

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS
Commentary by Michael Sigler
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God Calls People to Jubilee

Leviticus 25:8-24

Key verse: “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” (Leviticus 25:10).

I love the story of the woman who walked into a coffee shop and sat down at a table. She took care not to disturb the man sitting on the other side of the table from her.

For a few minutes, the woman was engrossed in reading a magazine. She barely looked up from it as she reached for a cookie in a bag on the table. Immediately, the man also took a cookie out of the bag and began to eat it. The woman was not happy that this stranger would just help himself to her cookies like that, and she glared at him. The man smiled and continued to eat his cookie.

In a few moments it happened again. The woman took a cookie and the man did the same. She was really getting irritated now, and gave the man another dirty look.

A few minutes later, the woman decided to leave. She left the rest of the cookies in the bag on the table, and—still fuming—she headed for the elevator. That’s when it happened. Opening her purse to put her magazine inside, she discovered there her still unopened bag of cookies. Only then did she realize what she’d done. All along, she thought the man had been eating her cookies—but she had been eating his cookies the whole time!

So often, we do the same with God. We eat God’s “cookies” without even thanking Him, much less acknowledging that they all belong to Him. We act as if what we have is ours to do with as we please. So often, we forget the Biblical truth that *everything belongs to God*. He just lets us take care of some of it, and asks us to be good stewards of all that He entrusts to us.

That is one of the main lessons of “Jubilee,” as described here in Leviticus 25. Every seven years, the land owned by the Hebrews was to lie fallow, or uncultivated. *The Lord said, “When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord” (Lev. 25:2)*. During this Sabbath year, not only were no

crops to be planted or harvested, whatever did grow on the uncultivated land was to help feed the poor, the slave, and the stranger in the land.

Then, every fiftieth year, the close of seven seven-year periods, was the year of Jubilee. During this year, not only was the land to lie fallow, but several other practices were to be observed:

In the year of Jubilee, all land reverted back to the original family owners, free from any debt obligation (Lev. 25:10-13). In this way, Israel would be less likely to concentrate wealth and ownership in the hands of a few, while the majority of people were poor. Clearly, God wanted His people to take care of the poor among them and curb the inclination toward economic exploitation.

In the year of Jubilee, God would bless the people by providing for them even though they did not plant or reap crops (Lev. 25:18-21). God said that in the sixth year prior to a sabbatical year, there would be a “bumper crop” so that they could store enough to get them through the seventh “sabbatical” year. Also, even when the year of Jubilee followed a sabbatical year, God would provide enough food in the sixth-year crop to cover the two following years when the land was to lie fallow!

We too often view this Book of Leviticus as a rather boring catalog of commandments and laws that have little relevance for us today. The truth is, Leviticus reveals some timeless principles that are of great significance for Christians today. We see several of those principles in this “Jubilee” passage from Leviticus 25:

1. God wants us to use our wealth in ways that consider the needs of others. God made sure that, in ancient Israel, wealth was not hoarded by a few at the expense of many. He also instructed those who owned land to use part of what it produced to feed the poor. Whatever our views are about private ownership, taxation, etc., one thing is sure: God still wants us to share what we have with those who have need. John Wesley said, “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”

2. God blesses us when we observe the principle of “Sabbath.” God blesses us when we take one day out of seven for worship, rest, and re-creation. The Fourth Commandment says, “Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8). Jesus said, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). One of the things that Sabbath was meant to teach us is that *we are not in charge of running God’s world.* We can pause for Sabbath rest and trust that God will provide “the bumper crop” we need, even if we’re not out there working seven days a week!

3. Everything we make and everything we “have” is on loan from God. God owns it all. He just lets us take care of His “stuff.” This is perhaps the greatest timeless principle of Jubilee. God established the year of Jubilee to remind Israel that the land really belonged to God, who loaned it to His people for stewardship. Still today,

we should always remember, those are God's "cookies" we've been eating, all along!

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