be the foundation that sets the stage for the kind of Utopian world man has always dreamed of. The Bible calls it “the kingdom of God” or “the kingdom of heaven.” As every Christian who has ever prayed the Lord's prayer should have realized long ago, “the kingdom of heaven” is not *in* heaven; it is to be implemented on the earth (Matthew 6:10).

Grace is an Old Testament doctrine

Going beyond the literal application of the laws of jubilee, we discover that out of the jubilee flow the principles which underlie some of the most common and fundamental doctrines of our Christian faith; namely, the doctrines of grace, redemption and forgiveness. These three doctrines themselves have much greater ramifications prophetically than most believers have ever realized. These, then, are the very broad highlights of where our study of the laws of jubilee will take us.

As with the second-level sabbath law, the primary text of the third-level (jubilee) sabbath is found in Leviticus, chapter 25. But there is much more detail concerning it, about *seven* times as many verses. Now returning to address the nomenclature issue, why did we refer to the jubilee as the 49th/50th year? Because both years are involved. Notice that after 49 years have elapsed, God stipulates that just after the halfway point in the year is crossed...

9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile [modern spelling: *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.

Gladness for mourning

Every 49 years, the feast of jubilee was to fall on and replace the day of atonement. The seventh month (our September/October) of the religious and agricultural calendar was actually the first month of the civil year. This is similar to the manner in which today in the United States, the federal government's fiscal year begins on October 1st, not January 1st.

In ancient Israel, the first day of the seventh month was "New Year's Day," known as the feast of trumpets. On the 10th day was the day of atonement, which commemorated the sad occasion of the Israelites' failure to go in and possess the land of Canaan shortly after leaving Egypt. It was a lack of faith brought about by the frightening report of ten of the twelve men sent in to spy out the land. Joshua and Caleb were the only advocates of going in and conquering the land immediately. But this national failure was all in the overall purpose of the Father, of course.

Therefore, what should have been a day of great rejoicing and *jubilation* (derived from the same root as "jubilee"), with Israel celebrating in the faith that God

had given them the Promised Land, was instead turned into a day of mourning. God institutionalized it into the annual day of atonement. It was marked by fasting, refraining from work, and special sacrifices and bloody rituals. More importantly, it was the one and only time each year that the high priest went beyond the veil into the Holy of Holies. Nonetheless, God declared that on every 49th year, there was an exception and the Israelites were to declare a jubilee—and it was to last an entire year, not merely one day!

10 And ye shall hallow [set aside, make holy, keep separate] 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.

What a loaded verse! It is a précis of the entire law of jubilee: 1.) Set aside the 50th year. 2.) Proclaim liberty to everyone. 3.) Celebrate the occasion. 4.) Everyone in debt is free to repossess his original family land allotment. 5.) Everyone separated from his family by servitude is free to return to his family.

The Liberty Bell prophesies

Many readers may have recognized that the underlined portion of v. 10 above is that which our nation's Founding Fathers caused to be inscribed on the Liberty Bell. Over the course of the centuries, large bells came to serve the same purpose that "trumpets" (a word which describes several types of horns) used to serve in very ancient days: bells tolled and pealed as means of warning and alarm, to mark great causes for joy and celebration, or to mark any special occasion, solemn or otherwise. Hence, in early America, by placing this inscription on the "national bell," it is evident that the vision of the founders was for a land based on biblical principles of liberty.

Unfortunately, even though the inscription was taken from the very heart of the laws of jubilee, those laws were never implemented in America. Perhaps then it was a prophetic sign in 1832 which confirmed that our nation was already drastically falling away from her Christian origins, during which year the Liberty Bell suffered a large crack, rendering it unusable—that is, it could no longer proclaim liberty to the 56-year-old nation.

Jubilee periods are 49 years

At the risk of being repetitious, we wish to emphasize and clarify this matter of 49- versus 50-year cycles. Verse 10 states that the 50th year is set apart for a special purpose. The first day of the seventh month is the beginning of the new civil year. In Hebrew, it is called *Rosh HaShanah*, literally, the “head of the year.” Ten days into this same seventh month, the trumpet is blown which signals the jubilee. Some people get confused about jubilee periods, thinking they are 50-year periods. Not so. Remember, it is ten days into the *seventh* month of the 49th year, based on the *religious* calendar, when the jubilee is proclaimed.

On the *civil* calendar, this day occurs on the 10th day of the *first* month of the 50th year. Moreover, the 50th year of the religious calendar actually becomes the first year of the next seven-year cycle of land sabbaths. Thus, when counting by jubilee cycles, we count by 49-year periods rather than by 50-year periods. This becomes critically important in deeper studies involving the prophetic significance of time cycles.

God instructs us to set aside the 50th year. Even though the 49th year is one of the recurring seventh-year land sabbaths; nonetheless, the 50th year is also to be set aside in the same manner; i.e., no sowing, pruning, reaping, etc. Uh-oh! What about the food situation now? Now there will be two-and-a-half years with no new food. Surely there will be massive famines, will there not? Not if we believe God, as we shall see in due course.

