

I. The Jubilee in Biblical Perspective
“The Year of Jubilee”
Leviticus 25:8-17
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January 24, 2010 – Morning Sermon

Our text for this study is Leviticus 25. This is an interesting text. This is a passage on the jubilee to help guide us in our year of jubilee. I’m so glad to say that we can return to the Book of Daniel tonight in our study and you can take some time this afternoon to read through the first three chapters that we have covered as we set up our study of the conversion of a pagan king in chapter 4 but we will review Daniel 1 through 3 and set our minds and hearts to seek Christ in the Book of Daniel. Let’s look at our text for this study now. The Sabbath years are in Leviticus 25:1-7 but we will look at verse 8 and follow.

Leviticus 25:8-24, 39-41 says, **8** *“You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. **9** Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land. **10** And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan. **11** That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. **12** For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field. **13** “In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. **14** And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. **15** You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. **16** If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. **17** You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God. **18** Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely. **19** The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. **20** And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ **21** I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. **22** When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop; you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives. **23** “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. **24** And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land. **39** If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: **40** he shall be with you as a hired servant and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. **41** Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers.*

The grass withers and the flower fades. This is the Word of our God. It abides forever and by God’s grace may it be preached for you.

Perhaps you saw the banner on your way in this morning. It is something we have talked about and is now up. 50 years have been God's faithfulness to Briarwood and our theme this year is "The Year of Jubilee." We celebrate the jubilee this year. One may say, "Pastor what is the year of jubilee?" and that would be a fair question. It has not been highly preached on and taught. In fact, there are not a lot of passages in the Scripture that deal with it. It's most profoundly while not exhaustively and almost all the literature on the jubilee is right here in Leviticus 25 and then in chapter 26 it warns that if you don't celebrate the jubilee or the Sabbath years then the Lord says He will bring vengeance and judgment upon them which He did. Have you ever wondered why God took Israel into captivity in Babylon for 70 years? It is because that's how many Sabbath years they did not set aside to the Lord so the Lord warned them in Leviticus 26 – "If you don't honor Me in the land, I'll give the land rest from you by taking you out of it" and that's why He did it. But jubilee is something that has been designed by God's grace and mercy.

The Year of Jubilee was a design of God's grace and mercy to give His people rest and renewal, to display His justice and mercy as things are restored and put back in order, to bring all of His people where they ought to be and where they should be, and to give us one more prophetic Sabbath prophesy of a Messiah. What is one of those names the Scripture gives to our Savior? He is the Lord of the Sabbath, for Christ has come and in Him we have rest. He says, "Come unto Me all of you who are weary and heavy laden for I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). This is not just a physical rest but a rest for your souls for this Savior is our Redeemer and it is in Him that we rest in our salvation. It is in Him that we rely for our lives. Even when we work out, we are working out what this Lord of the Sabbath has worked in to us as we rest upon Him.

So this is one more instrument of that. In fact, the jubilee really is a Sabbath. There was a Sabbath of the seventh day. There was a Sabbath of the seventh year. You can see it outlined in Leviticus 25:1-7. Then there was the Sabbath of the Sabbath years. So there is the Sabbath day of every week where it says, "Six days you shall labor but on the seventh day (Sabbath) you shall set aside" (Exodus 23:12). Then there was the Sabbath of the years where every seventh year the people would give the land a rest, they would rest and be renewed and refreshed in the Lord. Then in Leviticus 25 He says there is a Sabbath year of the Sabbath year where after seven Sabbath years you will celebrate a Sabbath year which is the fiftieth year. You again will let the land rest. This is something God had designed out of grace and mercy for His people. This is something God has designed as to how we were to live as His Old Covenant people.

Now clearly, the weekly Sabbath in its ceremonial injunctions is fulfilled in Christ. We now have a Christian Sabbath that is not governed by ceremony but by celebration of a risen Savior which is the Lord's Day. The Sabbath year is no longer binding as a ceremonial obligation upon us although we do make use of the concept where we give people a sabbatical. But if this is our year of jubilee and while it's not binding upon us to follow this why would this be designed and how could this benefit us in the year 2010, the fiftieth year, after the kindness of God has established this congregation? How could it be helpful for us? I think the best way is to go back and see how the jubilee was to be celebrated. So we will go back and look at Leviticus 25.

