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THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR:  
AN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF THE JUBILEE

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A Dissertation  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

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by  
Charles Randall Breland  
December 2019

**APPROVAL SHEET**

THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR:  
AN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF THE JUBILEE

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To my dearest wife, Bethany.

I cherish you and am eternally grateful for your sacrifice to see this work finished.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AnBib</i>	<i>Analecta Biblica</i>
<i>ANET</i>	Pritchard, James B., ed. <i>The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures</i> . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011
<i>AOS</i>	<i>American Oriental Society</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BDAG</i>	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, and William F. Arndt. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
<i>BDB</i>	Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds. <i>The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon</i> . Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979.
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>COS</i>	<i>The Context of Scripture</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Eretz-Israel</i>
<i>EJ</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>The Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	Köhler, Ludwig, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J Richardson, Johann Jakob Stamm, Benedikt Hartmann, G. J Jongeling-Vos, and L. J. de Regt. <i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Translated by M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1994.
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JPS</i>	Jewish Publication Society
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTSS</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996
<i>NAC</i>	New American Commentary
<i>NICOT</i>	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
<i>NSBT</i>	New Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>OTL</i>	The Old Testament Library
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Revista Degli Studi Orientali</i>
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>



TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Supplements to <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## PREFACE

I have often reflected to others that I have been a student my entire life. It is an immense joy and privilege to study the Word of our living God. This project began in an Old Testament seminar with Dr. Charles Halton in the spring of 2010. It is there that I read C. J. H. Wright's *The Mission of God*. His most excellent chapter on the Jubilee opened my eyes to the centrality of the Jubilee in the Torah and the prophetic expectation. A conversation in the living room of Chris Burtch, one of my several best friends, led me to believe that the church needed an evangelical treatment of the Jubilee. I am forever indebted to Chris for asking me pointed and thoughtful questions about the meaning of the Jubilee. I wrote a short paper on the Jubilee for a seminar with my doctoral supervisor, Dr. T. J. Betts. This seminar paper along with conversations with Dr. Jim Hamilton solidified my intention to write on the Jubilee. I am grateful for the influence and encouragement of Chris Burtch, Dr. Hamilton, Dr. Halton, and Dr. Betts.

My commitment to pursuing a doctoral degree began with instruction by my godly parents, Charles and Catherine Breland. They always believed I should avail myself of as much educational opportunity as I could. My parents taught me the value of diligence, hard work, and integrity. Harry and JoEllen Valentine, my godly in-laws, paved the way for this project via encouragement, financial help, and endless prayers. Thank you to all of my parents. My wife has been a most willing and deeply encouraging friend through this entire process. Despite my many desires to give it all up, she found the way to always put the wind back in my sails and point me back to seeking God's glory in all my work. Our sweetest daughters, Evangeline and Juliana, have cheered me on with many hugs, cuddles, glorious drawings, and prayers for my "book." I also should mention Lance Howerton and Dan Talcott, who have generously provided the time away from

work two years in a row to finish this project. Their constant encouragement and belief in this project have instilled in me deep gratitude and immense courage, which are gifts that only the truest of friends and brothers in the faith can give.

I am forever grateful to my church for their zealous participation in this project. The elders have shown me the meaning of redemption and true friendship in a way few men can know. Thank you to Jim Hamilton, Denny Burk, Christopher Burtch, Matthew Damico, Michael Frantz, Gabe Molnar, J.O. Oesterling, Matt Pierce, Colin Smothers, and John Watson. It is the privilege of my life to serve among these valiant warriors of the Lord. Denny Burk's bowls of fall gumbo sustained me during long days of writing. John Watson and Christopher Burtch filled in for me one too many times to teach at Kenwood so that I could write. Colin Smothers made a valiant effort in reading this dissertation through and helping me smooth over many rough patches. Jim Hamilton's encouragement, exhortation, many conversations, and detailed proofing have made this project far better. Finally, I want to thank the members of Kenwood Baptist Church. As I have had the privilege of serving them in various capacities the last decade, it is to them that I have imagined that I have written this dissertation. This work may be academic in nature, but it is for the church. The Jubilee holds great power to shape our desire to do practical good to others, especially those of the household of God. May the Lord always bless you, Kenwood!

Randall Breland

Louisville, Kentucky

December 2019

## CHAPTER 1

### HISTORY OF RESEARCH

#### Introduction

For the contemporary Christian, the word “Jubilee” evokes images of joy, celebration, and deliverance. Preachers may think of the trumpet in Leviticus 25 or the proclamation of liberty in Isaiah 61. Worship leaders may recall the popular song, “These Are the Days of Elijah,” in which the lyrics sing, “Lift your voice, it’s the year of Jubilee.”<sup>1</sup> Political pundits may reminisce about the Jubilee 2000 movement, which had limited success in addressing third world poverty. A popular fiction writer has even used the biblical Jubilee to argue that America is doomed.<sup>2</sup> Although evangelical culture is full of references to the Jubilee, the content of that understanding often lacks basis in the biblical text. Although there are celebratory and prophetic elements within the biblical Jubilee, it is primarily concerned with redemption, restoration, and rest.

Discussion and understanding of the Jubilee seems lacking in the pew, in the pulpit, and, sadly, in the professoriate as well. I have heard few believers connect the word Jubilee to the historical institution described in Leviticus 25. Few preachers would connect Nehemiah’s reform or Jeremiah’s purchase of land to the biblical Jubilee. Having personally spent a decade in Christian academics as a student, not once have I heard a lecture, sermon, or even a cursory explanation of the Jubilee. What does the church mean when it sings, “It’s the year of Jubilee”? In order to fill in the gap within Christian

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Robert Mark, *Days of Elijah* (Mobile, AL: Integrity Hosanna! Music, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery That Holds the Secret of America’s Future* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2012); and Jonathan Cahn, *The Mystery of the Shemittah: The 3,000 Year-Old Mystery That Holds the Secret of America’s Future, the World’s Future, and Your Future!* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2014).

thinking, this dissertation aims to provide a coherent understanding of the Jubilee in the Old Testament.

Despite the biblical Jubilee's general absence in evangelical culture, it is not absent in academics. The literature on the subject is vast. A large section of the literature addresses the Jubilee's provenance, in which scholars tend to place the Jubilee within broader, critical reconstructions of the Pentateuch. They follow the broad trajectories of the Wellhausen program and Noth's subsequent Deuteronomistic history. According to Wellhausen, the Jubilee was an "artificial institution" created by priests in the exilic or post-exilic period as a ploy to claim authority over the land of Palestine and its management.<sup>3</sup> A separate segment of the Jubilee literature focuses on contemporary application, although the tendency is to use the Jubilee to argue for the agendas of socialism and liberation theology. In general, the rest of the literature can be categorized under the ancient Near Eastern (ANE) background of the Jubilee, Second Temple background of the Jubilee, or Luke's use of the Jubilee. Conclusions regarding the role of the Jubilee in ancient Israel, in the New Testament, and in the contemporary day are varied and often lack appropriate textual warrant.

This dissertation will focus on the ANE background and texts related to the Jubilee in the Old Testament. Jubilee motifs, echoes, and allusions saturate the Old Testament. Despite all that has been written, no monograph-length treatment of the Jubilee from an evangelical perspective exists. A few evangelicals have written on the Jubilee and have laid a strong foundation; however, their work is limited to shorter treatments in essays or individual chapters. The academy and the church need a full evangelical treatment of all the Old Testament texts related to the Jubilee.

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<sup>3</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, rev. ed., trans. J. S. Black and A. Enzies, Old Testament Library (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1885), 118-20.

## **Thesis**

This dissertation argues that the Jubilee is (1) a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure, recalled the Sabbath rest of creation, and reenacted Yahweh's liberation of Israel from Egypt; and (2) a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah. The biblical Jubilee thus offers several fruitful trajectories of inquiry: historical, redemptive-eschatological, and ethical. Forming a coherent theology from these various categories is no easy task. The aim of this work is to weave together an Old Testament theology of the Jubilee that takes into account a number of textually-based observations regarding the Jubilee.

1. The biblical Jubilee was an ancient law given in Leviticus 25:1-55 by Moses to pre-settlement Israel.
2. The biblical Jubilee was a remembrance of the Sabbath rest mankind enjoyed at creation.
3. The biblical Jubilee was the capstone of Israel's system of social justice that was intended to preserve, on a cyclical and generational basis, Israel's kinship structure and egalitarian system of land tenure.
4. The biblical Jubilee was a celebration of God's giving of the *Torah* at Mount Sinai.
5. The biblical Jubilee was a reenactment of the Exodus redemption.
6. The biblical Jubilee was a category that shaped and informed the meaning of spiritual forgiveness in ancient Israel.
7. The biblical Jubilee was a key motif amplified by the prophetic expectation of the second Exodus.
8. The biblical Jubilee is a type of God's coming eschatological redemption.

## **History of Research**

This section surveys the major works and ideas in Old Testament Jubilee research to the present date. It is only intended to be a representative survey.

### **Jubilee Parallels in the Ancient Near East**

A large portion of the Jubilee literature examines relevant parallels in the ANE.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, Analecta Biblica 4 (Rome: Pontifical

ANE parallels related to the Jubilee legislation abound: proclamations of freedom, sacred concepts of land, use of the numbers seven and fifty in sacred and cyclical calendars, the fallowing of land, and the redemption of land and persons.<sup>5</sup> The most important ANE parallels originate from similar proclamations of freedom attested in Akkadian and Babylonian sources. Akkadian *andurarum* (“freedom”) proclamations date to the third millennium BC. Babylonian proclamations of *misharum* (“justice”) are first extant in the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1792–1750 BC).<sup>6</sup> Archaeologists have uncovered other parallel proclamations from Mesopotamia in Babylon, Nippur, Sippar, Mari, and Hana.<sup>7</sup> The Edict of Ammisaduqa (c. 1645 BC) is the only complete witness that grants *misharum*.<sup>8</sup> Three monographs cover the parallel legislation in the ANE.<sup>9</sup> A host of articles, essays, and a

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Biblical Institute, 1954), 46-69; Sharon Hilda Ringe, “The Jubilee Proclamation in the Ministry and Teaching of Jesus a Tradition-Critical Study in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts” (PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 1981), 30-34; Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*, SBL Dissertation Series 136 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 45-72; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 3A (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2241-44; John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 115 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 19-36.

<sup>5</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 20.

<sup>6</sup> A summary of the data can be found in Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 75-96, 152-78. See Code of Hammurabi, Prologue, Tablet V, Ins. 10-20 and §117, in *ANET*, 165b; 170b-71a.

<sup>7</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 23-24. These range from the Old Babylonian period (c. 2004-1600 BC) to the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods (c. 750-550 BC).

<sup>8</sup> See *ANET*, 526-28. A second edict, that of Samsuiluna (1749–1712 BC) is very fragmented. See F. R. Kraus, “Ein Edikt des Königs Samsu-Iluna von Babylon,” *Assyrian Studies* 16 (1965): 229. The prologue to the Lipit-Ishtar Lawcode, where Lipit-Ishtar claims he granted freedom to the enslaved citizens of Sumer and Akkad. See *ANET*, 159b. Relevant passages are reproduced in Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1974); Weinfeld, *Social Justice*. A comparable work is the volume by Raymond Westbrook and Richard Jasnow, eds., *Security for Debt in Ancient Near Eastern Law* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), which surveys relevant parallels from the Ur III period to the Neo-Babylonian period. The essay on Israel by Tikva Frymer-Kensky argues that credit in Israel was only extended as a mechanism of social obligation as interest-free subsistence loans to the insolvent. Frymer-Kensky dates the Jubilee to the post-exilic period and doubts it had any practical effect. Although the work is published later than Weinfeld, Chirichigno, and Leggett, these three volumes

few monographs precede these three works and have been summarized and assimilated in Weinfeld.<sup>10</sup> The three monographs, in alphabetical order by last name, are written by Chirichigno, Leggett, and Weinfeld.

**Greg Chirichigno.** Chirichigno's monograph provides a comparative analysis into the background of debt-slavery in both Mesopotamia and ancient Israel.<sup>11</sup> According to Chirichigno, laws that remedied debt-slavery and the alienation of land were prominent in the ANE "as early as the Ur III period (c. 2050–1955 BC)."<sup>12</sup> Most significantly, Chirichigno argues that Israel's manumission laws addressed the problem of debt-slavery.<sup>13</sup> Israelites could sell themselves or dependents into debt-slavery for a fixed period of time as a recourse to pay off a delinquent loan. Chirichigno also argues that the Jubilee legislation is unique in the ANE because of its fixed fifty-year time period and its exhortation to treat Israelite debt-slaves as hired servants. Finally, Chirichigno rejects the

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are much more specific and are the standard works on the subject. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Israel," in Westbrook and Jasnow, *Security for Debt*, 251-62.

