

Sunday May 1, 2022  
Lesson 9: A Sabbath Jubilee  
Scripture: Leviticus 25: 1-13

**Context:**

As we continue into the Easter season, we start a new section of our spring curriculum. We have gone through the gospel of Mark and examined how God calls us to make a mark with our faith and in following Jesus. We now learn how to take the steps as disciples of Jesus and to learn of the spiritual disciplines to help us draw closer to God and respond in our daily lives. We continue with a lesson from the Old Testament as we learn of the year of Jubilee.

The lesson comes from the book of Leviticus, a book known for containing codes and rules to govern the Israelites in their founding. The book consists of further instructions given by God to Moses having to do with ritual requirements and holiness.<sup>1</sup> These instructions can be broken down by subject matter and how they had specific codes to address certain situations.

For the focus on Jubilee, we look at its placement as part of the Holiness Code. The Holiness Code was known because of the repeated use of words having to do with holiness and overlaps with the ritual calendar.<sup>2</sup> Jubilee helps tie the understanding of land and sabbath together.

Jubilee functioned in holiness as a way to demarcate time and to also establish the people of Israel as separate from others. The Holiness Code sought to explain how Israel functioned in conjunction with how God functioned. A helpful image might be to think in terms of circles.

For Jubilee, at the center of the circle is the sabbath. Sabbath was tied to the understanding of how after God created the world, there was a day of rest. The same goes for the Israelites. As a result, the land, which belonged to Yahweh, also needed its sabbaths.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there was the weekly sabbath at the center, with a circle around it, pointing to other holy days. And then beyond those appointed holy days, there was ordinary time.

Yet because of the primacy of sabbath, this led to the eventual understanding of Jubilee. Jubilee was a year in the timetable where the fiftieth year resulted in a penultimate Sabbath, where the people were called to rest after laboring for as long as they did. It was a time to celebrate and rejoice. This was a time to enjoy the land and to enjoy life. Jubilee was a time to forgive debts and to celebrate abundance, which would have been stored up beforehand. Jubilee was also a time for people to return home to their native land and give thanks for what was in front of them. This was a year to praise God and give thanks for the abundance of life.

---

<sup>1</sup> Coogan, Michael D., ed., *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 144.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

### **Application**

The concept of Jubilee is one which sounds absolutely beautiful. Imagine a year where everyone could rest, feed off the earth, and focus on play and leisure. In our fast-paced society and world, imagine after hearing the initial shock of not being programmed 24/7, how we could breathe and finally experience true life satisfaction. Who knows what transformations would take place within us?

Yet another component to Jubilee is a specific focus on taking care of the world around us, allowing the ground to rest and recuperate as well. Jubilee reminds us of how creation is not just part of our economy; it first and foremost belongs to God. God gives us the land to cultivate and draw from for our resources and yet God also expects us to respect it and see it as a gift. And there are seasons in God's economy where we should allow for it to bloom and flourish without human intervention.

While Jubilee focuses on the land and giving it the space to rest, I also think the concept of Jubilee can direct us on how we live our lives. There are times when we think we might be able to add things to our plate whether it's a project, a committee, or a cause. The things we add might be wonderful things where our gifts and abilities would be true assets.

As I read of Jubilee though, I am reminded of how humanity is also a part of creation. What if we were to take a year or maybe even a few years where we focused on ourselves and our own rest and cultivation? Regardless of marital status, the number of dependents living in our house, or even the perception of time we think we possess, I think a healthy embrace of Jubilee could shape all of us for the better. When we are rested, have found what truly makes us come alive, and focus on the relationships which give us life, we can have a better sense of how God is at work in our lives and what truly brings meaning.

In some places, I have heard scholars question if Jubilee was a real occurrence. And I have heard others be critical of the concept in general. While I cannot speak to the historicity of it or not, I can speak to the cynical nature of those who dismiss Jubilee as "unproductive" or a "idealistic concept which could never take place today."

Perhaps the reason we dismiss Jubilee is because we are afraid of what would happen if we truly learned about what is important to us and discover there are some things which truly do not matter. We might even have to learn how to be content with what we have been given in life. Or we might discover certain parts of our vocation or certain relationships which do absolutely nothing for our development or peace. And then we are left to figure out what comes next.

This does not mean we quit what we do or just take a year off. This doesn't mean we just take lots of vacations and shirk our work responsibilities. What it does mean to practice Jubilee I think is to find ways to take care of ourselves, those we love, and the land we live on. We discover the power of saying "no" and see the beauty of living life simply and responding to the gifts God has already put in front of us.

Jubilee is about seeing how God has already given us so much and how even God rests in what has been made. God wants us to not run up our anxiety or stretch ourselves to a breaking point. God wants us to celebrate Jubilee, finding the way of life which allows us to slow down, to find meaning, and delight in all the wonderful ways God has blessed and nourished us.

How can you practice Jubilee in your life? Why do you think Jubilee chafes with American productivity and the 24/7 pace by which we live? What are some ways you can practice Jubilee in the coming year? What are some practices to help you apply Jubilee? What does it say about humanity when scripture emphasize how even God rests and yet we feel we cannot?

Rev. Dr. E. Hunter Pugh  
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge  
PO Box 71  
Brantley, AL 36009