May 20
Lesson 12 (KJV)

Remembering with Joy

Devotional Reading: Psalm 50:1-15
Background Scripture: Leviticus 25

LEVITICUS 25:1-12

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying,

2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD.

3 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

4 But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.

5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.

6 And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee.

7 And for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.

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.

9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile 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.

10 And ye shall hallow 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.

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.

KEY VERSE

Ye shall hallow 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.—Leviticus 25:10
LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the nature of the rest the land was to receive during the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee.

2. Explain the spiritual principles that these laws were meant to instill.

3. Identify one way he or she can proclaim the “Year of Jubilee” that Jesus has ushered in and make a plan to do so.

LESSON OUTLINE

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   B. New Testament Jubilee
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   D. Thought to Remember

Introduction
   A. Living by Faith

When we think about living by faith, we generally consider that to be a religious concept, meaning that one who lives by faith is trusting in God. But the fact is that everyone lives by faith, even the person who is not religious in the least!

Why do we get on airplanes? Because we have faith that the pilot has the proper skills to get us to our destination safely. How do we know that the pound of hamburger we purchase at the store is indeed (1) a pound and (2) hamburger? Because we have faith that the grocer is dealing with us honestly. Why do we entrust a
package to a delivery person? Once again, we are taking a step of faith. Devout Christians, strident atheists, and everyone in between takes such steps of faith. This is faith based on evidence; it is not blind faith.

But imagine a world in which we could trust no one else because there was no evidence upon which to base that trust. How demoralizing that would be! Every action we took during any given day would be subject to incredible risk.

In truth, none of us lives totally on our own. To survive in society, we must have a certain level of faith in the competence of others. This sometimes involves risk. Many portions of the Law of Moses challenged the Israelites to exercise a measure of trust and risk. But the basis of the Israelites’ actions was rooted first and foremost in their trust in God.

B. Lesson Background

Often the various regulations found within the Law of Moses are placed in three categories: civil (those that helped maintain an orderly society), ceremonial (those dealing with how God’s covenant people were to express their worship to Him), and moral (those dealing with right living). Whereas the first two groups applied only to Old Testament Israel (though there may still be general principles of conduct to be drawn from them), the moral laws continue to serve as standards of right and wrong behavior.

Today’s passage from Leviticus 25 falls primarily within the ceremonial category, since it concerns certain religious observances that do not apply to Christians (see Colossians 2:14-17), specifically the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee. These topics also have civil ramifications as well, since obedience to them was intended to help build a just society.

But if the specific commandments of today’s text no longer apply, then why bother studying them? The answer is hinted at above: because they speak to principles of conduct that are important yet today.

I. Sabbath Year
(Leviticus 25:1-7)

A. Principle Stated (vv. 1, 2)

1. And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying.

There are dozens of references in the book of Leviticus that record the Lord speaking unto Moses. This is direct word-revelation: God communicating with humans (in distinction from general revelation that is affirmed in, for example, Psalm 19:1-4).

The Israelites gathered at mount Sinai in the third month after leaving Egypt (Exodus 19:1). The people encamp here for a little less than a year (Numbers 10:11, 12) in order to receive God’s law.

HOW TO SAY IT

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
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<tr>
<td>Canaan</td>
<td>Kay-nun.</td>
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<td>Deuteronomy</td>
<td>Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.</td>
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<td>Levites</td>
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2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the Lord.

The most important feature of the promised land that lies ahead is that it will be God’s gift. His covenant people, the children of Israel, will not be able to claim they have earned it (Deuteronomy 9:6). They will be stewards of God’s grant, not owners who are entitled.

At this point, the Israelites have already received the Ten Commandments, the fourth being that of keeping the Sabbath (see Exodus 20:8-11). The importance of this commandment is underlined by the fact that it is the longest of the 10. It is to be obeyed by every person in Israel, including non-Israelites who live among the covenant people. Even animals are to be given a rest.

In the verse before us we have reached the point of wait—there’s more! as the command regarding Sabbath is to be applied to the land as well.

**What Do You Think?**

As you personalize the Sabbath principle, how will you know when you’ve gotten the proper amount of rest?

**Talking Points for Your Discussion**

- Considering tell-tale signs of inadequate rest
- Considering tell-tale signs of too much rest

**B. Details Specified (vv. 3-5)**

3, 4 Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; but in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the Lord: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.

The sabbath of rest unto the land operates on a principle similar to that which undergirds the Sabbath Day: just as the people are to work for six days and rest on the seventh, the land is to be sown and its produce reaped for six years. . . but in the seventh year neither sowing nor reaping is to done. From a productivity standpoint, we know that it is good to let farmland lie fallow for a time or to rotate crops. But the focus of this legislation is spiritual: this period of rest unto the land is for the Lord.