<sup>10</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 19-20, provides the following list of relevant articles, essays, and monographs in chronological order: Eli Ginzberg, "Studies in the Economics of the Bible," *JQR* 22 (1931-1932): 343-408, esp. 400-405; Hildegard Lewy and Julius Lewy, "The Origin of the Week and the Oldest West Asiatic Calendar," *HUCA* 17 (1942-1943): 1-148; Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949); Eduard Neufeld, "Socio-Economic Background of *Yōbēl* and *Šemittā*," *RSO* 33 (1958) 53-124; Julius Lewy, "The Biblical Institution of Derôr in the Light of Akkadian Documents," *EI* 5 (1958): 21-31; R. Yaron, "A Document of Redemption from Ugarit," *VT* 10 (1960): 83-90; J. J. Finkelstein, "Ammissaduqa's Edict and the Babylonian 'Law Codes,'" *JCS* 15 (1961): 127-34; J. J. Finkelstein, "Some New *Misharum* Material and its Implications," *Assyrian Studies* 16 (1965): 225-31; Kraus, "Ein Edikt," 225-31; Shmuel Safrai et al., "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee," *EJ* 14 (1972): 574-86; Christina Simonetti, "Die Nachlaßedikte in Mesopotamien und im Antiken Syrien," in *Das Jubeljahr im Wandel: Untersuchungen zu Erlaßjahr und Jubeljahrtexten aus vier Jahrtausenden*, ed. G. Scheuermann (Würzburg: Echter, 2000), 5-54.

<sup>11</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 54. For example, LH §§117–119; MAL A §44; C §§2-3; and G+C §7. He even notes that LH §117 was "an attempt by Hammurabi to release debt-slaves periodically." Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 99.

<sup>13</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 343. He also mentions Nuzi loan terms and contracts that envisioned a kind of indentured servitude, although he observes that the *tidennu* (debt-slaves) of Nuzi were of a higher caste than the *ḥabiru* (immigrant slaves) many scholars see in the legislation of Exod 21 and Deut 15.



predominant critical theory that the Jubilee legislation is a revision of the earlier Sabbath year legislation. Instead, he argues that the Jubilee year and Sabbath year laws are complementary to one another and serve a broader program of social justice.<sup>14</sup>

**Donald Leggett.** *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament* surveys both the ANE background and the relevant biblical material. Leggett covers multiple ANE parallels to the *goel* (“redeemer”) redemption of property, persons, and blood. He argues that defaulting debtors were the most basic source of slaves in both Israel and the ANE.<sup>15</sup> Israel’s practice of redemption is made unique by the kinship ties involved in redemption and by Yahweh’s ownership of the land and the people.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the people and the land were linked together inseparably. Yahweh’s ownership meant that both land and persons could only be leased—not sold—for a limited term and that both land and persons were permanently subject to *goel* redemption.<sup>17</sup> Further, Leggett contends that *goel*-redemption and the Jubilee shared a unified goal: to deliver Israelites from insolvency.

Finally, Leggett links Israel’s system of social justice to the covenant between Israel and Yahweh. Israelites were to deliver one another from slavery just as Yahweh had delivered them from slavery.<sup>18</sup> In other words, while kinship ties motivated Israelites to redeem their neighbors and their neighbors’ land, loyalty to Yahweh and the covenant prompted Israelites to redeem as Yahweh had redeemed them.

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<sup>14</sup> Chirichigno writes, “Therefore, it is possible that the laws in Exodus, Deuteronomy and Leviticus could have been “operational” at the same time. . . . That all three laws, and their related discussions of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years, could have been understood as a single comprehensive system of social welfare legislation is further suggested by the fact that all of these regulations also appear in the OB *mēšarum* edicts. This parallel alone provides a significant argument in favor of the pre-Monarchic or Monarchic dating of all of these regulations.” (Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel*, 300, 354-55)

<sup>15</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 100.

<sup>16</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 67-68.

<sup>17</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 106.

<sup>18</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 293-94.

**Moshe Weinfeld.** Weinfeld's *Social Justice in Ancient Israel* argues that the biblical phrase, משפט וצדקה while often used in a strictly juridical sense, was a broader concept that called for kings, leaders, and individuals to provide liberation to the poor and oppressed.<sup>19</sup> For Weinfeld, socioeconomic liberation was an ancient practice that often mixed in utopian elements as a legislative ideal, much akin to the Code of Hammurabi.<sup>20</sup> Thus, he contends that the Israelite קרור proclamation (“liberty”; i.e., the Jubilee) was analogous to the Mesopotamian *andurarum*, *misharum*, and *kidinnutu* (“protection”) proclamations of liberation.<sup>21</sup> These proclamations forgave debts, allowed displaced individuals to return to their ancestral estate, and exempted individuals or cities—especially sacred cities—from various taxes and duties owed to the king.<sup>22</sup>

Weinfeld also links multiple biblical motifs with the ANE concept of liberation: divine rule and the cosmic mountain/inheritance, the development of debt release from the sociopolitical realm to the realm of the soul/the cult (i.e., the Day of Atonement), Yahweh's liberation of mankind and his coronation as king at creation (i.e., the New Year's

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<sup>19</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 5, 44. This was true in the ANE and in Israel (e.g., Isa 9:1ff; Isa 11:1ff; 16:5). He notes that establishing such socioeconomic justice was the special duty of the (eschatological) king. For a work that is parallel to Weinfeld and similar in its scope, see Enrique Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge: A Study of Justice in the Biblical World*, trans. Seán Charles Martin (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004). The first chapter provides a good overview of justice in Mesopotamia. Nardoni argues for a post-exilic date for the Jubilee legislation. Nardoni, *Rise Up, O Judge*, 88-89.

<sup>20</sup> Weinfeld writes, “In Israel, as in Mesopotamia, the collections of laws were edited by scribes whose object was to present the *desirable* rather than the actual and hence the gap between the laws and legal documents, which reflected the actual reality.” Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 156. He later argues that the Jubilee was of ancient origin even if it was utopian. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 177.

<sup>21</sup> See Lev 25:10; Jer 34:8, 15, 17; Ezek 46:17; Isa 61:1.

<sup>22</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 140-41. Weinfeld also summarizes other common rights of freedom that were granted, including the restoration/redistribution of land, restoration of temples with their idols, the return of exiles and freeing of prisoners/captives, the rebuilding of cities, and clothing the naked. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 110. He concludes, “The Mesopotamian *mīšarum*, which is parallel to משפט וצדקה in Israel, is fundamentally a legalistic proclamation of the king, signifying clemency and release. Hence, the subject of משפט וצדקה ought to be understood in a like manner. While the concept of righteous judgment is basically connected with commandment and law, as given to Moses by God, it implies salvation of the oppressed and pardon for the unfortunate.” Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 184.

Festival), and the vital role of the *shofar* (“sacred/war horn”) in Israel’s cult.<sup>23</sup> By linking these motifs to social justice, Weinfeld demonstrates that “justice and righteousness” in ancient Israel had a strong socioeconomic component. In other words, caring for the poor and destitute was a central way that the kings of Israel, the nation as a whole, and individual Israelites were to mirror Yahweh’s *מִשְׁפָּט וצֶדֶק*.<sup>24</sup>

### **The Jubilee in the Pentateuch**

Several monographs have given full-length treatment to the laws of Jubilee and the related manumission laws in the Pentateuch. As mentioned, these full-length treatments assume a critical reconstruction of the Pentateuch. Much of the discussion centers around the date and *Sitz im Leben* of the Jubilee.<sup>25</sup> Many critical scholars date the Jubilee’s provenance into the late monarchy or exilic period, while others argue that the priests or the monarchy revised the legislation several times across Israel’s history to serve changing political needs.<sup>26</sup> An overview of the most significant scholars and their relevant works, in alphabetical order, follows.

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<sup>23</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 241 (Cosmic Mountain—for connections to the Exodus, see 188, 243ff.), 210-12 (Day of Atonement), 198-99 (New Year’s Festival), 207 (the *shofar*). Weinfeld argues that the Jubilee declaration of freedom was a “model for the redemption of the soul.” Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 210. He also argues that the blowing of the *shofar* corresponds to three divine declarations of freedom: at the creation of the world when Yahweh was coronated as King of the Universe (celebrated by the blowing of the *shofar* on New Year’s Day), the revelation at Mount Sinai, and in the “[messianic] future, when he shall reign over the entire earth.” Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 207. Weinfeld connects these three divine declarations to the Sabbath day (creation), the Jubilee (Sinai/Exodus), and the future Sabbath.

<sup>24</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 220. He cites Ezek 18:7-8, 16-17; Isa 3:14-15; 5:1-7; Jer 7:5-6; and Zech 7:9-10. This idea is strongly parallel in the ANE literature. See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 222-30.

<sup>25</sup> The date of the Jubilee’s provenance is a perennial question for scholars as it is often used as a major foundation for larger arguments concerning the date and composition of the Pentateuch.

<sup>26</sup> Some critical scholars date the Jubilee to a time not long after Israel’s conquest of the land. Others date it to the monarchy. The majority of scholars consider the Jubilee to be utopian legislation formed during Israel’s exile in Babylon. For an excellent overview of research on the Jubilee before 2000, see James C. VanderKam, “Sabbatical Chronologies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context*, ed. Timothy H. Lim (Edinburgh: Clark, 2000), 159-78. Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 53-79, has an extensive overview of critical views of the date of the Jubilee. See below for Bergsma’s view. See J. van der Ploeg, “Studies in Hebrew Law. III. Systematic Analysis of the Contents of the Collections of Laws in the Pentateuch,” *CBQ* 13 (1951): 39, for

Bergsma's monograph *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* has thoroughly assimilated all the relevant texts and research.<sup>27</sup> Bergsma focuses his attention on the legislation in Leviticus 25 and then traces its development through the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple literature, and Qumran documents.<sup>28</sup> Bergsma argues that the purpose of the Jubilee was to maintain the relative equality and independence of the families and clans within ancient Israel's agrarian society.<sup>29</sup> Bergsma argues that the Jubilee was a pre-exilic institution and that Israel, at least, observed it in theory. Bergsma also argues that the Jubilee had an eschatological focus because it reminded Israel of their experience in the Exodus.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the Jubilee was an "eschatological" event for an Israelite debtor who looked forward to the Jubilee release.

**John S. Bergsma.** Bergsma then traces the Jubilee through the Hebrew Bible, focusing on Isaiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel's use of the Jubilee as a prophecy and a type. Broadly speaking, these texts associate the beginning of the Jubilee-age with Israel's release from exile.<sup>31</sup> At the end of the exile, a great messianic figure will proclaim a great

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a representative conquest period view. See Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, rev. ed., Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 185, for a representative view dating to the monarchy. See R. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 212, for a representative exilic view. Even those who date the Jubilee to the exilic period admit that portions of the holiness code (Lev 17ff.) are ancient and precede the monarchy. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1319-67 and North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 193-212, for an overview of critical theories relating to composition of the Jubilee legislation from Wellhausen up until 1954.

<sup>27</sup> Bergsma is particular in his tracing of the Jubilee, choosing to focus solely on the Jubilee year and Lev 25.

<sup>28</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 295. Bergsma's assessment of the relevant ANE parallels is consistent with the views of Weinfeld and Chirichigno.

<sup>29</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 296. Bergsma holds to a pre-exilic date for the Jubilee and has argued extensively against the post-exilic date in John S. Bergsma, "The Jubilee: A Post-Exilic Priestly Attempt to Reclaim Lands?" *Bib* 44 (2003): 225-46. He summarizes, "The main weakness of the 'post-exilic priestly ploy' hypothesis is the lack of any clear evidence in the text of Lev 25 that points to the post-exilic period as its *Sitz-im-Leben*." Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 75.

<sup>30</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 296.

<sup>31</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 187ff.; 300ff.

and everlasting Jubilee year. This great Jubilee year will usher in God's kingdom and Israel's eschatological hopes.

Several scholars have researched the development of the Jubilee in the Second Temple literature. Bergsma compiles and summarizes the relevant texts and attached research. He argues that *The Book of Jubilees*, *1 Enoch*, and *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* employ the Jubilee as a framework for the schematization of history. The Qumran documents also reference the Jubilee on a number of occasions. Bergsma has argued that the Qumran literature uses the Jubilee for three main purposes: (1) historiographical—charting the chronology of past events; (2) cultic-calendrical—for calculating the length of cultic activities such as the rotation of priestly service; and (3) eschatological—for predicting the arrival of the final era of history.<sup>32</sup>

To Bergsma, *11QMelchizedek's* appropriation of the Jubilee is most pertinent.<sup>33</sup> Bergsma concludes that the legal and ethical aspects of the Jubilee are “eclipsed” by its appropriation as a “chronological unit . . . of sacred time by which to schematize the past” and to anticipate the arrival of the eschaton.<sup>34</sup> According to Bergsma, the Second Temple literature associated the liberation motif of the Jubilee with the coming of a messianic figure who would address, not the monetary debt of individual Israelites, but the “moral-spiritual debt (i.e., sin)” of corporate Israel.<sup>35</sup>

Bergsma's dissertation is important for the present work on several levels. First, Bergsma interacts with many texts in the OT that allude to or echo the Jubilee. Much of

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<sup>32</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 255-57.