As I have some great news in that I didn't want to short change you. When I was first studying this and preparing it I have to turn in my notes early in the week and I

found five things about God's design in the year of jubilee. Then I went back and studied some more and now I actually have eight things instead of five. These are eight dynamics in the year of jubilee that will help us in our life takeaways this year as a congregation. I've worked pretty hard at this and I don't think I have overly forced it but all eight elements of God's design in the year of jubilee begin with the letter 'r.'

The first 'r' in the year of jubilee from God's design, God's declaration and provision is resolve. It is that the celebration of the year of jubilee required resolve. You had to do it intentionally. The text makes that clear. Count out, the text says. When you have done seven Sabbath years, seven cycles of seven weeks of years, then the next year will be a year of jubilee. Be intentional. Count it out. Also be intentional as you invoke it. Declare it intentionally the tenth day of the seventh month which was Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement. So one was to be intentional and by the way that's not unusual is it? Even today, although we don't have ceremonial obligations we have the need for laboring six days and resting on seven to lift up praise to the Lord in the New Covenant Christian Sabbath of the Lord's Day. We have to be intentional, don't we? I have to get my work done. I have to be intentional to set aside a day. Now I can be unintentional and squeeze in an hour for Jesus on Sundays or I can be intentional and live the way God designed me to live in His image – 6 and 1 like He did in the creation. One has to be intentional about any Sabbath.

One had to be intentional about the Sabbath year. Can you imagine you have been going along six years and you have to intentionally not plant anything for that year? You have to intentionally trust the Lord that year. And there is intentionality on the Sabbath of all the Sabbaths and that is the year of jubilee. So one was to resolve and the resolve of God's people to intentionally be obedient and set aside the Sabbath of the Sabbath years, the year of jubilee, to celebrate unto the Lord.

The second 'r' is rejoice. The Sabbath year was one of rejoicing. You can even see it by the day that it begins – the Day of Atonement. It is a day of rejoicing that God will bring a Redeemer for His people. How does it start? It starts with the blowing of the ram's horn, the Shofar. In fact, that's even how you get the name jubilee. The word jubilee comes from the Hebrew word 'jobel' and 'jobel' was the sound that the horn made when you blew it. So celebrate the jubilee. It's a year of jubilee, celebrated by sounding the horn and you can see the celebration in the confession of the people. Leviticus 25:10 says, "...proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants." Does that sound familiar to anyone? That is the verse that was put on the Liberty Bell. I forget the exact date but the date that it was first rung announcing the declaration of Independence, this verse was placed on it. It is also found in Isaiah 61. We are to proclaim liberty. It is a celebration of deliverance and liberty in and through a covenant keeping faithful God that we can utterly rejoice in.

So there is resolve where it is to be intentional. We want to be intentional in the year of jubilee. We want to rejoice because it's a time of celebration.

The third 'r' is it is a word of refrain. He says, "I want you to refrain from planting in the land. Let the land lie fallow. This is My land and I have put you in the land but the land belongs to Me. Now I am commanding you to let the land lie fallow. Whatever is in the land, don't tend it. There will be produce that comes up and you may pick it and eat it but you cannot plant it, sow it and you are not to dress whatever is out there. You are not to prune it or work on it." Interestingly, remember this is the year of

jubilee so what was the previous year, the 49th year? It was the Sabbath year, and what were you supposed to do? You were to refrain from planting. So this would be the second year you refrain from planting. You would have to be pretty intentional because you could think doesn't it say somewhere in Scripture "God helps those who help themselves"? The answer is no. That is not in the Bible and it's from the French Revolution and it won't work. So He says we are to intentionally refrain from planting in the land on the year of jubilee.