The jubilee is pure grace

Verse 10 instructs us that liberty is to be proclaimed throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof. That sounds good, but what exactly does that mean? Additionally, the jubilee proclamation states that every man returns to his possession and every man to his family. This will be explained in more detail below, but essentially it meant that if a Hebrew bondservant (or slave) was indebted to someone, *no matter what he had done to get into that debt or no matter how much in debt he was, he was to be set free. All debts were cancelled completely.*

This was in contradistinction to the seventh year release which was merely a one-year suspension of payments on debt. (More on that later as well.) But come the jubilee, there is no hint of any doubt of any exceptions: no manner of debt goes beyond the jubi-

lee! The jubilee is at its core an act of forgiveness and grace decreed by the Creator. And as we will ultimately see in the prophetic fulfillment of these laws, He Himself sets the example.

If v. 10 is a précis of the jubilee laws, then the next 18 verses are the details. In the space remaining in this issue, let us begin to explore them.

Leviticus 25:11 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 jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

Understanding the seventh year sabbath provisions from the two previous issues of FMS, we recognize that the 49th year is a year of land rest. And verses 11 & 12 here are clear enough: the 50th year is another year of rest for the land. Therefore, there are two consecutive years of idleness for the land at this juncture. Again, our mind wanders to wonder about food and where it will come from, but let us again defer that question until we arrive at the appropriate passage. Meanwhile, what is this next section all about?

Leviticus 25:13 In the year of this jubile ye shall return every man unto his possession.

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

15 According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, *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* YHWH your God.

To understand this passage, we need to understand the background of what happened when the Israelites finally did take possession of the Promised Land. Under General Joshua the Israelites conquered the land incrementally and drove out the Canaanite inhabitants...well, sort of! Actually, they did not thor-

oughly cleanse the land of Canaanites as God had commanded and this failure was to cause problems for them for ever after. But that's another story.

The point we must understand here is that under Joshua, every family was allotted a portion of land. Every family received its "40 acres," you might say. Obviously, some plots of land were better suited for successful agriculture than others and some men no doubt possessed more innate farming talent than others. These and other factors, such as natural disasters, would result in some men falling into poverty and force them to have to "sell" their land. It is this situation which the above verses are addressing.

Under the laws of jubilee, the buyer and seller would check the calendar to determine where they were in the jubilee cycle of 49 years. This would tell them how many years (i.e., annual harvests) were left before the jubilee year. This would be the gauge by which the value of the harvests off the land would be determined. It was *not a sale of the land itself*, (God owns all the land; we are stewards.) but more the equivalent of a modern lease of land—this for the purpose of obtaining the produce of the land for the remaining years until jubilee. The more years of harvests remaining, the higher the value. In this way, everything is fair. These statutes prevented "price gouging." They admonish both buyer and seller to deal at a fair price, and especially for the buyer not to take advantage of someone in hardship.

How to "Love thy neighbor"

To illustrate how it was designed to work, let's say that John Smith, of the tribe of Ephraim, is farming his family's farm. It's the same farm his daddy and his grand-daddy also farmed. But then one year, his farm gets hit with a severe flood and it wipes out all his crops. During the past few years he had been struggling just to get by and now this is the final straw. He will have no way to feed his family. So he puts the farm up "for lease." Another farmer, Elmer Jones, from another county which was not effected by the flood, negotiates with John Smith.

Following the principles in verses 15 & 16 above, they both know that they are now in the 29th year of the jubilee cycle. That means there are 18 yearly harvest likely to come from the land. (49 minus 28 years gone in this cycle = 21 harvests; less three sabbatical years on the 35th, 42nd, and 49th years = 18

harvests left.) However, this 29th year crop is a literal wash-out, so that leaves 17 harvests that the land is worth to Elmer Jones.

Being a farmer himself, Elmer also knows the value of an average harvest just like John Smith knows. And being a fellow Christian, Elmer wants to follow the spirit of the law and help his neighbor in his plight, and so he offers a fair price to John Smith for the 17 harvests. If Elmer Jones is wealthy enough, perhaps it is a lump sum settlement, which John Smith can then take and use to relocate his family into town. He would then probably have to hire out himself as a laborer (i.e., employee) for another man. He is then a "hired servant" in biblical terminology.¹

Or perhaps the negotiations included an arrangement whereby John Smith and his family could continue to live in their home on the farm and work the land for Elmer Jones. This makes him a "bondservant" to Mr. Jones. His pay would be a share of the harvest. Years ago in America, this "sharecropper" arrangement was somewhat more common than it is today. In any event, mindful of verses 14-17 above, Mr. Jones sleeps well at night. He has a clean conscience because he did not take advantage of a neighbor in distress. He helped him. He treated him equitably and honestly. God smiles down from above on Mr. Jones. As for John Smith, God knows it is difficult for him and his family for now, but Mr. Smith and his family will be restored to their lost possessions in the year of jubilee...if not before, for the law also makes provision for regaining possession before the jubilee.

(To be continued.)

ENDNOTE

1. It is interesting to note that about 100 years ago in the United States, somewhere between 90-95 percent of the men in this country were self-employed. Now the situation is virtually reversed. Most men are "hired servants," employees of other men.

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.