<sup>33</sup> Bergsma explains, “*11QMelchizedek* represents perhaps the richest and most sophisticated eschatological interpretation of the jubilee. The author takes themes and phrases from several scriptural passages pertaining to the jubilee (Lev 25, Dan 9, Isa 61) and applies them to Melchizedek (Gen 14), who is given a quasi-divine role in the inauguration of the eschaton.” Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 301.

<sup>34</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 304.

<sup>35</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 304.

his work is occupied with identifying the *Sitz im Leben* behind the text and assessing the viewpoints of critical scholarship. This leaves room for more in-depth analysis and exposition of the jubilee-related texts from an evangelical perspective. Second, Bergsma demonstrates that the eschatological interpretation of the Jubilee was prominent in Israel's active prophets (i.e., Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel) and later Jewish literature. Bergsma's treatment of each text is tremendous but there is room to weave them together into a more coherent and full theology.

**Roland de Vaux.** De Vaux argues that the biblical Jubilee was a utopian law that was a late (post-exilic) and ineffective attempt to extend the Sabbath year laws to landed property and to make observation of the law easier by spacing it out by ancient calendars and ideas.<sup>36</sup> The aim was to restore the property to individuals or families who had originally inherited it but lost it through insolvency.<sup>37</sup>

**Jeffrey Fager.** In *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, Fager argues that the Jubilee laws are ancient.<sup>38</sup> He believes, however, that an editor heavily redacted the laws during the exile as a result of a competitive relationship between two priestly schools: the ruling elite and a lay-priest "Ezekielian school."<sup>39</sup> The competition was generally over

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<sup>36</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 176-77.

<sup>37</sup> de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 167. De Vaux cites archeological data that shows a considerable gap between the rich and poor during the monarchic period. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 73. According to De Vaux, such a gap would have motivated the exilic editors to address the problem as they prepared to return to the land. For similar views, see W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1960), 119ff.

<sup>38</sup> Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge*, JSOT 155 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993). Particularly Lev 25:14, 25-31, 35, 39, 47, 48b, 53.

<sup>39</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 16. Fager's sociological method of analysis places Fager's work into the field of postmodern reader-response theory. Jean-François Lefebvre, *Le Jubilé Biblique: Lv 25—Exégèse et Yhéologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003), is similar in style and scope to Fager's work. Lefebvre concludes that the Jubilee was utopian and arose during the Persian period since its concerns are parallel to the utopian concerns of Neh 5. See also David J. Pleins, *The Social Visions*

how to divide the lands of Palestine when Israel returned from Babylon.<sup>40</sup> For Fager, the textual revisions point to a deeper struggle between centralized control of the land under the Israelite monarchy and the rights of families to private ownership of the land.<sup>41</sup> Fager posits that the “mainline priests” wanted to establish a “self-correcting” and centralized system of land tenure while the lay priests wanted a privatized system and the land completely redistributed.<sup>42</sup>

**Jeffries M. Hamilton.** Hamilton’s monograph *Social Justice and Deuteronomy* offers an in-depth comparative and rhetorical analysis of Deuteronomy 15. Deuteronomy 15 provides for the release of debts and slaves during the Sabbath year.<sup>43</sup> Hamilton’s analysis of Deuteronomy 15 focuses on the structure of the two pericopes (vv. 1-11; 12-18), which made “assent and compliance” to the laws unavoidable. The structure does this by broadening and specifying who was in need so that “those who stand in some danger of exclusion” are included.<sup>44</sup> Further, Deuteronomy 15 highlights relational connections so as to reinforce personal obligations within the community.<sup>45</sup> These laws also made “Yhwh [the] warrant, rewarder, and source of the law” so as to further encourage absolute obedience.<sup>46</sup>

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*of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 69, 78, 89, 349-50.

<sup>40</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 60-63.

<sup>41</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 119.

<sup>42</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 120.

<sup>43</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 96. He cites Lev 25:6 as an example of those included: “Yourself, your male and female slave, your hired servant, and the sojourners dwelling with you.” See Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 95, his translation.

<sup>45</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 96.

<sup>46</sup> For structural parallels, see chart in Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 26. See also pp. 41-42 for summary observations by Hamilton on the rhetorical structure of Deut 15:1-18.

As regards the ANE parallels, Hamilton argues that the manumission laws in the Pentateuch are parallel to *misharum* and *andurarum* edicts in Mesopotamia. He also argues that the cyclical nature of the releases (Sabbath Year and Jubilee) and Yahweh's position as "guardian of justice" made Israel's legislation unique.<sup>47</sup> Hamilton concludes that the Pentateuch calls on the wealthy and those of privileged position to be those who affect change. They are to be motivated by the idea that Yahweh is "advocate of the dependent and powerless."<sup>48</sup>

**Jacob Milgrom.** Jacob Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus is an original and thorough treatment of the Jubilee.<sup>49</sup> Milgrom dates the entire holiness code, including Leviticus 25, to the eighth century BC. He argues that the Jubilee legislation was a priestly response to two realities of the eighth century: (1) the growth of an urban trade-based economy; and (2) the growth of monarchy-controlled lands that resulted in latifundia (slaves working state-owned lands).<sup>50</sup> Despite his dating, Milgrom sees a coherence to the

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<sup>47</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 71-72.

<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 136-37. Hamilton's most potent observation is on the Sabbath Commandment's relationship to the justness of society: "That the justness of society with respect to these stands at the center of the ideal society is made manifest by the fact that their treatment through the special tithe, the two forms of release, and the festivals draws upon the Sabbath Commandment the quality of the cycle, as opposed to a treatment which is punctiliar and which therefore need not recur. The "holy rhythm" of Israel is given its beat by the treatment of the dependent, and those cyclical features of the life of the community whereby its relationship with YHWH is given reality in time features the dependents, whether slave, sojourner, orphan, or widow. This is the Sabbatical principle: that rest comes, sustenance comes, release comes, celebration comes regularly, periodically, and for the sake of the dependent." Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 136.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 3B. (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2145-271.

<sup>50</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, 1361-63, 1407-8, 1439-36. I am indebted to Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 11, for this synthesis of Milgrom's viewpoint on the Holiness Code and its provenance. In Milgrom's summarizing words, "[It is] probab[le] that the jubilee and, indeed, most of H's laws were motivated by the economic stress of the eighth century, as forcefully punctuated by the prophets." Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2245.



Jubilee legislation and believes execution of the law was plausible in pre-exilic Israel.<sup>51</sup>

**Robert G. North.** North argues in his *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee* that the Jubilee legislation was early and was designed for only one observance. He contends that the conquest generation was much more likely to have embraced the ideal of the Jubilee than the cynical-minded exiles. He also observes that “the jubilee law presumes an agrarian economy of primitive simplicity.”<sup>52</sup> A pre-occupation lawgiver produced the Jubilee legislation as a one-time event that would occur fifty years after the initial occupation of the land.<sup>53</sup> The idea was for unsuccessful farmers to learn from the successful farmers by working as their hired servants. These unsuccessful farmers would be allowed to return to their land on each of the seven-year Sabbath’s to experiment.<sup>54</sup> Then, at the end of fifty years, the unsuccessful farmers would return to their lost land better equipped for farming.<sup>55</sup> Such training would have given Israel a proper economic foundation and a future principle for future generations to learn from if they so chose.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> In fact, Milgrom argues that it likely did occur given the “insertion into the law of the section on houses in walled cities.” Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2247. While I do not hold to Milgrom’s source critical assumptions, the specificity of the legislation is one indicator among others to be discussed later, that the Jubilee did occur historically.

<sup>52</sup> North argues that while the core of the Jubilee legislation is ancient and remained intact across the centuries, it received some minor insertions/updates such as the legislation regarding Levitical houses in a more urbanized culture. See North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 212. Other important supporters of North’s position include William F. Albright, review of North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, *Bib* 37 (1956): 488-90; Albrecht Alt, “The Origins of Israelite Law,” in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 80-132, 128-29; John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), xlii, 427-28.

<sup>53</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 212. The principles of the Jubilee were a basic “rearrangement of existing Semitic economic and calendar usages by an authority of the Occupation era.” In an updated version of his monograph, which includes a review of scholarship since his original monograph, North observes that the argument for a post-exilic date for the jubilee legislation had become stronger. However, he does not concede his original views. See Robert G. North, *The Biblical Jubilee, After Fifty Years*, AnBib 145 (Rome: Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 207.

<sup>55</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 206-7.

<sup>56</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 214-18.

North also applies the Jubilee to contemporary politics, economics, and personal ethics. North argues that the government should foster an egalitarian social order. He also believes that the Jubilee endorses private land ownership, puts real obligation on the rich (“debt in justice”) to care for the poor as an act of worship, teaches a personal detachment from the material world, and fosters a godly work ethic.<sup>57</sup> Finally, North argues that the Jubilee is a type of the coming Messianic era as “it points to a coming era of peace and prosperity.”<sup>58</sup>

**Gordon Wenham.** Wenham argues, “The main purpose of these laws is to prevent the utter ruin of debtors.”<sup>59</sup> While Wenham thinks that Leviticus (or P) is not Mosaic, he believes it is pre-exilic. He bases this conclusion on the archaeological record, which supports the agrarian and egalitarian society presupposed by the Jubilee.<sup>60</sup> For Wenham, the Jubilee year was designed to give a new start to the poor by releasing all debt-slaves, their debts, and returning their lost land originally given to their families during the conquest.<sup>61</sup> Wenham follows North in his application of the Jubilee, including

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<sup>57</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 217-24. The Jubilee also exerts pressure against monopoly and excessive capitalism.

<sup>58</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 230. North continues, More specifically: Just as the Israelite jubilee was the rehabilitation of the bankrupt after a lifetime of servitude, so the messianic jubilee is the admission of the soul to the freedom and wealth of Heaven after a life in more or less degree subject to the servitude of sin and suffering. . . . As the Old Testament law sought to relieve property, so does the New, I Jn 3, 17; Jas 2, 15; but it moreover elevates the spirit of poverty to a value in its own right. The old law controlled the acquisition of material wealth, the new praises those who use this world as if they used it not, I Cor 7, 31; whose business is in heaven, Philp 3, 20. (North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 230)

<sup>59</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 317.

<sup>60</sup> Wenham writes, “Standards of house-building have led archeologists to conclude that early Israel was a relatively egalitarian society, but that, by the later monarchy period, the gap between rich and poor had widened.” Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 317.

<sup>61</sup> Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 319-23. Wenham states, “The jubilee law is thus a guarantee that no Israelite will be reduced to that status again, and it is a celebration of the great redemption when God brought Israel out of Egypt, so that he might be their God and they should be his people (vv. 38, 42, 55; cf. Exod. 19:4-6).” Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 323. The Jubilee also reminded the Israelites

using North's categories.<sup>62</sup>

**C. J. H. Wright.** Wright holds to an evangelical interpretation of the Jubilee. He thus argues that the Jubilee legislation was early (Mosaic), provided personal freedom from debt, and granted insolvent Israelites the opportunity to return to their ancestral property. As to the broader purpose of this legislation, Wright argues that the Jubilee was designed to preserve Israel's kinship bonds (social), maintain Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure (economic), and emphasize Yahweh's ownership of the land (theological).<sup>63</sup> Further, Wright demonstrates that the Jubilee was a necessary override to Israel's laws of redemption, which could have left the land in the hands of a few wealthy landowners.<sup>64</sup> The Jubilee thus buttressed, at least in theory, Israel's social, economic, and theological structure. Even though there is no historical account of a Jubilee being practiced in ancient Israel, Wright is careful to note that the legislation was real. In other words, it was not utopian.

Wright also argues that Israel developed an eschatological interpretation of the Jubilee. For example, Isaiah 61 applied the language of jubilar release to the exilic hope for a Second Exodus. Furthermore, Jesus employed a typological interpretation of the

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that the land belonged to Yahweh (see Lev 25:23) and that they themselves were Yahweh's slaves (see Lev 25:42, 55).

<sup>62</sup> Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, 322-23. See R. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 213-31, and previous discussion of R. North.

<sup>63</sup> C. J. H. Wright has developed his views on the Jubilee in several works. See C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 198-210; Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 289-323; Wright, "Jubilee," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:761-769; and Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). See Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 199-200 for a summary.

