



Leviticus - Chapter Twenty Five

VIII Leviticus 23:1-25:55 - Holy Times (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Twenty Five

Verses 1-22 are a sequel to Chapter 23, which primarily dealt with the Hebrew festal calendar. Added to that calendar are these two celebrations based on the Sabbath principle, i.e. one in seven. Israel is required to keep these holy times as a symbol that they are a holy people. The remainder of the chapter deals with the concept of redemption. If a person gets into difficulty or danger, then a relative, his 'kinsman-redeemer,' is to redeem him from his dire straits. The various methods of redemption are explained.

VIII.e Leviticus 25:1-7 - The Sabbatical Year

Every seventh year is a sabbatical year, and no agricultural activities should be engaged in. The personified land suggests that the land, even more than the Israelites, needs to rest. The Israelites may work the land for six years, but there is to be no organised farming in the seventh year. This practice is clearly a benefit to the soil, but it is also recognition that all produce belongs to God and that he bestows it freely on his people.

¹ The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: ² Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord.

Leviticus 25:1-2

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai. This is the first confirmation in Leviticus that the Israelites have remained at Mount Sinai to receive the law of God. They had arrived there as described in Exodus 19:1.



Mount Sinai

When you enter the land that I am giving you. The laws are given in faith; they are still in the wilderness, and not yet in the Promised Land. And as far as Moses and the people knew, they were only a matter of months from entering in.

The land shall observe a sabbath for the Lord. The idea of a Sabbath of days is familiar, where one day out of seven is specially consecrated to God. This describes a Sabbath of years for the land, where the land receives a rest one year out of seven. Obviously, this called Israel to a great deal of faith, they had to trust God that he would provide enough in the six years to see them through the seventh. During the Festival of Booths or Tabernacles on the Sabbath year, the law was to be read to all the people by the priests: *<<Then Moses wrote down this law, and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. Moses commanded them: 'Every seventh year, in the scheduled year of remission, during the festival of booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people – men, women, and children, as well as the aliens residing in your towns – so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe diligently all the words of this law, and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land that you are crossing over the Jordan to possess'>>* (Deuteronomy 31:9-13). Each Sabbath year was also to be a time for an extensive Scripture study for the whole nation.

³ For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; ⁴ but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. ⁵ You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. ⁶ You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath – you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound labourers who live with you; ⁷ for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

Leviticus 25:3-7

But in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of complete rest for the land, a sabbath for the Lord. This applied to both grain crops and fruit bearing plants; Israel was to do this as a radical demonstration that the land belonged to God, not to them.

You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. During the sabbatical year there must be no systematic harvesting of self-seeding crops, or such fruits as figs and grapes. Anything of this nature that the land produces without human aid is the property of all, and people are to obtain food wherever they can find it, just as the Israelites did in their wilderness wanderings.

You may eat what the land yields during its sabbath. It was also a powerful testimony of dependence on God; Israel was declaring their belief that God would meet their needs.

This commandment was good ecology! Giving the land a rest every seven years would help restore vital nutrients to the soil that normally would be depleted. Israel's failure to keep this command determined the length of their captivity; Leviticus 26:34 says that if Israel is not obedient, God will make sure the land gets its Sabbaths by exiling the nation to an enemy land; this was fulfilled in the Babylonian captivity of Israel: *<<He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years>>* (2 Chronicles 36:20-21). Today, many observant Jews find a way around the Sabbath year law; on the seventh year, they 'sell' their land to a Gentile, work it, and then 'buy' it back from the Gentile when the Sabbath year is over. The Gentile makes a little money, and the Jew can say, "It wasn't my land on the Sabbath year, so it was all right if I worked it."

VIII.f Leviticus 25:8-55 - The Year of Jubilee

The proclamation of the Year of Jubilee by the Lord is an act of grace. The rest of the chapter provides details of what the nation of Israel is to do every fiftieth year. It sets a marker for the value of land transactions because such sales return to the original owner or his surviving next of kin.

