

THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL
SESSION 10 | THE FEAST OF JUBILEE

THE BIBLICAL INSTRUCTION FOR THE FEAST

LEVITICUS 25:8-13 | THE INSTRUCTION FOR THE 50TH YEAR

- Verse 8 is as explicit as can be to show a period of 49 years prior to the beginning of Jubilee.
- In verse 9, the instruction is given to **sound the trumpet of jubile**. This is the first time the English word **jubile** is seen in the Bible. The more modern spelling of *jubilee* is not used at all. The word **jubile** (and its modern spelling) are directly imported to English from the Hebrew word *yobel*, which is not used in this verse, but is used in verse 10. Note that **jubile** was historically pronounced with three syllables, having come to English via French and Latin. The Hebrew word translated **jubile** is תְּרוּעָה [teruah], which a shout or war-cry. The year of Jubilee was to begin **on the tenth day of the seventh month** (v. 9), which is the day of atonement.
- The year would be a time to **proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof** (v. 10). These words would later become famous for their use on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia. The **liberty** would be to **return every man unto his possession**, that is, returning land ownership back to the family to whom it was originally allotted. Further, the people were to **return every man unto his family**, thus freeing anyone who had become enslaved in the ensuing 49 years. Note that Jubilee, unlike Shemitah, applied to **all the inhabitants** of the land. For the Shemitah, slaves were not released.
- Verses 12-13 give instruction for agriculture. These instructions are the same as that for a sabbatical year, meaning that in the seventh cycle there were effectively two back-to-back sabbatical years. Recall that the Lord had promised abundant harvests in the sixth year, and the land would naturally produce an abundant crop in the seventh that could be eaten, just not bought and sold.
- Verses 14-55 give economic and agricultural instructions for the 49 years, living in light of the 50th. For example, Leviticus 25:15-16 give instruction to charge according to the number of years remaining in a cycle.

THE MODERN JEWISH PRACTICE

The feast of Jubilee is not currently practiced by Jews. Because it requires all the people of the nation to be dwelling in their originally allotted land, it would be impossible to initiate a modern Jubilee. There is some disagreement between rabbinical scholars, but for the most part there is agreement that Jubilee has not been observed since the time of exile of the ten northern tribes.

In days in which the Jubilee was practiced, the nation was to always keep in mind the *count* unto Jubilee, much like they did for Pentecost (the counting of the Omer). For example, a person might say, “This year is eight years, which are one Shemittah and one year to the Yovel”¹

According to some Jewish sources, the number fifty is chosen because that was the average “career span” of an ancient Jew. They spent 12-15 years of youth, then a 50-year career, then 12-15 years of retirement, which was to be spent in spiritual growth.²

¹ *Ten Jubilee Facts to Know*. https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4386805/jewish/10-Jubilee-Facts-to-Know.htm. Accessed August 24, 2022.

² Ibid.

Among modern Jews, the Jubilee is neither counted nor observed. It cannot be observed until all twelve tribes have returned to the land and are living in their God-ordained locations (and even then would be tremendously difficult to implement). For the most part, Jews consider the future Jubilee cycle to begin again when Messiah comes. As one rabbi says, “We eagerly await the day when G-d will bring our entire nation back to our homeland—including the ten “lost” tribes—and we will again resume observing the Jubilee year, as well as so many other mitzvot which we are incapable of performing until that awaited day.”³

MODERN CHRISTIAN ABUSE

In the Roman Catholic church, popes have announced (with no Biblical support) years of Jubilee for the church. The first was done in 1300 regularly since that time. The latest was 2015-2016, called by Pope Francis, and designated the “Holy Year of Mercy.” According to the National Catholic Reporter, “A jubilee year is a special year called by the church to receive blessing and pardon from God and remission of sins. The Catholic church has called jubilee years every 25 or 50 years since the year 1300 and has also called special jubilee years from time to time, known as extraordinary jubilee years.”⁴ This is yet-another of the endless stream of actions that have taken place by the Roman Catholic church as a result of the replacement theology that is integrated into every fiber of the church’s being.”

The Roman Catholic church creates spiritual blessings of forgiveness from this feast, then appropriates it to themselves. In their “cafeteria” approach to theology, they do not carry out any of the financial or agricultural aspects of the feast.

The evangelical church is often no different. For example, evangelical author Dave Jenkins says, “The Year of Jubilee foreshadows the finished and sufficient work of the Lord Jesus. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, He relieves sinners from their spiritual debts and slavery to sin. Today sinners can be freed from both to have both union and communion with God the Father and enjoy fellowship with the people of God.”⁵

This kind of application comes from a flawed “Christian centered” hermeneutic (method of Biblical interpretation) that views all Biblical events in the light of evangelical Christianity.

As with the other feasts, Christians have a terrible habit of reading themselves into each of the feasts of the Jews. It is far better to *keep Jubilee Jewish* rather than “baptize” Jubilee into the Christian faith.

POINTS TO PONDER

In effect, there was no permanent transfer of title for real estate, and this alone was a means of assuring capital for each generation of a family. A bad decision might hurt the family for up to 49 years, but it would not hurt the family for all of time.

A close study of the economic system of theocratic Israel would reveal that it was not socialist at all. Rather, it was based on a philosophy that saw capital, especially fixed capital, as the means of the creation of wealth for the families of the nation.

Finally, even modern Judaism recognizes that there is no possible means of using a Jubilee system in a free-market economy today. To do so would require government-theft of private property to change current ownership from the hands of those who currently own it to those to whom the governing authorities wish to own it.

³ Davidson, Baruch S. *When Is The Next Jubilee Year?* https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/513212/jewish/When-Is-the-Next-Jubilee-Year.htm. Accessed August 24, 2022.

⁴ McElwee, Joshua J. *Francis announces new global jubilee, the Holy Year of Mercy.* <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-announces-new-global-jubilee-holy-year-mercy>. Accessed August 24, 2022.

⁵ Jenkins, Dave. *What Christians Should Know about the Year of Jubilee.* <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/what-christians-should-know-about-the-year-of-jubilee.html>. Accessed August 24, 2022.