<sup>64</sup> Wright explains that the Jubilee is "a mechanism to prevent [the territory from falling into the hands of a few wealthy families in each clan], and to preserve the socio-economic fabric of multiple-household land tenure with the comparative equality and independent viability of the smallest family-plus-land units." Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 205.

Jubilee in his Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:16–30) because the Jubilee categories of release, return, and redemption anticipated his ministry and the future hope of restoration.

Finally, Wright argues that the Jubilee was a paradigm for the early church's ethics and that its principles are universally applicable to contemporary society. The book of Acts alludes to the Jubilee in Acts 1:6, 3:21, and 4:34. These texts in Acts apply the Jubilee not only to the future restoration of God's people but also to the plight of the poor in the church's community.<sup>65</sup> In contemporary society, Wright argues that the Jubilee warrants legislation that restores and equips families to provide for themselves and provides a basis for correcting the inequalities created by international debt. The Jubilee also proclaims the sovereignty of God over time and nature, encourages faith in God's providence, and fosters a personal experience of the deliverance and forgiveness that God has brought.<sup>66</sup>

Wright's understanding of the Jubilee laws provides an important foundation for the present work. He employs helpful categories and language for understanding the Jubilee legislation. Further, Wright shows the value of the Jubilee for both contemporary ethics and for understanding the Bible's grand narrative of redemption, the latter of which is important to this work. Wright's foundational work lays out a strong trajectory from which to build and elaborate.

### **The Jubilee Beyond the Pentateuch**

As this dissertation argues, the Jubilee is picked up by the prophets and applied to Israel's eschatological expectation. Similarly, the following scholars look at the development of the Jubilee across the canon. Many of these scholars also deal with the use

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<sup>65</sup> Thus, the church was not only to communicate a message of "*spiritual* forgiveness of sin and also literal and *financial* remission of actual debts." Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 206.

<sup>66</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 208ff. Wright notes that he is not arguing for redistribution as some other authors do. He argues that the idea of redistribution is grounded in an improper understanding of the Jubilee.

of the Jubilee in the New Testament and the Jubilee's ethical implications, which is beyond the scope of the present work. Nevertheless, all of these scholars provide important categories and theological assessment of the Old Testament data.

**Chris Bruno.** Bruno's article asks, "How is Jesus our Jubilee?" He is most concerned with the present-day ethical implications of the Jubilee. Bruno argues that the proclamation of ἄφεσις by Jesus "refers to forgiveness of sins that results in or is closely linked to release from economic and demonic oppression."<sup>67</sup> According to Bruno, Jesus is inaugurating the eschatological Jubilee in Luke 4. However, Jesus is not completing it since he does not mention the retribution of Yahweh or comfort for those who mourn. Jesus' focus on the spiritual forgiveness of sins with a secondary application to release from physical/economic oppression is continued as a pattern in the early church, as reported by the Luke-Acts narrative. Thus, Bruno concludes, "While other aspects of Jubilee, particularly physical and economic relief, are present in the ministry of Jesus, they are pointers to a greater reality, namely, the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the relationship between God and his people."<sup>68</sup> After summarizing the biblical material, Bruno assesses three popular applications of the Jubilee. He contends that each focuses too heavily on the economic and physical principles of the Jubilee.<sup>69</sup> Bruno argues that ethical application of the Jubilee must maintain an "emphasis on the forgiveness of sin

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<sup>67</sup> Christopher R. Bruno, "'Jesus Is Our Jubilee' . . . But How? The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 1 (March 2010): 98.

<sup>68</sup> Bruno, "'Jesus Is Our Jubilee,'" 99.

<sup>69</sup> Bruno surveys three proposals that use the Jubilee as a base: *the Jubilee 2000 movement*, which argues for African nations to gain economic freedom through debt forgiveness; Wright's *Old Testament Ethics*, which sees the physical remission of debt as the primary focus of the Jubilee while the spiritual forgiveness of sin is a secondary application; and John Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*, which argues that Jesus' Nazareth Manifesto was meant to "initiate an equitable redistribution of capital" through the proclamation of a one-time Jubilee.

and the restoration of the relationship between God and his people.”<sup>70</sup>

**Jonathan Burnside.** Burnside’s *God, Justice, and Society* is an overview of biblical law.<sup>71</sup> He writes from the perspective of a modern lawyer and criminologist. Burnside spends two chapters looking at Israel’s system of social welfare, focusing primarily on the Sabbath day, the Sabbath year, and the Jubilee.<sup>72</sup> He argues that the Jubilee reunited people to their land and families while giving the poor freedom from dependency and personal debt.<sup>73</sup> He takes the text at face value and does not relegate it to utopian fantasy.<sup>74</sup> Burnside’s treatment is made unique by his juxtaposition between “family economics” and “Pharaonic economics.”<sup>75</sup> Thus, “for Israel, the practice of social welfare is about choosing not to be like Pharaoh and choosing to follow God.”<sup>76</sup> Pharaonic economics is associated with hoarding and taking advantage of those in want. Family economics (God-like and thus sacred) means abandoning one’s wealth and sharing one’s abundance with those in need.<sup>77</sup>

Burnside shows not only the way that Israel’s social legislation and especially the Jubilee looked backward, but also how it looked forward. He argues that the NT,

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<sup>70</sup> Bruno, ““Jesus Is Our Jubilee,”” 99.

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>72</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 179-252. He puts the entire “Sabbath spectrum” under the category of “restonomics,” with each Sabbath extended the previous one. His categories for these are unique: the Sabbath, the “Sabbath-plus” for the Sabbath year, and the “Sabbath Squared” for the Jubilee year.

<sup>73</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 202.

<sup>74</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 205-7.

<sup>75</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 207ff.

<sup>76</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 137.

<sup>77</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 237. For the idea of Pharaonic economics, Burnside is following and summarizing Calum Carmichael, “The Sabbatical/Jubilee Cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt,” *Biblica* 90 (1999): 224-39.

following the Prophets, amplifies the Jubilee such that being around Jesus is akin to living in a “perpetual sabbatical year” that joins the forgiveness of spiritual and physical debts and likewise joins the restoration of physical resources, spiritual resources, and reconciliation on both the horizontal (person-to-person) and vertical plain (God-to-person).<sup>78</sup> Burnside concludes by arguing that the biblical legislation strikes a balance between providing liberty and equality, something often dichotomized in secular economics and philosophy. For Burnside, biblical law is quite applicable in today’s contemporary setting. Biblical law thus presents a third way that balances capitalism/conservatism and socialism/liberalism with a third way: chiefly by promoting an even access to means of production.<sup>79</sup>

**Brevard Childs.** Hamilton is not the first to connect the Jubilee to the wider program of redemption. Brevard Childs observes that the Sabbath pointed forward “eschatologically” to the Jubilee year. The Jubilee year also pointed forward to the “messianic sabbath which will be a ‘sabbath without end’ (Jub 2.19–24).”<sup>80</sup> Childs also argues that the Sabbath at creation “was offered as a divine gift to share in [God’s] freedom.” In other words, Child’s observes what this paper argues regarding the Sabbath at creation: the concept of liberation is implicit in the creation narrative and the first Sabbath celebration.

**Ellen Davis.** Davis’s *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture* elucidates the common principles shared by the Hebrew Bible’s agrarian writers and modern agrarian writers like Wendell Berry.<sup>81</sup> Davis is concerned that modern agrarian practice (and the principles

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<sup>78</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 242-43.

<sup>79</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 252.

<sup>80</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 401.

<sup>81</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*

behind it) is causing irreparable harm to the planet and human civilization.<sup>82</sup> Davis uses the texts of Genesis 1, the story of manna provision in Exodus 16, Leviticus 11, 19, and 25, Naboth's vineyard, Amos, Hosea, and the Song of Songs in order to arrive at biblically-based agrarian principles that can be transferred to the modern world. She critiques a wide swath of ethical issues from human trafficking, to the North American meat and slaughterhouse industry, to the use of genetic and transgenic technology in crop design. She concludes that the Jubilee has the "greatest potential for creating widespread social change" because it seeks to prevent the otherwise inevitable gap that develops between the rich and the poor.<sup>83</sup> Davis sees the Jubilee as the prime example of the Bible's agrarian viewpoint that sees farmers, families, and fields as an interconnected ecosystem that must provide mutual care.<sup>84</sup>

**Daniel Gurtner.** Daniel Gurtner provides an excellent exegesis of Isaiah 58:2; Isaiah 61:1-2, and Luke 4:18-19, concluding that Luke uses Isaiah 61 to signal that Jesus' ministry is beginning the eschatological restoration. He also argues that the technical term for release (ἀφεσις) is used only as a metaphor for spiritual forgiveness.<sup>85</sup> Gurtner establishes that the anointed one of Isaiah 61 is the Messiah and thus Jesus.

**James Hamilton.** Hamilton follows Wacholder in arguing that Daniel's seventy weeks (Dan 9:24-27) is a "sevenfold visitation of Jeremiah's seventy years" and a "tenfold jubilee" that predicts "when God's purposes in history will culminate in a tenfold

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(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>82</sup> Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 2-4.

<sup>83</sup> Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 92ff.

<sup>84</sup> Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture*, 90-91.

<sup>85</sup> Daniel M. Gurtner, "Luke's Isaianic Jubilee," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Donald M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 140, 146.



jubilee.”<sup>86</sup> Hamilton contends that the “Davidic Son of Man” will be presented at this tenfold jubilee, which will culminate with a “return to Eden.”<sup>87</sup> Further, Hamilton sees a strong correlation between the “liberty and inheritance” that Israel originally obtained in the Exodus/Conquest and the restoration of “liberty and inheritance” in the Second Exodus.<sup>88</sup> The Jubilee thus “looks back to exodus and forward to new exodus.”<sup>89</sup> I have also had several conversations with Hamilton where he suggested to me that the Jubilee was a “reenactment of the Exodus” and that the Jubilee horn is blown at Jesus’ Second Coming because the Second Coming ushers in the eschatological Jubilee. A number of scholars likewise see Daniel’s seventy weeks as a tenfold Jubilee.<sup>90</sup>

**Walter Houston.** For Houston, the Jubilee is recognized as the “symbol par excellence” for understanding the OT’s system of social justice. Walter Houston contends that the Jubilee was an ideological institution that probably arose during the Persian period.<sup>91</sup> He argues that the Jubilee was not designed as a body of legislation meant to

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<sup>86</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 49.

<sup>87</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 58.

<sup>88</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 125.

<sup>89</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 125. Hamilton cites Isa 27:13 and its use of the Jubilee trumpet as support for this interpretation. He concludes, “The year of jubilee thus crystalizes a significant pattern from Israel’s past, celebrated yearly in their feasts, pointing forward to the culmination of itself when God definitely restores his people.” Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven*, 126. See also James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 199, 332, for similar statements by Hamilton.

<sup>90</sup> See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 544; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 174-75, 456; J. van Goudoever, “Time Indications in Daniel That Reflect the Usage of the Ancient Theoretical So-Called Zadokite Calendar,” in *The Book of Daniel in Light of New Findings*, ed. A. S. van der Woude (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993), 531-38; John J. Collins, *Daniel*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), 352-53; Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran*, 225-32.

<sup>91</sup> Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), 192.

bring about the circumstances it prescribes. Instead, it was meant to “teach justice rather than to enforce detailed regulations.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, the Jubilee called all Israelites who owned land or owned debt to be just toward their needy neighbor. In the same way, the Jubilee calls the contemporary individual to enact justice for the poor.

**Walter Kaiser.** Kaiser’s *Toward Old Testament Ethics* treats the Jubilee within a chapter entitled “Holiness in Wealth and Possessions.”<sup>93</sup> After looking at the use of wealth and prohibitions on interest, Kaiser turns to the Jubilee year. Kaiser argues that the Jubilee legislation served several purposes: to sanctify the land, transform Israel into a kingdom of peace and liberty, and prefigure the glorious liberty that will dawn with God’s kingdom. Kaiser argues that the Jubilee teaches the contemporary people of God that the land belongs to God, God watches carefully over business dealings by looking for holy and fair behavior, and that God calls all his people to deal graciously with the poor. Kaiser also argues that the program of liberation theology is astray because it does not connect the Jubilee to the Day of Atonement.<sup>94</sup> Kaiser is cautious about any calls to grant periodic (economic) Sabbaths or calls in favor of redistributing land to ensure every man has access to land as a means of production.<sup>95</sup>

**David Pleins.** *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible* is the most contemporary treatment of social justice in the ANE, the OT, and the resultant implications for today. Pleins also argues that the Jubilee was “part and parcel of the ideological engine that drove the priestly machine of ritual reform” in post-exilic Israel.<sup>96</sup> In fact, Pleins argues that the

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<sup>92</sup> Houston, *Contending for Justice*, 195.