⁸ You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month – on the day of atonement – you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. ¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. ¹² For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

Leviticus 25:8-12

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years. The year of jubilee was somewhat like a Sabbath year, in the sense that crops were not planted, and the land was given a rest. Many take the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-3 to speak of a jubilee year: *<<The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion – to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory>>*. Since Jesus read this passage in a Nazareth synagogue at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:16-21), some have speculated that Jesus' ministry began in a year of jubilee, although it was mostly not observed among the Jews at that time.

The Hebrew word *yobel*, jubilee (v.10), is related to a term that means 'ram' or 'ram's horn.' The ram's horn or trumpet is to be sounded throughout Israel on the Day of Atonement to announce the beginning of the fiftieth year (v.9).

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. The USA has accepted this command and its founding fathers were aware of the principle of the year of jubilee and the

freedom associated with it; ‘proclaim liberty throughout all the land’ is inscribed on the Liberty Bell that hangs in front of Independence Hall in Philadelphia.

Jubilee is a year of release and liberty. In that year, people are to return to their land possession, i.e. their ancestral property.

Israelites who sold themselves to indenture are also to be released and sent home. This provided a periodic restoration of the means to earn a living for each family in an agrarian society. The jubilee did not equalise all possessions in Israel, however, since possessions such as cattle and money were not reallocated. The prohibitions of the jubilee are the same as for the sabbatical year. The land is to lie fallow for two years in a row: the forty-ninth or sabbatical year, and the fiftieth year of jubilee. This law prohibits the amassing of large estates, which would reduce many Israelites to tenant status on their ancestral land, as confirmed by: <<Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land!>> (Isaiah 5:8).

¹³ In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. ¹⁴ When you make a sale to your neighbour or buy from your neighbour, you shall not cheat one another. ¹⁵ When you buy from your neighbour, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop-years. ¹⁶ If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. ¹⁷ You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 25:13-17

Basic guidelines for business are given. In selling or purchasing property, the price must be calculated according to how many years have passed since the jubilee, since it is not the estate itself that is to be sold or purchased but the amount of crops that can be harvested before the next jubilee.

In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.

When Israel came into the Promised Land, the land was allotted according to tribes and families. These initial tracts of land would be the permanent possession of those families, and therefore land in Israel could never really be ‘sold’, it could only be leased, and the amount of the lease would be based on how many years there were left until the jubilee. Since all the Israelites eventually return to their inherited land, the act of selling agricultural land essentially means leasing it. This assured that no family would be permanently prevented from having land. Every

fifty years, every family would have the opportunity to start again, but see vv.29-31 for land that could be sold permanently.

The injunction **you shall not cheat one another**, stated twice for emphasis, is idiomatic for the economic oppression of the poor and needy; refer also to 19:33. There is to be no exploitation of fellow Israelites in land transactions. The theme of treating others fairly runs throughout Scripture: <<***Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate***>> (Proverbs 22:22), <<***For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors for ever and ever***>> (Jeremiah 7:5-7), <<***Thus says the Lord of hosts: Render true judgements, show kindness and mercy to one another; do not oppress the widow, the orphan, the alien, or the poor; and do not devise evil in your hearts against one another***>> (Zechariah 7:9-10), and: <<***For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you knows how to control your own body in holiness and honour, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrongs or exploits a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you***>> (1 Thessalonians 4:3-6).

¹⁸ You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. ¹⁹ The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. ²⁰ Should you ask, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ ²¹ I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. ²² When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating from the old crop; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old.

Leviticus 25:18-22

You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances. This is an exhortation to keep God’s law, which will bring rich blessings. These blessings include security in the land against external threats (vv.18-19). God also promises to supply enough food during years of agricultural activity to cover periods in which the land lies fallow, such as during the sabbatical year (vv.21-22).

Safety is promised for the people as they live in the Promised Land: <<***When you cross over the Jordan and live in the land that the Lord your God is allotting to you, and when he gives you rest from your enemies all around so that you live in safety, then you shall bring everything that I command you to***>>

the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name: your burnt-offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes and your donations, and all your choice votive gifts that you vow to the Lord>> (Deuteronomy 12:10-11), and again when the Messiah comes: <<In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: 'The Lord is our righteousness'>> (Jeremiah 33:16).

I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. Faith, trust and obedience is all that is needed to know that God will supply all that is needed in life: <<*But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well*>> (Matthew 6:33). God promises his blessing upon all his people: <<*From this day on I will bless you*>> (Haggai 2:19b).