The timetable to be observed with this law is similar to the laws concerning both debts and servants. In the Sabbath Year, debts are to be canceled (some suggest “suspended”) in the case of loans made to Israelites (Deuteronomy 15:1-6). The law also states that a Hebrew servant is to serve for six years, then in the seventh year he or she is to be set free (15:12).
A 2013 report by the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative indicates that not giving the agricultural land breaks from growing crops or forests has consequences. Erosion increases, soil quality declines, and the capacity of the land to yield crops goes down.

Farmers are discovering they can double the amount of crops a parcel of land yields by allowing it to lie fallow for a few years. Such a practice has the potential of doubling the amount of livestock the land can support. ELD researchers estimate that if some form of resting the land were practiced worldwide, the crop yield could potentially increase by 2.5 billion tons annually.

The ancient Israelites did not have access to ELD research. They had something better: God. They could either honor His desire in faith or trust their own instincts. We face the same choice in countless ways daily, don’t we?

—L. G. S.

5. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land.

The Sabbath law of rest applies, not only to what the people intentionally sow and harvest, but also to any edible substance that grows on its own. Thus the entire land is given the opportunity to rest, not just the part the people have farmed.

What Do You Think?

How will you deal with obstacles to build seasons of rest into your life?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding practical obstacles
Regarding cultural obstacles
Regarding psychological obstacles
Other

C. Results Promised (vv. 6, 7)

6, 7. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, and for thy cattle, and for the beast that are in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat.

Although no harvesting or reaping occurs during the sabbath of the land, enough food will be available during that entire year. (We noted in comments on Leviticus 2:14 in lesson 11 that meat often refers to food in general.) The people need not fear, for God promises that there will be adequate food for all, whether Israelite, non-Israelite, or animal.

One wonders how the land is to provide food when the people are not allowed to eat what normally is sown and reaped (Leviticus 25:4, above) or reap what grew apart from any cultivation (25:5, above). The answer may lie in distinguishing between harvesting and simply living off the land. The key concept of “harvesting” is gathering the crop for storage. During the sabbatical year people can collect food from the field for use at that time. The people are to live much like the poor among them, who are permitted during the seventh year to take whatever they wish from the land (Exodus 23:11).
Later in Leviticus 25, the Lord offers additional assurance in anticipation of the people’s concern for having enough to eat during the Sabbath Year. He says, “I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year [that is, the year before the Sabbath Year], and it shall bring forth fruit for three years” (Leviticus 25:21). The land will experience its rest in the seventh year, the people will sow new crops in the eighth year, and then the ninth year will be the next year during which crops are harvested (25:22).

Such laws as these are grounded in a key truth that bears repeating: the promised land is the Lord’s. His people must trust that He, as its ultimate caretaker, will ensure that it produces exactly what the people and the animals need. Of course, the stated blessings and provisions hinge on the people’s faithful obedience to the Lord as Leviticus 25:18, 19 make quite clear.

II. Year of Jubilee
(Leviticus 25:8-12)

A. Counting Sevens (v. 8)

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.

This is another one of those wait—there’s more! moments. In addition to the Sabbath Year that occurs every seventh year, God has another requirement. This one involves counting off seven cycles of sabbath years to determine the passage of forty and nine years. The reason why is given next.

B. Sounding Trumpets (v. 9)

9. Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubile 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.

Given the importance of the seventh day and year, it is not surprising that the seventh month (late September and early October) is also special. The first day of this month is commemorated as a day of rest and offerings (Leviticus 23:24, 25). The people cease working on the tenth day and celebrate the day of atonement (23:27-31). The details of its observance are outlined in Leviticus 16. This particular day is also described as “a sabbath of rest” (23:32). On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the people cease work at the start of the seven-day Feast of Tabernacles (23:34).

The tenth day also heralds the arrival of the jubile (modern spelling adds another e at the end). The Hebrew word being translated appears to be derived from a word translated “rams’ horns” in Joshua 6:4. The word translated trumpet here is different, although still referring to a ram’s horn.

Just who is to sound the trumpet is not stated. Since it is to be sounded throughout all your land, it may be the duty of the priests or Levites who will be assigned territory among the people of Israel (see Joshua 21).

C. Proclaiming Liberty (v. 10)

10a. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you.

Our word holiday derives from the phrase holy day, but in many cases we have kept the celebration part while not retaining the holiness aspect. The Israelites are not to miss the latter. The liberty to be proclaimed throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof every fiftieth year is certainly cause for celebration. But
the people must also be sure to *hallow* that year, meaning to set it aside as a holy year. Exactly what the terms *liberty* and *hallow* include are next explained.