<sup>93</sup> Walter J. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 209-21.

<sup>94</sup> Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 219.

<sup>95</sup> Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics*, 219-20.

<sup>96</sup> Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, 69.

prophetic literature is woefully inadequate in advocating concrete mechanisms for the alleviation of poverty.<sup>97</sup> Such inadequacy required concrete mechanisms like the post-exilic Jubilee program, although even these mechanisms were only a “utopian commitment to the rectification of the plight of the poor” that mainly served “the Aaronic hold on power in the commonwealth.”<sup>98</sup> Pleins concludes that the OT should not be put into a “straitjacket” whereby there is a single blueprint envisioned by the text. Instead, he calls for openness to the text and a “multifaceted dialogue” on justice, power, and poverty that sees Scripture as a “working analogy” and a “partner” in the contemporary ethical conversation. In other words, Pleins is arguing for a postmodern hermeneutic whereby individual communities allow the text to serve their definitions, means, and ends of social justice.<sup>99</sup>

**Andrew G. Shead.** Shead’s “An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee” follows C. J. H. Wright’s understanding of the historical Jubilee.<sup>100</sup> Shead places the Jubilee within the context of the Bible’s theology of Sabbath. He shows that the Jubilee, like all Sabbaths (day, year, Jubilee), had an eschatological orientation that looked forward to the coming kingdom.<sup>101</sup> Further, in concord with Hamilton, Shead argues that the Jubilee was a reenactment of the Exodus and the Conquest.<sup>102</sup> Shead argues that both Daniel 9 and Isaiah 61 employ and amplify the Jubilee chronologies, albeit each in different ways. Further, he briefly deals with the Second Temple literature, especially

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<sup>97</sup> Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, 78.

<sup>98</sup> Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, 81.

<sup>99</sup> Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible*, 528ff.

<sup>100</sup> Andrew G. Shead, “An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 1 (April 2002): 19-33.

<sup>101</sup> Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 22.

<sup>102</sup> Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 22.

focusing on the use of the Jubilee in *11QMelchizedek*.

Shead's most unique contribution is his close analysis of the Septuagint (LXX) translations of the key Jubilee texts. Shead shows how the translator of the LXX consistently chose ἄφεσις to render multiple technical terms associated with both Sabbath year and Jubilee year releases. The LXX translator uses ἄφεσις to render קָדוֹר (Lev 25:10; Isa 61:1; Ezek 46:17; Jer 34:8, 15, 17), נְשָׁמָה (Deut 15:1; 31:10), יוֹכֵל (Lev 25:13), and קָפְזִי (Deut 15:12–18; Isa 58:6). The result is that the LXX translator has both tightened the links between these texts and “homogenized” these texts so that the release becomes the key focus of the Jubilee.<sup>103</sup> He then argues that the Sabbath, Jubilee, and redemption laws partially realize in the present God's future blessing. These laws thus shape the community of God's people to be “forward-pointing” to the great eschatological Jubilee by encouraging God's people to provide “various types of unmerited ‘release’ at personal cost.”<sup>104</sup> Therefore, Jesus is proclaiming a Jubilee-like release from the bondage to sin and is offering “forgiveness and restoration to a life of sabbatical blessedness in a new creation.”<sup>105</sup>

## The Present Work

As stated, this present work fills a gap in evangelical thinking and biblical theology. C. J. H. Wright and Andrew Shead are the only scholars who try to fill this gap. Their work provides an excellent starting point but needs expansion and the support of detailed exegesis. Bergsma's work is an impressive tour of OT and Second Temple texts associated with the Jubilee. Nevertheless, Bergsma's efforts, which follow C. J. H. Wright, to reconcile the releases of Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 needs

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<sup>103</sup> Shead writes, “The LXX has aided the transformation of ‘ἄφεσις legislation’ from debt-relief law to prophesy of the return from exile to a vision of the final triumph of God's Messiah.” Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 32.

<sup>104</sup> Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 31.

<sup>105</sup> Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 33.

improvement. Further, more thorough exegesis and explanation is needed for how the Jubilee relates to the covenant of Israel, the story of Israel, the redemption laws of Leviticus 25, and the structure of Leviticus as a whole.

The following factors limit the scope of this work. The ANE background of the Jubilee has been well-documented. Its value is limited because of the unique factors of the biblical Jubilee mentioned previously. Thus, only the key documents and institutions are surveyed. Many key texts, such as Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15, Isaiah 61 receive detailed exegesis in order to lay a thorough foundation in the Old Testament text. While there is warrant to explore the way the New Testament picked up and applied the Jubilee to Jesus and ethics, it is necessary that a thorough and unified foundation in the Old Testament is first provided.<sup>106</sup> Thus, this dissertation focuses on the Old Testament alone. Finally, I recognize the broad scope of the present proposal. Any of the chapters proposed deserve a full-length work. However, as noted in the introduction and demonstrated in the history of research, an Old Testament theology of the Jubilee is desperately needed. The thesis of this project and the seven clarifying observations assist me in limiting the scope as I write.

## Methodology

In both the ANE texts and Old Testament texts, this work will analyze the words in the original languages with a sensitivity to the literary and historical context of

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<sup>106</sup> Important contributions to the New Testament's use of the Jubilee include Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Robert Bryan Sloan, Jr., "The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubilar Theology in the Gospel of Luke" (PhD diss., University of Basel, 1977); Donald W. Blosser, "Jesus and the Jubilee (Luke 4:16-30): The Year of Jubilee and Its Significance in the Gospel of Luke" (PhD diss., St. Andrew University, 1979); Donald M. Gurtner, "Luke's Isaianic Jubilee," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 123-46; John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972); Razouselie Lasetso, *The Nazareth Manifesto: The Theology of Jubilee and Its Trajectories in Luke-Acts* (Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India: The Rev. Ashish Amos of Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2005); and Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997).

each text in order to derive at a meaning that aims to represent the intent of the original author of each text. As the work progresses through text, it will attempt to systematically develop a coherent theology of the Jubilee that represents the witness of the various texts in their whole.

This dissertation will begin by looking at ANE parallels to the Jubilee in chapter two. This chapter will show that the Jubilee shared similar goals with the ANE release proclamations. Chapter three will then place the Jubilee within the Sabbath spectrum, showing how the Jubilee is part-and-parcel of the Pentateuch's Sabbath theology and also how the Jubilee looks back to God's creation rest. This chapter will also argue that Deuteronomy 15:12ff. releases dependent debt-slaves after a six-year term while the Jubilee in Leviticus 25:8ff. releases heads of households who have lost the ability to support themselves. The fourth chapter will then take an in-depth look at the Jubilee in Leviticus and other Pentateuch texts, with special attention given to the relationship between the Jubilee and the laws of redemption found in Leviticus 25. This chapter will also look at several proposed examples of a historical Jubilee occurring throughout the Old Testament. The fourth chapter will conclude by making an argument for an early date for the Jubilee and provide critiques of proposals that place the giving of the Jubilee law to a date later than Moses. The fifth chapter will look at key passages in the prophets that pick up the Jubilee and apply it to Israel's eschatological hopes.

## CHAPTER 2

### BACKGROUNDS TO THE JUBILEE

The goal of this chapter is to provide a proper conceptual framework by which to understand the biblical Jubilee. This conceptual framework will provide indirect support to the overall thesis, that the Jubilee was ancient and aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure. This indirect support will come by showing that parallel ANE freedom proclamations were likewise ancient and shared similar goals; by elucidating the system of egalitarian land tenure that the Jubilee was intended to protect; and by arguing that the "Hebrew" slave is a dependent debt-slave, which sets up the subsequent argument that the "hired worker" in Leviticus 25 that is released is a head of household along with any non-debt-slave dependents. Because the nation of Israel was not monolithic and did not exist in a vacuum, this chapter will examine briefly ancient Near Eastern parallels to the biblical Jubilee and the redemption of land and persons. Furthermore, the laws of redemption and the biblical Jubilee did not operate independently of a wider social and legal framework within ancient Israel. Therefore, this chapter will place the Jubilee within Israel's social structure. Finally, since the Jubilee involves the redemption and release of debt-slaves, this chapter will explore debt-slavery in Israel and briefly consider Israel's manumission laws in Exodus 21:1-11.

#### **Social Justice and Proclamations of Freedom in the Ancient Near East**

The nation of Israel shared a "common cognitive environment" with her neighbors.<sup>1</sup> At its heart, the biblical Jubilee is a proclamation of freedom for the benefit of

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<sup>1</sup> John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 26.

Israelites. Proclamations of freedom were a common institution in the ANE and a prominent feature of the ANE cognitive environment. The Jubilee legislation also includes laws concerning the redemption of land and persons. Once again, redemption was a common practice in the ANE. The ANE's freedom proclamations and redemption laws demonstrate that the Jubilee and redemption legislation found in Leviticus 25 and other biblical texts are ancient ideas that were common in the agrarian economies of the ANE. While there are many similarities, these ANE parallels also highlight the unique and distinctive characteristics of the biblical Jubilee and Israel's overall system of social justice. The following chapter provides a brief overview of these laws in order to provide context and color to the details of the biblical Jubilee.

### ***Misharum and Andurarum Proclamations***

Leviticus 25 commands Israel to “proclaim liberty” throughout the land every fiftieth year. The word used for “liberty,” דָּרוּר, has a similar word in both Akkadian, *andurarum* (“justice”), and Babylonian, *misharum* (“freedom”).<sup>2</sup> There are more than twenty witnesses to Babylonian *misharum* and Akkadian *andurarum* proclamations from the ANE. The witnesses begin as early as 2400 BC and continue as late as 550 BC. Most of these proclamations are attested in inscriptions that employ the formula: “Year in which King X established *misharum/andurarum* in the land.”<sup>3</sup> Generally, the verbal giving of

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that freedom proclamations only occurred in Babylon or Akkad. However, Babylonian and Akkadian edicts are the most relevant to this study. Freedom proclamations are attested all over the ANE and ancient Greece. For example, Hatushili I, a Hittite king from sixteenth century BC, granted freedom to the slave residents of the city of Hahum in order to serve in the temple. Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 92). The historian Herodotus reports that the Athenian leader, Solon, granted a release in 594 BC. Further, it was customary for a new Spartan king to release the populace from debts when he ascended to the throne; even the Jewish people were frequently beneficiaries of such freedom proclamations. The Persian King, Ahaseurus, granted a release to the provinces when Esther was crowned. The Seleucid ruler, Demetrius II Nicator, issued a freedom proclamation on behalf of the Jews in 142 BC. See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 145-48, for discussion of these proclamations.

<sup>3</sup> See John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 11. For a list of the proclamations, of which seventeen occur between Hammurabi and Ammisaduqa, see F. R. Kraus, “Ein Edikt des Königs Samsu-Iluna von Babylon,”



the proclamation was accompanied by “the raising of a ceremonial torch.”<sup>4</sup> These acts were chiefly concerned with the remission of debts and the return of confiscated lands to their original owners.<sup>5</sup> It was customary for Babylonian kings to proclaim an act of *misharum* at the beginning of their reigns. This means that such proclamations were often periodic and occurred fairly regularly. Yet, this also means that these proclamations were susceptible to the good will of a king and not guaranteed.<sup>6</sup>

The oldest witnesses are from the Entemana King of Lagash (*andurarum*, c. 2400 BC), the Sumerian King Lipit-Ishtar (*misharum*, c. 1934 BC), and the Babylonian King Hammurabi (*misharum*, c. 1750 BC). Other witnesses come from Mesopotamian sites at Nippur, Sippar, and Mari.<sup>7</sup> These witnesses are attested as late as the Neo-Babylonian period (ca. 750-550 BC).<sup>8</sup> While most of the witnesses occur in regnal formulas, some of the witnesses occur in private documents. For example, an adoption contract from Nuzi, dated to the middle of second millennium BC, ends with the line: “The tablet was written after the proclamation.”<sup>9</sup>

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*Assyrian Studies* 16 (1965): 229; and Christina Simonetti, “Die Nachlaßedikte in Mesopotamien und im Antiken Syrien,” in *Das Jubeljahr im Wandel: Untersuchungen zu Erlaßjahr und Jubeljahrtexten aus vier Jahrtausenden*, ed. G. Scheuermann (Würzburg: Echter, 2000), 30-32. For further discussion of the regnal formula, see Niels Peter Lemche, “Andurārum and Mišarum Comments on the Problem of Social Edicts and their Application in the Ancient Near East,” *JNES* 38, no. 1 (1979): 20-21; Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 93-95. For more recent summaries of the data and its significance for understanding the Jubilee, see Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 20-30; and Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 75-96, 152-78.

<sup>4</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 26.