The fourth 'r' word is reliance. Obviously I have to rely on the Lord. The Sabbath is always a test, not only of obedience and intentionality, but always of reliance because I know God made me to work 6 and rest 1, to gather with the family of God and give Him praise and be renewed in praise on that day, but it seems to me I could be a lot more productive if I did seven days work, instead of relying on the Lord and His Word. Just rely on the Lord. So it's always a test of reliance. If you think of one day and seven, think of one year and seven. They were to trust the Lord in reliance. If you think that's something think of the year of jubilee where it's worked out into two years and these people weren't stupid. They knew that they not only had to leave the ground fallow in the 49th year but they had to leave it fallow in the 50th year and think would God feed me but when they did start to plant the next year they couldn't plant and then pick something the next day. So that adds up to about three years. I wonder if God is able? Now we really find out do we think everything that has been done is by His strength or not when we are called by Him not to do but to trust Him? It becomes a test not only of obedience out of love but a test of trust and reliance upon the Lord Jehovah Jireh who will provide. I will provide from the produce that is out there that I will give you in that land.

The fifth 'r' is restoration. All the land that you had acquired in that 50 years and I'm absolutely sure there were some good land negotiators but at the end of 50 years it all had to go back to the family and the tribe it belonged to. You can see God's justice here, can't you? He said when you return it make appropriate recompense for the land and for the crops. The crops you have, the crops you'll lose. He says I want it all to be done right. Don't defraud one another. Deal honestly with each other but give the land back and you see how the Lord automatically restarts everybody at that 50 years. No land barrens, no oppressors and no tribes are going to end up with all the land. No tribes are going to be smarter than other tribes because it all goes back and that means every tribe has what God said they were going to have when they came into the land. One might think, "Harry is that fair?" Yes. Whose land is it? It's God's land and this is the way God would have it proportioned out.

I know this is a sideline but you would be amazed at how much Leviticus 25 used to affect our country. We not only wrote a verse on the Liberty Bell, this actually affected how we funded our government. Did you know up until the Civil War there was no property tax? Do you know why our forefathers didn't tax the property? It was because the government doesn't own it. The earth is the Lord's. When you tax something you claim to control it and own it. So why did we start the Civil War? It was to fund the war. They said it was just a temporary tax. Have you ever met a temporary tax? Previously it was all sales tax, fees and tariffs and it certainly wasn't property tax. By the way it wasn't income tax either. That started right after the Civil War for the same purpose and that was to alleviate the war debts as a temporary measure. It wasn't done because the Lord had not given the money to the government, the Lord has given

the money to the people and they would answer to Him for its use. Be that as it may, there was this act of restoration where the land would be returned. Justice was secured. Proportionality was established and a new 50 years would be set in place.

The sixth 'r' is release. You were to release all of the slaves. There was a mechanism where if you owed money to someone and you had not been able to make your payments, one of the ways you could pay your debt was to sell yourself into slavery. But He said don't consider your brother as a slave, consider them an indentured servant (a term we would use) and remember at the year of jubilee all of them are to be released. They and their families are now set free. The captive is set free just like I set you free from bondage in Egypt and brought you to the land you return the land and set free all the captives that they may return to their families and to their land.

The seventh 'r' is restitution. You pay all the debts. You pay what you owe. You don't defraud anyone. The laborer, the crops, the land – restitution is to be made appropriately on everything.

That leads me to the last 'r' which is redemption. You redeem the captive, you redeem the land, and you redeem the crops by paying the ransom. Redemption was built in to the whole concept of jubilee and it was not lost upon the people of God concerning this matter of redemption. The God who had redeemed them out of Egypt and brought them to the land now called upon them to understand the concept of redemption. It was no accident that God designed the year of jubilee to begin on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, the promise of a Redeemer for us.

These things I have just mentioned about the year of jubilee is not binding on us and they are all fulfilled in Christ who is our Jubilee and the Lord of the Sabbath. So how would all of this guide us? What will guide us through this is what will guide us through every Sabbath concept. It involves three words and they are celebration, contemplation and anticipation. The Lord's Day is a time of celebration, a time of contemplation and a time of anticipation. Celebration is God's sustaining grace for six days. We contemplate on the majesty of our Redeemer and our redemption and we anticipate on the next week to serve Him with a whole heart renewed and refreshed. This is what will guide us this year.