Visual for Lesson 12. *Point to this visual as you ask, “Under what conditions does God expect us to apply the Jubilee principle today, if any? Why?”*

10b. And ye shall return every man unto his possession.

This is to be the result of the proclamation of liberty. The word *possession* refers to one’s ancestral property within the promised land. A scenario is described in *Leviticus 25:25-28* in which an Israelite sells property because of his impoverished state. When the Year of Jubilee arrives, the property reverts back to its original owner, who is allowed to *return* to it. *Leviticus 25:14, 15* establishes how this is fair to those who must give the land back.

10c. And ye shall return every man unto his family.

In some cases, an impoverished Israelite may sell himself into servitude to another Israelite, as *Leviticus 25:39-43* describes. That person is to be given freedom to *return* . . . *unto his family* in the Year of Jubilee. Every fiftieth year is, in effect, an opportunity to start over.

The Israelites are thus being encouraged to see their land and their fellow Israelites as God sees them. Land is not something to be acquired and hoarded for selfish purposes, and people are not to be used as a means for promoting one’s own personal status or comfort. In all of this the Israelites are to remember their former status
in Egypt (Leviticus 25:38, 42, 55) and treat others with the compassion and mercy that God showed them when He brought them out of that bondage.

The announcement of the Year of Jubilee on the same day that the Day of Atonement is observed is not mere coincidence. God wants His covenant people to understand that on the same day that reconciliation with Him is carried out, a kind of reconciliation among people is to happen as well every 50 years. As the people are restored with God spiritually, those who have been separated from their homes due to personal setbacks are to be restored to their families and their property. Thus reconciliation with God is to be demonstrated in a very practical, tangible manner.

What Do You Think?

- What steps can we take to become known as people of reconciliation?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- When relational debt is outstanding
- When sin debt is outstanding
- When monetary debt is outstanding
- When deficits of justice abound

LIVING AS RECONCILED PEOPLE

In modern times, there is perhaps no greater example of practicing reconciliation than that of Nelson Mandela. Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his role in resisting the South African government and its commitment to racial apartheid. Instead of emerging from prison embittered against his captors, he displayed an unflagging commitment to unify a nation that had been divided by years of institutionalized racism.

Mandela eventually became the first black president of South Africa. In that role he created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which provided amnesty to anyone who had committed a politically motivated human rights violation during the apartheid era. Neither side of the conflict was exempt from being called to stand before these public hearings. Part of the plan’s genius was that amnesty would be granted only to those who fully disclosed their crimes. This model of restorative justice created the possibility for forgiveness between a people hopelessly divided.

The Day of Atonement offered reconciliation between a holy God and His sinful people. The Year of Jubilee, which was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, encouraged the people to think of a kind of reconciliation with fellow Israelites by allowing them to return to ancestral property and family. God’s people were thus taught to think of reconciliation not just as a matter of their personal relationship with the Lord but also in terms of how others were treated. The spiritual and the practical were thus closely linked together. So it should also be for God’s people today.

—L. G. S.

D. Observing Jubilee (vv. 11, 12)

11, 12. 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. For it is the jubile; it shall be holy unto you: ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.

The laws concerning sowing and reaping to be followed during the Year of Jubilee are similar to those that accompany the Sabbath Year (Leviticus 25:5). A question arises as to whether the Year of Jubilee is the same as
the seventh Sabbath Year within a given cycle or is an additional year. If the latter, the result is two consecutive years of neither sowing nor reaping.

Leviticus 25:20-22 appears to say that God’s promises to provide enough abundance in the sixth year that the people’s needs will be met through the seventh, eighth, and ninth years. But that text specifies sowing during the eighth year. Since (1) the year on which the Year of Jubilee falls is an eighth year and (2) sowing is forbidden on a jubilee year (25:11), then (3) it appears that the seventh Sabbath Year in the cycle is also a Year of Jubilee. The fiftieth year may have been the same as the forty-ninth year by counting both the first and last years of the cycle.

The primary purpose of legislation such as that in today’s text is not agricultural or economic, although there are indeed benefits to be had along those lines. Rather, the primary purpose is spiritual. God’s people are being encouraged to place their faith in the Lord and to trust Him as the giver of the land to provide for His people.

What Do You Think?
How will your neighbors see your life change as you rely more and more on God’s provision?

Talking Points for Your Discussion
- In your approach to generosity
- In contentment
- In family life
- Other

Sadly, what follows in the Old Testament record is the account of a people who repeatedly disobey God’s commands. When the people of the southern kingdom of Judah are taken into exile, 2 Chronicles 36:21 states the land enjoyed Sabbath rests while lying desolate—rests presumably denied before the exile by the disobedience of God’s people.