<sup>5</sup> *ANET*, 183-84.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Kaufman argues similarly: “Although there is no evidence for any fixed periodicity of these proclamations, there is every reason to assume that they were a regular feature of most ancient oriental monarchies, just as many oriental regimes are still regularly inaugurated with political amnesties.” See Stephen A. Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems of Ancient Israel,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon*, ed. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer, JSOTSS 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 279.

<sup>7</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 23-24.

<sup>8</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 23-24.

<sup>9</sup> *ANET*, 189.

There are only two extant texts reporting the content of the proclamations: the partially attested *misharum* proclamation of Samsi-iluna and the fully attested *misharum* proclamation of Ammisaduqa. The content of Ammisaduqa's proclamation is over twenty paragraphs long.<sup>10</sup> The first four paragraphs provide a general sampling of the decree and its provisions:

1. (Text C). The tablet [of the decree which the land was ordered] to hear at the time that the king invoked a *misharum* for the land.
2. (5) The arrears of the farming agents, the shepherds, the *šusikku*-(agents) of the provinces, and (other) crown tributaries—the . . . of their firm agreements and the promissory notes . . . of their payments are herewith remitted. (10) The collecting officer may not sue the crown tributary for payment.
3. The “market” of Babylon, the “markets” of the country(side), the *ra'ibānum*-officer, which in the . . . tablet, are . . . to the collecting officer—(15) their arrears dating from the “Year in which King Ammiditana remitted the debts which the land had contracted (= year 21 of Ammiditana)” until the month of Nisan of the “Year: Ammisaduqa the king, Enlil having (20) magnified his noble lordship, like Shamash (Text A) he rose forth in steadfastness over his country, and instituted justice for the whole of his people (= year 1 of Ammisaduqa)”—because the king has invoked the *misharum* for the land, (25) the collecting officer may not sue the . . . for payment.
4. Whoever has given barley or silver to an Akkadian or an Amorite as an interest-bearing loan, or on the *melqētum* basis (30) [or ] . . . and had a document executed—because the king has invoked the *misharum* for the land, his document is voided; (35) (Text C) he may not collect the barley or silver on the basis of his document.<sup>11</sup>

These opening paragraphs announce a general remission of debts, apply a scope of time to those debts, and apply a geographical region to where the proclamation is enforceable. This proclamation also links the giving of the proclamation (“has invoked the *misharum*”) with the institution of “justice for the whole of his people.” The link between social justice and the giving of freedom proclamations is common in the ANE and sheds light on how the Jubilee fits into the bigger picture of Israel's law. For now, it is sufficient to say that the Jubilee was aimed at instituting justice in the social and physical sphere.

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<sup>10</sup> See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 169, for a brief but helpful discussion of Ammisaduqa's decree.

<sup>11</sup> *ANET*, 184.

Ammisaduqa's decree extends beyond a general forgiveness of debts. The decree also releases citizens from various taxes owed to the crown:

12: The *šusikku*-agent of the land who (15) customarily receives [the carcasses] from the palace cattle-herdsmen, shepherds, and goatherds under divine oath, (and) who (21) customarily renders to the palace: For every cow carcass: one (quantity) of sin[ews] together with the skin; for every ewe-carcass: one-sixth . . . barley, together with the skin, plus  $1\frac{3}{4}$  minas of wool; for every goat-carcass: one-sixth of [a shekel] of silver plus  $\frac{2}{3}$  of a mina of goat-wool,—because the king has instituted the *misharum* for the land, their arrears will not be collected. The . . . (of) the *šusikku*-agent of the land (25) (the quotas) . . . will not be filled.<sup>12</sup>

Paragraph 20 releases those who have sold themselves into debt-slavery in certain cities. These cities would have been outside the “market of Babylon” listed in paragraph 3:

20: (25) If an obligation has resulted in foreclosure against a citizen of Numhia, a citizen of Emutbalum, a citizen of Idamaras, a citizen of Uruk, a citizen of Isin, a citizen of Kisurra, or a citizen of Malgium, (in consequence of which) he [placed] his own person, his wife (30) or his [children] in debt servitude for silver, or as a pledge—because the king has instituted the *misharum* in the land, he is released; his freedom (35) is in effect.<sup>13</sup>

Paragraphs 5-7 of the edict also contain punishment for those who violate the *misharum* by demanding payment, not refunding interest paid, etc. Paragraph 9 excludes loans in grain or silver that were given for commercial ventures. Other paragraphs deal with taxes on specific goods or types of tradesmen, tributaries owed to the crown, leases of fields by military personnel, etc. Significantly, the proclamation does not include the return of fields. However, Weinfeld convincingly argues that the return of fields can be assumed since other proclamations of *misharum* in the same period include the return of ancestral property.<sup>14</sup>

Although the provisions may have varied within individual proclamations, the evidence points to a common goal for ANE freedom proclamations: to annul economic

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<sup>12</sup> *ANET*, 186.

<sup>13</sup> *ANET*, 187.

<sup>14</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 169.

injustices, gain the loyalty of citizens, and ensure economic strength and stability. These proclamations granted freedom to slaves and indentured servants, annulled debts, returned lost land, canceled taxes, and freed citizens from various civil obligations like military service or forced labor. The proclamations also provided for the restoration of temples, the rebuilding of cities, and the return of exiles.<sup>15</sup> As the edict of Ammisaduqa shows, these proclamations were often limited to certain cities, provinces, or classes of citizens. On the one hand, the biblical Jubilee offered a wider release since all citizens of Israel were included. On the other hand, the biblical Jubilee's release was more limited because it does not envision release from military service, forced labor, or taxes. This is probably because Israel was designed as a theocracy with Yahweh as their king. In other words, there was not supposed to be an earthly king to whom Israelites owed taxes, service, etc. They owed these things to Yahweh.

In addition to the civil elements, these proclamations operated as religious and cultic acts.<sup>16</sup> This was in part due to the fact that rights of freedom were regularly granted to holy cities. In fact, while *misharum* and *andurarum* proclamations focused on the past, the Akkadians practiced *kiddinutu* ("protection"), which guaranteed special rights in the future to the citizens of a sacred city. The content of the *kiddinutu* proclamation would be placed on poles at the entrance to the city or Temple, announcing to all who entered that the citizens of these cities were excluded from taxation, military or corvée conscription, confiscation of land, etc., in the future.<sup>17</sup>

The idea of freedom was also associated with the realm of the divine in the ANE worldview. For Bergsma, this provides an important insight into the Hebrew worldview and the way in which the Jubilee, which was a super-Sabbath, was connected to the

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<sup>15</sup> See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 140-41.

<sup>16</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 26.

<sup>17</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 27-28.

Sabbath-rest originally ordained at creation:

In the Akkadian worldview, the prototypical establishment of *andurarum* was not for man, but the gods. The freedom and leisure of *andurarum* was associated with the realm of the divine; for mankind to experience *andurarum* would be to participate in the divine life. A certain correspondence with the Hebrew worldview is apparent: the sabbath rest was established primordially for God himself (Gen 2:2-3). When humanity later also rests on the sabbath day, they participate in the divine life (Exod 20:8-10). Likewise, the cycles of sabbatical years and jubilees in Lev 25 allow mankind—and indeed, the land itself—periodically to enjoy the divine rest.<sup>18</sup>

As will be discussed later, experiencing the Jubilee was tantamount to experiencing the freedom God granted Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden.

### The Laws of Hammurabi

Even though they are much older, the Laws of Hammurabi (LH) deserve a closer look since they are nearer in content to the biblical Jubilee than the other extant *misharum* proclamations. The LH are commonly dated around 1750 BC.<sup>19</sup> The reign of Hammurabi was marked by geographical, military, and government expansion that centralized and solidified Babylon's control over eastern Mesopotamia.<sup>20</sup> The LH is the “longest and best organized” collection of laws from Mesopotamia.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the

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<sup>18</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 21.

<sup>19</sup> Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., Writings from the Ancient World, vol. 6 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 91.

<sup>20</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 91.

<sup>21</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 91. See Roth, *Law Collections*, 73-76, for a survey of the sources and the minor variations in content that exist. Martha T. Roth reports that the LH maintained influence for over a millennium: “In addition to the famous monument, some fifty manuscripts are known to record all or part of the laws, prologue, and epilogue of the composition. The manuscripts range from those contemporary with the time of Hammurabi through to the middle of the first millennium, and come from a variety of sites. The scribes in schools studied and copied the Laws, and engaged in exercises resulting in commentaries to and extracts of the composition, and even one Sumerian-Akkadian bilingual.” Martha T. Roth, “The Laws of Hammurabi,” in *Monumental Inscriptions from the Biblical World*, COS 2, ed. William W. Hallo [Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2000], 336.

Copies of the LH were posted by Hammurabi in multiple cities within his realm. Roth, “Laws of Hammurabi,” 335. However, the most famous copy is etched into the Louvre Stela: “Hammurabi himself, however, achieved and retained enormous personal appeal as a charismatic leader both during his lifetime and after. The enduring power of Hammurabi's name and deeds is dramatically demonstrated by the seven and a half foot tall stela with the most complete edition of the Laws, which was taken from Sippar as booty to Susa by conquering Elamites five hundred years later (Roth, “Laws of Hammurabi,” 336).

prologue of LH, Hammurabi claims to have established truth and justice via a *misharum* proclamation: “When the god Marduk commanded me to provide just ways for the people of the land (in order to attain) appropriate behavior, I established truth and justice [misharum] as the declaration of the land, I enhanced the well-being of the people.”<sup>22</sup> Martha Roth observes the integral connection in the LH between the gods’ appointment of Hammurabi and his duty to enact justice for the weak and powerless via the mechanism of a *misharum*.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the LH makes explicit the connection between the civil act and its religious/cultic underpinnings. This is again helpful for understanding the Jubilee’s place within Israel’s wider framework. For one to experience the freedom of the Jubilee was tantamount to experiencing Yahweh doing justice on one’s behalf.

Besides the link between justice and freedom, the LH are closer to the biblical Jubilee than many of the other *misharum* proclamations because, uniquely, the LH puts a set time limit on debt-slavery. LH §117 guarantees *misharum* for those in bondage on a set time frame: “If an obligation is outstanding against a man and he sells or gives into debt service his wife, his son, or his daughter, they shall perform service in the house of their buyer or of the one who holds them in debt service for three years; their release [andurāršunu] shall be secured in the fourth year.”<sup>24</sup> LH §118 stipulates that slaves can be sold to cover a debt and that they are not subject to a release after three years like a family member would have been. LH §119 stipulates that an owner of a slave-woman

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The Louvre Stela was excavated from Susa in 1901-1902, and then transferred to the Louvre Museum where it remains to this day. Roth, *Law Collections*, 73. See *ANET*, fig. 59 for a picture. The top of the stela pictures Hammurabi standing before the sun-God Shamash, the god of justice. Although it is not clear what action is to be inferred from the scene, the significance is evident: Hammurabi and Shamash are pictured as joint-guarantors of justice in Babylon. Roth, *Law Collections*, 73.

<sup>22</sup> Laws of Hammurabi, Prologue, Tablet V, Ins. 14-24, in Roth, *Law Collections*, 80-81.

<sup>23</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 71.

<sup>24</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 103.

who has borne children belonging to the owner must redeem her.

LH §119 has striking similarity to Exodus 21:7-8, which forbids an Israelite master from selling a female debt-slave to a foreign people. Ostensibly, the legislation is written to protect female slaves from sexual exploitation. Exodus 21:7-8 stipulates that he must let her be redeemed if the master will not keep her in marriage: “When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has broken faith with her.”

Furthermore, while the similarities are not exact, the biblical legislation also limits the length of debt-servitude to seven years. According to Deuteronomy 15:12, Israelite debt-slaves were to be released on the seventh year: “If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.” There is some debate about whether this release happened at the end of seven years or during the Sabbath year. Such debt-slaves would have also been released on the super-Sabbath-year, the Jubilee. Whatever the differences, there is a strong conceptual relation: both the LH and Israel’s law places a determinate term on debt slavery.<sup>25</sup>

### **Significance of ANE Proclamations**

The ANE parallels support the early date for the Jubilee legislation which is assumed by Leviticus 25. The ANE parallels also show a similar concern as the Jubilee legislation does, namely, of providing family and economic stability. Further, the ANE parallels establishes that the release of lands, persons, and debts that is legislated in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 is accepted practice in the ANE. While there are many striking conceptual similarities, the biblical Jubilee has a number of unique components.

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<sup>25</sup> For a fuller treatment of Exod 21, see the end of the chapter. For a fuller treatment of Deut 15 and its relationship to the Jubilee in Lev 25, see chap. 3.