So let's first look at celebration. How will we celebrate? Here is where you can take the Biblical paradigm and map for us to think through how we can celebrate 50 years of God's grace and goodness to us. This is what we will do. We want to take the first third of this year and celebrate God's goodness to us that has allowed us to be a Great Commission church. Then we want to take another third of the year and celebrate God's goodness that has allowed us to be a great commandment church. By the way, have we been a perfect Great Commission church? Absolutely not. Have we been a perfect great commandment church? Absolutely not, but God has allowed that commitment to be at work within our heart and overflow into the life of this congregation so that we want to celebrate and focus. It's no accident that we'll be able to celebrate our mission's conference around this series of time of the Great Commission. We will celebrate that God has brought to us a discipleship ministry where we go and make disciples. We will celebrate that God has given us a heart for the world to go and make disciples of all the nations. God has given us a heart for evangelism and for teaching – teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. We want to celebrate God's call and goodness and grace to us as a congregation.

So secondly, we want to celebrate the great commandment to love the Lord our God with our heart, soul and mind, the love of one another and our neighbor that God is doing something in and through us. Then the last third of the year is a great commitment to where we would go if Jesus Christ has not yet returned. We want to have a great commitment in the fall of this year as to where we will go. This is our celebration. I want you to join with me this year and give praise to God who gave us a founding pastor who was faithful to the Gospel for forty years of those fifty years. He was a founding pastor, a discipling pastor, and a praying pastor. I would like for you to join me in giving praise to God for literally the hundreds of missionaries we have not only been able to support but send out from here and for the leaders in this church.

Do you know when most institutions and churches fail? It's not hard to figure out. All you have to do is read the book of Judges. It's right between 40 to 80 years. I think one of the things that God has graciously given us in elders, deacons, teachers and shepherds, leaders of our women's ministry is great leaders. They have been men and women who love the Lord. Whether it was formal leadership of ordained office or informal leadership of a small group, it is those leaders that we need to give God praise for because leaders don't come from the wisdom of the world. They come from the grace of God and above.

One of the first missionaries that came out of this membership went out to serve with Campus Crusade and his name was Bailey Marks and Dr. Bright, the president of Campus Crusade asked Bailey to put together the whole international missionary staff of Campus Crusade. What a great blessing that God allowed us to give away someone who would raise up and send missionaries around the world to proclaim the Gospel. We want to celebrate God's blessing with the gift of our pastor, founding pastor, our leaders, our missionaries and the churches we have been able to plant. We have been able to plant churches that have planted daughter churches and granddaughter churches and have planted entire presbyteries. We have been able by God's grace to help and join hands with churches and pastors who are revitalizing churches as the Lord would strengthen those churches back to spiritual vitality and health. We have been able by God's grace to celebrate partnerships. Think of the partnerships and the ministries of oversight of things like Campus Outreach, Young Business Leaders, and Christian Medical Ministry. Then there is the synergy of partnerships with Intervarsity, Campus Crusade, Jungle Aviation and radio service all in the past.. The last president of Jungle Aviation and Radio service was a member of this church.

God has been so gracious to us and it is of the Lord. I know at times like this you don't want to be proud or boast but while we need to take every effort to make sure we take no glory from the last 50 years and we boast not of ourselves, it is equally and maybe perhaps more wrong for us not to boast in the Lord. He has done great things and to God be the glory! We need to celebrate that, honor Him and thank Him for His faithfulness throughout all of these years for giving to us a growing heart for mercy and Gospel justice throughout the land. These are gifts of God's grace. If that is celebrated as a Great Commission, a great commandment, and a great commitment then that would lead us to the second thing.

The second takeaway is to have an intentional year of contemplation. We would contemplate on the great goodness of God to us as a people. I try to imagine this year of jubilee if I was an Israelite where I'm out there trying to feed my family and work and I

get to that Sabbath year of the 49th year and I honor it. Then I'm told I have to honor another one but not only does that call me to test my reliance upon the Lord but it would cause me to go back and see how the Lord has been faithful. Can I trust Him with this year? Can I trust Him with next year? Yes, I have been able to trust Him with my life and in fact He is my life. I have seen the faithfulness of God, the grace of God and the power of God. He has given me victory over my enemies. They were more numerous than His people, more powerful in the eyes of the world than His people but He gave them the land, took them out and kept them in the midst of it. So here is this glorious truth that I have seen the faithfulness of God and I know the God who has done that is doing that and will do that so that we this year might see through 50 years many dangers, toils and snares I have already come. It's grace that has brought us this far and grace that will take us home.