²³ The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. ²⁴ Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

Leviticus 25:23-24

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity. So, the land could be leased, but never sold, and the lease would always be up in the year of jubilee. In addition, the lease could be bought out at any time by a kinsman-redeemer (v.25).

The land is the Lord's, so no one can sell his inherited land as though it were his permanent possession. The status of the Israelites is that of aliens and tenants with the Lord. Thus they are tenants, so to speak, in the Promised Land. This principle is later applied to the believer's existence in this world, as confirmed by: <<*Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; do not hold your peace at my tears. For I am your passing guest, an alien, like all my forebears*>> (Psalm 39:12), and: <<*Beloved, I urge you as aliens and exiles to abstain from the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul*>> (1 Peter 2:11).

Abraham recognised that he was only an alien in the land even though it had been promised to him by God: <<*I am a stranger and an alien residing among you; give me property among you for a burying-place, so that I may bury my dead out of my sight*>> (Genesis 23:4), as did the other patriarchs: <<*All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland*>> (Hebrews 11:13-14).

Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. This redemption of the land was accomplished through the kinsman-redeemer, Hebrew *goel*. He was a designated close relative who had the right and

responsibility to buy the poor out of their poverty and loss. The kinsman-redeemer is also a wonderful picture of Jesus, the kinsman-redeemer who purchased Christian believers from the 'slave market' of sin: <<*But now, irrespective of law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith*>> (Romans 3:21-25a), and: <<*For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body*>> (1 Corinthians 6:20).

The Book of Ruth describes a kinsman-redeemer transaction; when Naomi returned from Moab, poor and in debt, her nearest kinsman-redeemer was willing to buy back the land for her, but stopped short when he found he would also have to marry Ruth and raise up an heir for the property. When this nearest kinsman-redeemer balked, Boaz was the next closest kinsman-redeemer, and stepped right in out of love for Ruth (Ruth Chapter 3).

²⁵ If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next-of-kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. ²⁶ If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, ²⁷ the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned. ²⁸ But if there are not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of jubilee; in the jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned.

Leviticus 25:25-28

Then the next-of-kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. This is issued as a command and was not intended as an option for the person who was the kinsman-redeemer: <<*Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, 'Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours'*>> (Jeremiah 32:7).

In the jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned. If an Israelite is forced to sell his land temporarily, he and his family retain the right of redemption. The land may be redeemed in one of three ways:

1. A kinsman-redeemer buys back the land.
2. The seller himself is able to buy it back.
3. It is restored to the rightful owner at the jubilee.

²⁹ If anyone sells a dwelling-house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale; the right of redemption shall be for one year. ³⁰ If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, a house that is in a walled city shall pass in perpetuity to the purchaser, throughout the generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. ³¹ But houses in villages that have no walls around them shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. ³² As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites shall for ever have the right of redemption of the houses in the cities belonging to them. ³³ Such property as may be redeemed from the Levites – houses sold in a city belonging to them – shall be released in the jubilee; because the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel. ³⁴ But the open land around their cities may not be sold; for that is their possession for all time.

Leviticus 25:29-34

Dwelling-houses in walled cities are not regulated by rights of redemption as are houses in un-walled villages. The former are not released at the jubilee, and their redemption is for only one year and not in perpetuity. Why this distinction is made is uncertain, although it may be that houses in walled settlements are considered privately owned, rather than part of a tribal inheritance. One exception to the rule is that houses belonging to Levites in their cities carry full rights of redemption. The allocation of cities to the Levites is described in Numbers 35:1-8.

³⁵ If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. ³⁶ Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. ³⁷ You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. ³⁸ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

Leviticus 25:35-38

If any of your kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them. Israelites are to show mercy to one another because they are recipients of God's mercy. These commands specifically prohibit making money of the misfortune of a poor brother; instead of making profit out of his misery, the command is simple: you shall support them.

Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear your God; let them live with you. Jesus made a similar command in Luke 6:34, when he asked what credit is it to someone if they give to or help only those whom they know can help them back: <<*If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again*>>. The idea is to give without expecting something in return.