It is true that the biblical Jubilee is a proclamation of freedom, but the similarity is one in concept only. The following section is an assessment of the major similarities and differences.<sup>26</sup>

First, the language employed in the Jubilee legislation has a striking similarity to the language used in ANE freedom proclamations. The Hebrew word used to describe the release of land and debt-slaves during the Jubilee is דָּרוֹר: “And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty [דָּרוֹר] throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee [יּוֹבֵל] for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan” (Lev 25:10).<sup>27</sup> דָּרוֹר is a cognate with the Akkadian *andurarum*. HALOT defines דָּרוֹר as “release” (of slaves in the sabbatical year) and claims that it is a loanword from the Akkadian (*an*)*durāru*, which is translated as “tax exemption.”<sup>28</sup>

Julius Lewy has argued that there is a close connection between the Akkadian practice of *andurarum* and the Israelite practice of דָּרוֹר. He bases his argument on the linguistic similarity between *andurarum* and דָּרוֹר, thus arguing that the Israelites borrowed and adapted the Akkadian practice in post-exilic times.<sup>29</sup> Lemche rejects the late dating of the institution but has argued for a late borrowing of the word on the basis that Akkadian tended to drop the *an*- prefix at a later period.<sup>30</sup> Scholars like Lewy and Lemche are also influenced by the broader critical argument that the Jubilee institution and the accompanying language of דָּרוֹר is late because the word is not present in Nehemiah 5.

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<sup>26</sup> See exegesis of Lev 25 in chap. 4 in this dissertation for a more thorough comparison.

<sup>27</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from English Standard Version.

<sup>28</sup> HALOT, s.v. “דָּרוֹר III.”

<sup>29</sup> See Julius Lewy, “The Biblical Institution of *Derôr* in the Light of Akkadian Documents,” *EI* 5 (1958): 21-31.

<sup>30</sup> Neils Peter Lemche, “The Manumission of Slaves—The Fallow Year—The Sabbatical Year—The Jubel Year,” *VT* 26 (1976): 56-57.



They also argue that Leviticus 25 is not quoted, alluded to, or echoed in Nehemiah 5.

Lemche and Lewy are correct to stipulate that the institutions are similar. Their linguistically-based argument that the institution of *דָּרוֹר* must be late is incorrect and stretches the evidence. Preformatives like *an-* are weak in Semitic languages and tend to assimilate. Kaufman believes *דָּרוֹר* to be ancient because it is an “etymon, both linguistic and institutional” of *andurarum*.<sup>31</sup> He also argues that the vowel shifts between *andurarum* and *דָּרוֹר* are very early: “The shift of long *ā* in *(an)durārum* to *ō* in *dērōr* suggests that the borrowing of the term occurred in second-millennium Canaanite where it was subsequently subject to the Canaanite vowel shift. Those, like Lemche . . . who would argue for a borrowing in Neo-Assyrian times have the burden of linguistic evidence against them.”<sup>32</sup>

Bergsma also rejects Lewy and Lemche’s linguistic argument because of the tendency of preformatives to assimilate in all Semitic languages:

It has been claimed that the loss of the initial *an-* in the Hebrew *derôr* indicates that it was borrowed from Akkadian only in the neo-Assyrian period, when the prefix had been dropped, leaving *durārum*. . . . However, a preformative like *an-* is phonetically weak in Semitic languages and subject to assimilation. Other evidences point to an early borrowing of the word.<sup>33</sup>

The evidence, then, is as follows: *דָּרוֹר* is likely an early word, it is cognate to the Akkadian *andurarum* even though the *an-* preformative is absent, and *דָּרוֹר* might have been borrowed from *andurarum*, although it is equally plausible that similar parent languages and conceptual worlds led to parallel development and usage of the two words.

The Babylonian word *misharum* also has a Hebrew cognate, מִשָּׁרִים (“evenness,

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<sup>31</sup> Kaufman, “Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 279. Kaufman’s argument that the borrowing is early is significant given his critical reconstruction of the fallow year, Sabbath year, and Jubilee laws. He dates the composition of Lev 25 to the post-exilic period, but does not think Nehemiah’s silence places Lev 25 after Nehemiah’s time. While he dates Lev 25 and the Jubilee quite late, he believes it is a restructuring and synthesizing of the older legislation from the covenant code of Exodus and the Deuteronomistic code of Deuteronomy. See Kaufman, “Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 279-83.

<sup>32</sup> Kaufman, “Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 285n7.

<sup>33</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 20-21n3.

level; uprightness, equity”; see Isa 45:19; Ps 99:4; Dan 11:6).<sup>34</sup> While some scholars want to show direct verbal dependence of מִשְׁאֵרִים and דָּרוֹר to the Akkadian *andurarum* and Babylonian *misharum*, it is more likely that the similar terminology also exists because of a shared conceptual world.<sup>35</sup> These Semitic roots are appropriate descriptors for what ANE freedom proclamations or the biblical Jubilee proclamation accomplished. There is not sufficient evidence to argue, as some have, that the similar roots indicate a direct borrowing or adapting of the Akkadian or Babylonian freedom proclamations. Weinfeld argues that the common idea behind all the words is “free movement,” an apt description given that slaves are set free to move about as they wish: “The names for “liberty” in both Akkadian and Hebrew are connected with the idea of free movement. The Akkadian name *mīšarum* is derived from *ešēru*, a verb which includes the meaning “to go straight ahead,” whereas *durārum* has the meaning “to roll without restraint.”<sup>36</sup>

A second conceptual similarity between Leviticus 25 and freedom proclamations in the ANE is the focus on family stability. The Sumerian word used for freedom proclamations, such as that given by Entemana of Lagash (c. 2400 BC), is *ama-ar-gi*, which is translated by the Akkadian word *andurarum* and literally means “return to the mother.” This phrase is an idiom that signifies the restoration of families that were

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<sup>34</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *TWOT* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), s.v. “מִשְׁאֵרִים”; BDB, s.v. “מִשְׁרָ.”

<sup>35</sup> Several other articles and monographs contribute to this debate. See Eduard Neufeld, “Socio-Economic Background of יִבְלָה and יִשְׁמְטָה,” *RSO* 33 (1958): 53-124; J. P. J. Olivier, “The Old Babylonian *Mēšarum*-Edict and the Old Testament” (DLitt diss., Stellenbosch University, 1977). Kaufman observes, “Hebrew *mēšārīm* (מִשְׁרָיִם), ‘justice’, and Akkadian *mēšarum* are undoubtedly cognate, yet whether the Hebrew term ever had the technical sense of the Old Babylonian one is uncertain.” Kaufman, “Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 279.

<sup>36</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 159. See also J. P. J. Olivier, who writes: “It would seem that the practice of דָּרוֹר was originally intended to alleviate the burden of those Hebrew slaves in debt servitude by releasing them (from their obligations), cancelling their debts, and restoring to them the possibility of starting anew on their ancestral land—hence “freedom.” . . . As such it can be compared with the Old Babylonian *mēšarum* and the more general *andurāru* practices, which were intended to restore economic equilibrium in the country when too much wealth had become concentrated into too few hands.” (J. P. J. Olivier, “דָּרוֹר III,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. William A. VanGemeren [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997], 965-66)

broken apart. This is conceptually analogous to the Jubilee's mandate to return (שׁוּב) to the clan (בִּישְׁפָּטָה) and family inheritance (אֲחֻזָּה) in Leviticus 25:10.<sup>37</sup>

A third similarity between the biblical Jubilee and ANE freedom proclamations are the accompanying symbolic acts. The Jubilee was proclaimed by the blowing of a shofar horn throughout the land (see Lev 25:9). Similarly, they raised a golden torch in Mesopotamia to signify that release had been granted. Jeremiah 6:1 puts these symbolic gestures in parallel: "Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem."<sup>38</sup> Thus, Israel's Jubilee and ANE freedom proclamations were both accompanied by symbolic actions in order to communicate that release had been granted.<sup>39</sup>

A fourth similarity is the common goal shared by the institutions. Both the Jubilee and freedom proclamations in the ANE were aimed at redressing economic injustice. Both institutions want to see "justice and righteousness" achieved in the socioeconomic sphere. This common goal also means that the benefits granted in ANE freedom proclamations are similar to those granted in the Jubilee. Several ANE proclamations granted clothing as an added benefit to the release. It is possible that some Israelites would have gone beyond what is prescribed in Leviticus 25 during a Jubilee release. This possibility is heightened when one considers that the promised Messiah in Isaiah 61 gave clothes to the prisoners, who are likewise set free by an eschatological jubilee-like proclamation.

A fifth and final similarity is the cultic connection. The biblical Jubilee was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. In Israel, physical and economic freedom was

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<sup>37</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 22. For fuller discussion of the Entemana text, see Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 22; and Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 79.

<sup>38</sup> So also Isa 18:3b: "When a signal is raised on the mountains, look! When a trumpet is blown, hear!" Isaiah 8:13 is not describing a Jubilee; instead, the trumpet announces the onset of Yahweh's presence, which the Jubilee does as well.

<sup>39</sup> See Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 157-58, for further discussion of symbolic actions accompanying ANE freedom proclamations.

accompanied by the proclamation of spiritual freedom and forgiveness. In the ANE, freedom from slavery was equated with divine blessing. An Israelite who was restored to their land would have experienced the divine gift of their ancestral property just as their ancestors had in Joshua's generation. Just like in the Exodus, Yahweh's law meant that Israelites were released once again from slavery and taken into a promised plot of land.

These similarities give color to the biblical Jubilee and fill in some of the gaps in the modern-day understanding that Israelites would have naturally understood. Further, as stated previously, these similarities indicate that the Jubilee is original to the time of Moses and that its goal was the stability of Israelite families' on their land. Despite the similarities, there are important and remarkable differences. First, the Jubilee was enacted by individuals. While Nehemiah effected a release of debts (Neh 5:1-13) and Zedekiah proclaimed a general release (Jer 34:8-11), Leviticus 25 puts the responsibility on individual Israelites. While it might be presumed that the priests would blow the shofar horn, the legislation is addressed to individual Israelites and it was thus their covenant responsibility.<sup>40</sup> Second, the Jubilee was cyclical. While LH §117 limits the term of debt-slavery, it does not limit the term that land can be purchased/leased like the Jubilee does. Third, the Jubilee's aim was much more specific as it was the chief mechanism for protecting Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure. ANE freedom proclamations were certainly motivated by a desire to establish economic stability, but *misharum* edicts did not put entire societies on equal economic and social footing as does the biblical legislation. Fourth, the ANE parallels support the historicity of Cyrus' proclamation to the exiles and Artaxerxes' provision for Jerusalem during Nehemiah's time. The universal existence of *misharum*, *andurarum*, and *kiddinutu* proclamations backs up the historicity of the biblical accounts. Cyrus and Artaxerxes were acting like other ANE kings had acted for thousands of years. These ANE freedom proclamations are also quite

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<sup>40</sup> In later biblical texts, the Jubilee became an important image for understanding the just rule of the messianic king. But, this is a secondary development from the original legislation.

analogous to Ezekiel's vision that demanded the following parallel actions: the preservation of patrimony, cancellation of taxes and levies, the organized collection of tithes, and the establishment of just weights and measures.<sup>41</sup>

In conclusion, the parallels are helpful but it is going too far to argue that the Jubilee was a *misharum* edict. This is not to say that the parallels are without use. These parallels demonstrate that the shared concept between the ANE freedom proclamations and the biblical Jubilee is ancient. One does not need to presume a late date for Leviticus 25 like Fager, De Vaux, Lewy, Lemche, and other critical scholars do.<sup>42</sup> Further, the ANE freedom proclamations provide mental constructs that can fill out what a full-scale Jubilee would have involved if one had happened.

### **Redemption of Land and Persons in the Ancient Near East**

This dissertation also considers Israel's legislation regarding the redemption of land and persons. The biblical Jubilee and Israel's program of redemption go hand in hand. Israel's legislation on redemption is located within the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25. Further, the Jubilee itself redeems people from the bondage of slavery and restores them to their ancestral land. Most importantly, the biblical Jubilee is a necessary override to the practice of redemption. Scenarios can be imagined in which a few wealthy families within a clan "redeem" the land of other clan members and keep it in their possession permanently, thus undermining Israel's egalitarian economic and social structure. The most significant work on ANE redemption of land and persons is Leggett's monograph, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament*.<sup>43</sup> The following section offers a brief

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<sup>41</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 55.

<sup>42</sup> See chap. 1 of this dissertation for discussion of de Vaux, North, et al. and similar arguments regarding a late dating of the Jubilee.

