

## The Sabbath Year

In addition to the weekly Sabbath, God also instituted the **Sabbatical Year** for Israel. Every **seventh year** was to be the Sabbatical Year. During this Sabbath Year the land was to have rest. This applied not only to field crops but also to orchards and groves.

**Exodus 23:10-12** - 10 "And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, 11 but **on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat**. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. NASB

During this Sabbath Year the crops and harvest, left to grow without cultivation, were reaped during this year were considered the common possession of all people and animals.

**Leviticus 25:1-6** - 25 The Lord then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and say to them, 'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then **the land shall have a sabbath to the Lord**. 3 'Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, 4 but **during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the Lord**; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. 5 'Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; **the land shall have a sabbatical year**. 6 'And all of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. 7 'Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat. NASB

This was especially beneficial to the poor and needy. Also during this Sabbath Year the any money that was on loan to any of their ethnic kinsmen was to be released and forgiven.

**Deuteronomy 15:1-3** - 1 "At the end of every seven years you shall grant **a remission of debts**. 2 And this is the manner of remission: every creditor shall release what he has loaned to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother, because the Lord's remission has been proclaimed. 3 From a foreigner you may exact it, but **your hand shall release whatever of yours is with your brother**. NASB

Moreover any ethnic kinsmen that had been sold into slavery were to be released. Not only this but they were to be sent away with full provisions and sustenance.

**Deuteronomy 15:12-16** - 12 "**If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free**. 13 And when you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. 14 You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the Lord your God has blessed you. 15 And **you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you**; therefore I command you this today. NASB

Consider how wise and benevolent these precepts are as they build into the very culture of the people an antidote against tyranny, unnecessarily harsh slavery and debt. But consider the nature of these precepts as part of the Civil Law, more than Ceremonial. They governed how the political state of Israel was to operate and governed even their agricultural practices. See also in this how difficult it would be to enforce or even obey these Civil laws in the Church, with its multi-geographical context and multi-religious framework of modern cultures and nations. See in this the obvious abrogation of the Civil Law.

## Jubilee

In addition to the Sabbatical year, God also ordained a **year of national mercy and liberty** called the **Jubilee**.

**Leviticus 25:8-12** - 8 'You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. 9 'You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. 10 **'You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family.** 11 'You shall have the fiftieth year as a

**jubilee**; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. 12 'For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field. NASB

In the Jubilee, all family land allotments were returned to the families which owned them causing the land to revert to its rightful owners, even if the land had been sold. Whenever properties were bought and sold in this time the price was always based on the numbers of years remaining until Jubilee, for then the land ownership would then revert to its original owners.

**Leviticus 25:13-17** - 13 'On this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his own property. 14 'If you make a sale, moreover, to your friend, or buy from your friend's hand, **you shall not wrong one another.** 15 '**Corresponding to the number of years after the jubilee, you shall buy from your friend; he is to sell to you according to the number of years of crops.** 16 'In proportion to the extent of the years you shall increase its price, and in proportion to the fewness of the years, you shall diminish its price; for it is a number of crops he is selling to you. 17 '**So you shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God;** for I am the Lord your God. NASB

Nelson's Bible Dictionary comments; "*Part of the reason why God established the Jubilee Year was to prevent the Israelites from oppressing one another (Lev 25:17). One effect of the Jubilee Year was to prevent a permanent system of classes. The Jubilee Year had a leveling effect on Israel's culture; it gave everyone a chance to start over, economically and socially. The Jubilee Year reminds one of God's interest in liberty; God wants people to be free (Luke 4:18-19). It also stands as a witness to God's desire for justice on earth and calls into question any social practices that lead to permanent bondage and loss of economic opportunity.*"

Moreover, it was a time were severe indebtedness, to the point of slavery was remitted and liberty enacted. The Jubilee thus represented God's desire for freedom and justice to prevail among His people. Ungers Bible Dictionary comments; "*Every Israelite who through poverty had sold himself to one of his countrymen or to a foreigner settled in the land, if he had been unable to redeem himself or had not been redeemed by a kinsman, was to go out free with his children (Lev 25:35-43,47-54). Thus ownership of a person was changed into a matter of hire (vv. 40, 53). It would seem that there must have been a perfect remission of all debts in the year of Jubilee from the fact that all persons in bondage for debt were released, and all landed property of debtors was freely returned. Thus the Jubilee year became one of freedom and grace for all suffering, bringing not only redemption to the captive and deliverance from want to the poor, but also release to the whole congregation of the Lord from the sore labor of the earth, representing the time of refreshing (Acts 3:19) that the Lord provides for His people. For in this year every kind of oppression was to cease and every member of the covenant people to find his redeemer in the Lord, who brought him back to his possession and family.*"