³⁹ If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves.
⁴⁰ They shall remain with you as hired or bound labourers. They shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. ⁴¹ Then they and their children with them shall be free from your authority; they shall go back to their own family and return to their ancestral property. ⁴² For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. ⁴³ You shall not rule over them with harshness, but shall fear your God. ⁴⁴ As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. ⁴⁵ You may also acquire them from among the aliens residing with you, and from their families that are with you, who have been born in your land; and they may be your property. ⁴⁶ You may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your fellow Israelites, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

Leviticus 25:39-46

If any who are dependent on you become so impoverished that they sell themselves to you, you shall not make them serve as slaves. A further predicament is envisaged, namely, that an Israelite, becoming impoverished, had to sell himself to a fellow Israelite. In this case the poor man must not be treated like an ordinary slave but as a hired worker or a bound labourer. His right to return to his house at the jubilee means that he has sold just his labour, and not his status as a free Israelite, to his fellow Israelite.

Paul takes this further when he recommends that Philemon takes his former slave Onesimus back as a Christian brother: <<*Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord*>> (Philemon 15-16).

You shall not rule over them with harshness is repeated for emphasis. Treating a fellow Israelite like a slave is prohibited by language echoing the Israelites' hard labour in Egypt, as confirmed by: <<*The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites*>> (Exodus 1:13).

As for the male and female slaves whom you may have, it is from the nations around you that you may acquire male and female slaves. Foreign slaves among the Jews did not have the same rights as Hebrew slaves sold into servitude because of debt; they could be held as slaves for life, although they had to be treated humanely: <<*Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it*>> (Exodus 20:8-11), and: <<*When a slave-owner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. But if the slave survives for a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property*>> (Exodus 21:20-21).

⁴⁷ If resident aliens among you prosper, and if any of your kin fall into difficulty with one of them and sell themselves to an alien, or to a branch of the alien's family, ⁴⁸ after they have sold themselves they shall have the right of redemption; one of their brothers may redeem them, ⁴⁹ or their uncle or their uncle's son may redeem them, or anyone of their family who is of their own flesh may redeem them; or if they prosper they may redeem themselves. ⁵⁰ They shall compute with the purchaser the total from the year when they sold themselves to the alien until the jubilee year; the price of the sale shall be applied to the number of years: the time they were with the owner shall be rated as the time of a hired labourer. ⁵¹ If many years remain, they shall pay for their redemption in proportion to the purchase price; ⁵² and if few years remain until the jubilee year, they shall compute thus: according to the years involved they shall make payment for their redemption. ⁵³ As a labourer hired by the year they shall be under the alien's authority, who shall not, however, rule with harshness over them in your sight. ⁵⁴ And if they have not been redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children with them shall go free in the jubilee year. ⁵⁵ For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are

my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Leviticus 25:47-55

A Hebrew in dire financial straits may indenture himself to a resident alien in the land. Yet the Israelite retains his right of redemption. He may be redeemed by a kinsman or he may redeem himself if he gains sufficient means (vv.48-49). In addition, his indenture ceases in the jubilee year. These verses demonstrate that the sojourner is required to keep the laws of Israel while residing in the land.

As a labourer hired by the year they shall be under the alien's authority, who shall not, however, rule with harshness over them in your sight. The master has certain rights over those he hires under contract but he is to treat them fairly with good reason: *<<Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven>>* (Colossians 4:1).

For to me the people of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt. God cared so much about the matters simply because first and foremost, each Israelite was to be the servant of the Lord. This applied to God's favourite king: *<<Now then bring it about; for the Lord has promised David: Through my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from all their enemies>>* (2 Samuel 3:18). The prophets accepted were his servants: *<<Surely the Lord God does nothing, without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets>>* (Amos 3:7), as were the priests: *<<On that day, says the Lord of hosts, I will take you, O Zerubbabel my servant, son of Shealtiel, says the Lord, and make you like a signet ring; for I have chosen you, says the Lord of hosts>>* (Haggai 2:23); and the apostles freely accepted this role: *<<Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God>>* (Romans 1:1), *<<James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ>>* (James 1:1a), *<<Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ>>* (2 Peter 1:1a), and: *<<Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James>>* (Jude 1:1a).