Conclusion

A. Old Testament Jubilee

Did the Israelites ever practice jubilee as a nation? We don’t have any firm evidence that they did (Isaiah 37:30 is a possible reference to jubilee ideas). Although the generation that followed Moses rebelled against God (Judges 2:10-13), the lack of reference to jubilee in the historical narratives of the Old Testament does not mean that jubilee was not practiced. That would be an argument from silence. We simply do not know.

Yet we do know that the prophets appealed to the jubilee ideal figuratively with reference to the coming kingdom of God. An example is Isaiah 61:1, where the Hebrew word translated liberty is the same word translated as liberty in Leviticus 25:10 (the only other places where this word is used are Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17; Ezekiel 46:17).

B. New Testament Jubilee

When one considers what the Year of Jubilee signified for God’s people in the Old Testament, it is not difficult to see a reference to a new jubilee in Jesus’ declared intent “to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised” as He quoted from Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18.

Jesus is the one who has made it possible for human beings, separated from God because of sin, to come home, to return to where we belong—with the Lord. The “liberty” of this jubilee is the freedom from sin that Jesus brought about by defeating the devil and releasing us from bondage to him (see Hebrews 2:14, 15).
The jubilee that Jesus inaugurated at His first coming will reach its ultimate fulfillment and consummation when He returns. At that time a trumpet will sound (1 Thessalonians 4:16; compare Leviticus 25:9), and all Christians will be gloriously and finally liberated from the curse and the brokenness of sin—to dwell with our rightful owner in His home forever.

A jubilee for eternity!

**What Do You Think?**

What steps can you take to help your fellow Christians live more fully as beneficiaries of Jesus’ jubilee?

**Talking Points for Your Discussion**

- In congregational worship settings
- In Bible class settings
- In fellowship settings
- Other

**C. Prayer**

Our Father, we acknowledge that true freedom comes only when we follow Your commandments. Help us to treat Your Word as the ultimate authority, to follow Your Son as Lord, and to depend on Your Spirit for the power to live holy lives before the world. We pray in the name of the one who set us free. Amen.

**D. Thought to Remember**

View people and possessions as God does.

**INVolVEMENT LEARNING**

*Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

**Into the Lesson**

Distribute handouts (you prepare) of the poem below, which is “No Man Is an Island,” by John Donne (1573-1631).

No man is an island entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as any manner of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind. And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Invite a volunteer to read the poem aloud, and then write on the board, “No man is an island.” Talk about what this statement means, and challenge students to give examples from their own lives when they have seen this to be true.
Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Who Would I Trust?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually to decide whom to trust in various situations. Afterward, read each statement and let volunteers share the names they listed.

After either activity say, “None of us lives totally on our own. To flourish, we must show trust in others, trust that sometimes involves risk. One key part of the Jewish law demonstrates this type of trust and risk.”

**Into the Word**

Say: “Putting one’s trust in God is not a mere mental exercise. It is following God’s commands, even when those commands seem to violate common sense or endanger one’s well-being. God’s commands to observe a periodic Sabbath Year and a Year of Jubilee fall into that category.”

Divide the class into three groups. The groups should read their assigned Bible texts and come up with objections that may have been voiced by the people of Israel concerning those commands. (Possible objections are listed in italics.)

**Group 1—Leviticus 25:1-5**

Why does land need rest anyway? It’s just dirt!
It’s my property; I’ll do what I want with it!
Isn’t this just promoting laziness? Why should someone who is willing to work sacrifice a year of income?

**Group 2—Leviticus 25:6, 7, 20-22**

What will keep me from starving if the land does not produce enough food in these special years?
Faith in God is fine, but shouldn’t I take responsibility to provide for myself and my family?
If there is a food shortage in one of these special years, why should I give some of the food to my servants and animals?

**Group 3—Leviticus 25:8-12, 23, 24**

These people are my servants because they owed me money. I am supposed to forgive that debt? How unfair!
Wait a minute. I worked hard to buy more land to provide for my security and to pass it on to my children. I am supposed to give up what I worked a lifetime to earn?
What I worked for is mine. No one has the right to tell me to give it away!

After groups have finished, allow them to share their findings and objections. Point out how controversial these commands are. Yet by following them, the Israelites would have grown in their trust for God as well as their compassion for their countrymen who had difficult years.

**Into Life**

Challenge students to talk about ways they could celebrate a type of jubilee year in their own lives. Distribute lengths of streamers and have students write on the streamers different words or Bible verses that remind them to trust and thank the Lord.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Remember and Rest” activity for students to complete.