See in this **Sabbatical Year** and **Jubilee** a **shadow** pointing to the ultimate freedom from all indebtedness and oppression that comes from sin, finding its **substance** in **Jesus Christ** and the Gospel. Let us see in Jesus the joy of true freedom and understand, as in the words of songwriter Michael Card, that Jesus is the very incarnation of the Year of Jubilee.

### **What about OT dietary laws?**

The Ceremonial Law not only regarded the religious worship of God including the Priesthood, the Tabernacle and sacrificial offerings, the Sabbath and commemorative Feasts, but also the entire lifestyle of the Israelites. It included laws regarding the "**clean**" and "**unclean**" practices for the purpose of **holiness** before God. God had called the people to be set apart (holy), not only in their religious worship, but in the way they lived their lives. As a result, God had given specific laws regarding what was considered pure and holy (clean) in their lifestyle and also what

was considered defiled, or profane (unclean). This regarded their diet with a whole set of **dietary laws**, as well as medical practices and sexual purity in relationships. Through obedience to these Israel would remain ceremonially pure or become defiled by violating these laws. These practices would keep God's people set apart from the surrounding nations who were unclean in the sight of God through their sinful religions and resulting morality and lifestyle.

In regard to the **dietary laws**, God had a whole system for discerning between the clean and unclean animals, which could be eaten and which could not.

**Leviticus 11:1-3** - 1 The Lord spoke again to Moses and to Aaron, saying to them, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, **"These are the creatures which you may eat from all the animals that are on the earth.**" NASB

The Unger's Bible Dictionary gives a good summary; "*four legged animals that do not chew the cud or have cloven feet (Lev 11:4-8; Deut 14:7-8); fish without scales and fins, e.g., eels and all shellfish (Lev 11:9-12); birds of prey and such as feed upon worms and rotting flesh (11:13-19); serpents and creeping insects; insects that sometimes fly and sometimes go upon their feet, with the exception of some of the locust kind (11:20-24,42).* (2) *By the sacrificial ordinances was forbidden the eating of all blood of cattle and birds and bloody flesh (Lev 3:17; 7:26; 17:10-14; Deut 12:16,23; cf. Gen 9:4; 1 Sam 14:32-34); the fatty portions that, in the sacrifice of oxen, sheep, and goats, were burned upon the altar (Lev 3:17; 7:23,25); also everything consecrated to idols (Ex 34:15).* (3) *For sanitary reasons, doubtless, the following was forbidden as food: the flesh of cattle that had fallen down dead or had been torn by wild beasts (Ex 22:31; Lev 11:39-40; Deut 14:21) as well as food prepared with water on which the dead body of an unclean insect had fallen (Lev 11:31,33-34); also all food and liquids remaining in an uncovered vessel in the tent or chamber of a dying or dead man (Num 19:14-15).*" These **dietary laws** were for the specific purpose of setting God's people apart as holy unto Him. Israel was to be holy unto God by keeping the (Old) Mosaic Covenant. This is how God set Israel apart from the surrounding nations.

**Leviticus 20:24-26** - 24 'Hence I have said to you, "You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey." **I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 'You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean;** and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. 26 **'Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.**" NASB

Many Christians throughout Church history have maintained that it is either necessary or preferable to keep these **dietary laws**. In the case of those who prefer them, of course they are free to keep such practices so long as they are not trusting in this tradition as a system of works to be either justified or condemned. But in regard to those who maintain it as a lifestyle which God requires in order to keep one clean or the violation of it makes one unclean, clearly disregard the New Testament teaching and fail to understand the nature of the New Covenant in regard to dietary laws. Both Jesus and the Apostles teach that all foods are clean. Jesus clearly taught that people are not defiled by what goes into them, but rather what proceeds out of them, either words or actions.

**Mark 7:14-21** – 14 And after He called the multitude to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand: **15 there is nothing outside the man which going into him can defile him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.** 16 ["If any man has ears to hear, let him hear."] 17 And when leaving the multitude, He had entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable. 18 And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do