Thirdly, we not only want to spend the time this year in contemplation but in anticipation. I have to confess that this is striking at my heart that as much as I want to celebrate and contemplate, my energy is already thinking about 2011. I'm already thinking about the future. So where do I get anticipation out of this? The people were to look to the Lord and it was done on the Day of Atonement so where did Leviticus 25 end up? It ended up as a prophecy. In Isaiah 61 you find the year of jubilee quoted in light of its real fulfillment that the year of jubilee was a prophetic statement to point God's people to Christ who is our Jubilee. So here is this marvelous prophesy of a Messiah who would bring atonement as this is announced on the day of a atonement. This Messiah would set us free from sin, death, hell and the grave.

Isaiah 61:1, 2 says, *1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me ,because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; 2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.* This passage is fulfilled in Christ and that's not a preacher's hyperbole. It is Jesus on word.

Now I'd like go to the passage in Luke 4. Here Jesus is baptized and He begins His public ministry. He is first tempted by Satan in the wilderness after the baptism then He returns to His hometown to begin His ministry. He went through the Galilee. He taught in the synagogue and this is what happened at Nazareth. Luke 4:16-19 says, *16 And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. 17 And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, 18 (Isaiah 61) "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because he has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

"I am the Jubilee" is what He is saying. "I am the fulfillment of this. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me." Remember the baptism where He was announced? "This is My Son in whom I am well pleased and I have come to set you free." So Christ will live that righteous life, go to an atoning death on the cross and there He will cancel our debt. He will pay the debts we owed to God because of our sins and He will set us free. It is the Lord who is the fulfillment of the jubilee. They anticipated Him. He has come so we will announce the preeminence of Christ and we will proclaim this Gospel until jubilee

one more time. He is coming again to bring to consummation to all that He purchased with Himself as the ransom upon the cross and when He comes by God's grace may He find us faithful.

For God's glory Briarwood is committed to equipping Christians to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ that when He comes the same grace that has brought us thus far will take us to when the Lord of the jubilee comes for His people, and He might find us faithful. So I can't wait until 2011. Who is the young man we are going to send out for a 40 year pastorate to plant a church? Who are the missionaries, the leaders that God will allow us to develop and send into every sphere of society in His church and from His church? Where are the churches that we can plant? Where are the churches that we can partner with as God brings life back into them again? Where are those amazing ministries that are yet to be born on the hearts of His people as He lays burdens upon them to reach college campuses, to reach the business world, the medical world, the lawyer, the salesman, and the houses of legislation in power? Where are those ministries yet to come?

There is one thing I must say in closing. The jubilee is glorious and for me it is so exciting to study it and anticipate it. There is no record of Israel ever celebrating a year of jubilee. Why? It is because many times at the end of 40 years they had already gone to the high places, the false gods. God was faithful but they were not. Sometimes they had been led astray by ungodly kings. Sometimes they were in the midst of blessing when they still didn't acknowledge the year of jubilee because they were too busy celebrating themselves but by God's grace we have arrived at 50 years. It's of Him, it's from Him and it's for Him. God has been faithful so may God allow us the grace to honor and praise Him this year and to contemplate all of those things He has done – people who He has saved, churches that He's planted, missionaries that He has sent, families that He has put together, ministries that He has established. Then we want to anticipate that the best is yet to come for our God is great. Greater things yet will we see when it's of Him, from Him and for Him. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments we could spend together. I can't help when I close in prayer to know that there maybe some reading this that have not yet been set free. The bondage of sin in this world has captured you by its intimidation or its subtleties but I tell you there's a Savior who will set you free and will forgive you of all of your sins because He has redeemed you and paid the price. The Day of Atonement has come and the atoning death of Christ is declared victorious. He is risen! Put your trust in Him today and pray 'Father, I know I'm a sinner. I know Jesus was sent to save sinners like me. This day I am Yours and I praise You. You are mine!' Father, now may I ask also that you take us as a congregation through this year. You've done great things. To God be the glory and even now build within us what an equipping centered church will look like, winning sinners, training sinners in the preeminence of Christ, for the glory of God and our joy. I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.