<sup>43</sup> Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament: With Special Attention to the Book of Ruth* (Cherry Hill, NJ: Mack Publishing, 1974). See chap. 1 for overview of this work.

survey of laws in the ANE pertaining to the redemption of lands and persons. These laws show a general correspondence with Israelite law and show that the practice was widespread in the ancient Near East.<sup>44</sup>

### **Relevant Laws for Land Redemption**

The most—and perhaps only—relevant law is from the Laws of Eshnunna (LE; c. 1770 BC). Eshnunna was an influential city-state located in northern Mesopotamia on the Dijala River, which is modern Tell Asmar.<sup>45</sup> LE §39 reads, “If a man is hard up and sells his house, the owner of the house shall (be entitled to) redeem (it) whenever the purchaser (re)sells it.”<sup>46</sup> According to Samuel Greengus, the parallel here is the set of circumstances.<sup>47</sup> Just as an Israelite would sell his ancestral land because of insolvency, so the original owner in the LE was forced to sell because of economic hardship. LE §39 is silent on the length of time for which redemption is allowed and the appropriate redemption price. Further, LE §39 is unlike the Israelite laws in Leviticus 25 because the biblical law is based on ancestral rights to the property.<sup>48</sup>

Besides the LE, both Greengus and Leggett cite redemption provisions attested in private sale contracts that range from “early second to the middle of the first millennium BCE.”<sup>49</sup> Several of these contracts come from northern Syria in the second millennium BC. A contract from Emar states that the seller can redeem his house for up to one year:

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<sup>44</sup> This survey does not look at cases of redemption reported in the biblical record. These will be dealt with in chap. 4 of this dissertation (see Lev 25:47-53; Ruth 3-4 ; Jer 32:8-15; Isa 52:3; Neh 5:1-13). A helpful overview comparing general laws of redemption with the biblical record can be found in Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the Ancient Near East* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 86-112.

<sup>45</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> *ANET*, 153.

<sup>47</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 110.

<sup>48</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 111.

“If in the future, Zu-ba’la (the debtor and seller)—up to one year of days—will pay these 30 shekels silver to the (new) owners (of the house) he may take it back.”<sup>50</sup> The contract also stipulates that any other claimants have up to two years to come forward to redeem the house via payment of the 30 shekels. According to Greengus, other contracts from Emar do not set a time limit on the right of redemption.<sup>51</sup> Despite these parallels, the contracts from Emar are not uniform and offer little insight into the fuller redemption laws of Leviticus 25.

Private sale contracts from ancient Babylon are similar in their scope and provisions. In general, the original seller retained the right to redeem their land if they were forced into selling it to survive economically. This right of redemption is implied in Khafajah text 82, which grants the seller a permanent right to redeem the field:

“Whenever he (Kalarum) will acquire money of his own, he may redeem the field. He cannot redeem the field with money belonging to another person.” It can be assumed that Israel’s practice of land redemption, although not specifically mentioned, also precluded someone from redeeming their field with borrowed money. Leggett quotes R. Yaron, who explains that this restriction was widespread in ancient systems of law: “The ownership in property acquired with a third person’s money rests in that third person, not in the actual buyer. Consequently, repurchase of the field with money belonging to an outsider would not result in true redemption, merely in the substitution of a new alienee for the earlier one.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 111. See Daniel Arnaud, *Recherches au Pays d’Aštata: Emar vi.3*, Textes Sumériens et Accadiens (Paris: Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1986), 123, for the document. Raymond Westbrook, “Social Justice in the Ancient Near East,” in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook*, ed. Bruce Wells and Rachel Magdalene (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 153, also discusses this contract.

<sup>51</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 111.

<sup>52</sup> Reuven Yaron, *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 2nd rev. ed. (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 153.

## **Assessment of ANE Land Redemption Laws**

While the ANE redemption documents show a similar economic motivation to that of Israel's, not all of them are motivated by the concept of family property that undergirded Israel's economic system. Despite the difference in motivations, the right of redemption is generally the same in the ANE as it was in Israel. However, Israel's redemption laws are much less limited than what is frequently attested in the ANE.

Greengus observes,

There are other sales, at Emar and elsewhere, where a connection to debt is not mentioned. There are also cases where a higher amount had to be paid in order to redeem or where any redemption is expressly denied. In the Bible, the right of redemption is supported by a concept of family property; a similar concept was also operative at Emar (and at Nuzi); but one may not assume that the concept of family holdings was the prime motivation everywhere. In Babylonia, easing the situation of free persons who fell into debt seems in itself to have been a sufficient, motivating principle.<sup>53</sup>

Leggett's conclusion is a fitting and succinct conclusion to the matter: "The available evidence suggests a general correspondence between Israelite and Babylonian law."<sup>54</sup>

## **Relevant Laws for Person Redemption**

Redemption of persons was as widespread a practice in the ANE as was the redemption of alienated land. Persons could be redeemed from captivity as a result of war, redeemed from slavery, or redeemed from debt-slavery. The legislation in Leviticus 25:47ff. is concerned with the latter situation. The Middle Assyrian Laws (MAL), dated to the middle of the eleventh century BC, restrict a master's right to marry off a debtor's daughter without the debtor's permission. The provision is located in MAL Tablet A, §48:

If a man [wants to give in marriage] his debtor's daughter who is residing in his house as a pledge, he shall ask permission of her father and then he shall give her to

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<sup>53</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 112.

<sup>54</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 67.



a husband. If her father does not agree, he shall not give her. If her father is dead, he shall ask permission of one of her brothers and the latter shall consult with her (other) brothers. If one brother so desires he shall declare, 'I will redeem my sister within one month'; if he should not redeem her within one month, the creditor, if he so pleases, shall clear her of encumbrances and shall give her to a husband.<sup>55</sup>

This law protects the daughter's interest and grants the right of redemption to the father—along with authority over her marriage—as long as he lives. The brothers right of redemption is present but quite limited in its time duration—one month. Like LH §119 reviewed previously, the Middle Assyrian law protects female debt-slaves from exploitation. LH §117, already reviewed previously, is similar to the biblical law in that it sets the time of service to a set time frame of three years. The practice proceeded the time of Hammurabi, as attested in earlier Middle Assyrian texts, such as Khajafah text 88. This text demonstrates the relative's right of redemption. In this case, a son sells himself to the service of the Temple to redeem his father: "17 shekels of silver for the redemption of Hagaliga, his father, Zagagan has received (as a loan). (But) he had no silver (with which to repay the loan), (so) he sold himself to the *enum* priest."<sup>56</sup> This text attests to a son redeeming his father with loaned money. The son then sells himself into debt-slavery to a priest to cover the money. This is similar to Israel's legislation, where the responsibility of redemption begins with the nearest relatives. However, the biblical legislation does not envision the redeeming relatives subsequently selling themselves into slavery. In fact, as will be shown in chapter 4, sons or daughters likely would have been sold into debt-slavery before the father would have been sold. Other documents from Sippar and Mari attest to slaves paying their own redemption price, loans transacted for the purpose of redemption, and receipts for redemption prices having been paid.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 173.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 69. Reports of the dig and the general contents of the archive can be found in R. Harris, "The Archive of the Sin Temple in Khafajeh," *JCS* 9, no. 3 (1955): 33-34, 42-43. The Khajafah texts date to a time previous to Hammurabi's dynasty. The texts are an archive of over 100 tablets found in a temple dedicated to the god Sin. The tablets document the transactions and correspondence of the-priest in residence.

<sup>57</sup> Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions*, 69-70.

## **Assessment of Person Redemption Laws**

As Greengus argues, the “traditional right of redemption” was widespread. This is because persons living in the ANE had little recourse other than borrowing from others if they fell into hard times. Often, the only capital a debtor had to offer was either their land or the labor that they themselves could provide as a debt-slave. The conditions in Israel were no different. If an Israelite was unable to pay back their debts, they typically only had their land and person. It is true that they could sell or trade other assets as collateral, such as livestock, equipment like millstones, etc. However, given the widespread practice of debt-slavery and redemption, these movable assets would have exhausted quickly. What sets Israel apart is the extensive redemption legislation and its grounding in Yahweh’s character and past actions.

## **Social and Economic Structure of Ancient Israel**

The experience of the average Israelite is foreign to those living in the third millennium. At its most basic level, the average Israelite’s life was organized into family and kin groups who shared in various agrarian activities.<sup>58</sup> Less than 2 percent of the U.S. population are farmers today.<sup>59</sup> It was exactly the opposite in ancient Israel, where even centers of royal administration like Jerusalem still found their commerce centered in agriculture. This is demonstrated by the existence of the Jerusalem Sheep Gate (Neh 3:1) and the Jerusalem Fish Gate (Neh 3:3), where, presumably, sheep or fish would have been bought and sold by Israelites or travelers. Animals and agricultural products were a regular part of everyday life for all Israelites from the occupation under Joshua through the Second Temple period and beyond.

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<sup>58</sup> Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, Library of Ancient Israel (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 4.

<sup>59</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 8.

## **Israelite Identity and the Land**

To rightly understand the Jubilee provisions, one must rightly understand an Israelite's relationship to his assigned plot of land. Israelite's identity was wrapped up in their kinship group and in their plot of inherited land originally given to their family during the conquest years under Joshua. The repeated promise in the prophets that every Israelite would sit "under his vine and under his fig-tree" demonstrated that Israelite identity was tied to their land (1 Kgs 5:5; Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). The story surrounding Naboth and his vineyard further illustrates the common Israelite understanding of his land (1 Kgs 21:1-16).

## **The Ownership and Division of the Land**

Leviticus 25:23 proclaims that Yahweh's ownership is the fundamental truth about the land of Israel. The Israelites possessed the land as their inheritance. Yet, ultimately, the land of Canaan belonged to Yahweh. Joshua 22:19 illustrates this tension well. When Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh built a symbolic altar of witness to the Lord, the heads of the western tribes reprimanded them: "But now, if the land of your possession is unclean, pass over into the Lord's land where the Lord's tabernacle stands, and take for yourselves a possession among us." Joshua's instructions are helpful because they demonstrate the dual understanding of the land that was present in Israel. The land was the inheritance of the Israelites and it was their possession while it also belonged to the Lord.

The variety of terms used by the Hebrew Bible to describe the land points to the reality of its dual-ownership by individual Israelites and by Yahweh. נַחֲלָה ("inheritance, inalienable or hereditary property"), רֶשֶׁת ("possession, landed property"), and גֹּזֶרֶל ("allotment, plot, portion, share") are the most common descriptors employed to describe the land. A survey of these terms illustrates Israel's complex understanding of the land. For the term נַחֲלָה, a "triangular usage" points to the land as the inheritance of every individual within the nation (Num 32:18; Deut 19:14), the land as the inheritance of Yahweh (Exod

15:17; 1 Sam 26:19; 2 Sam 20:19), and even Israel as Yahweh's inheritance (Deut 32:8-9).<sup>60</sup> Within the *הַנֶּחֱלָה* perspective of the land, Israelites understood that it was ultimately an inheritance given to them by the Lord. Numerous examples of this perspective exist. The issue revolving around the daughters of Zelophehad's plot of land represents the link between inheritance and divine gift. Numbers 36:2 reads, "They said, 'The LORD commanded my lord to give [לָתֵת] the land for inheritance by lot [בְּגֹרֶל] to the people of Israel, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance [לְתֵת אֶת־נִחְלָתוֹ] of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters.'"

The differing scope of land to which *הַנֶּחֱלָה* can refer is because of the division of the land according to the social structure of Israel. Thus, just as individuals had an inheritance, so also did each clan (Num 33:54; Josh 15:20; 18:28), each tribe (Gen 48:6; Num 32:32), and the nation as a whole (Judg 20:6; Ezek 35:15). Of course, the Levites had no inheritance in the land. Furthermore, it should be noted that the allocation was based on the number of persons, presumably based upon the number of persons under each family head (see Num 26:53-56; 33:54). Each family was to receive an amount of land that was equal to their need.<sup>61</sup> Numbers 26:52-56 gives the principle:

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Among these the land shall be divided for inheritance according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; every tribe shall be given its inheritance in proportion to its list. But the land shall be divided by lot. According to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. Their inheritance shall be divided according to lot between the larger and the smaller."

This principle of division extended beyond the tribal level also to the level of clans and households.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the land was distributed fairly and it was inalienable.

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<sup>60</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, "נֶחֱלָה," in VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, 77.

<sup>61</sup> Wright, "נֶחֱלָה," 77.

<sup>62</sup> See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 291-92, for further elaboration.

Often, the family's inheritance was called a plot (גִּזְרָה), a term that shifts the perspective to the family's specific allotment. While the exact size of plots that were given is unknown, the plots appear to have been large enough to sustain several generations living together.<sup>63</sup> Further, while it is unknown whether each plot was subdivided to the sons of each generation or not, the law forbids the moving of ancient boundary stones (Deut 19:14; 27:17; cf. Job 24:2; Prov 22:28; 23:10). The forbidding of moving the stones communicates that the boundaries set during the conquest were, at least in some measure, adhered to throughout the generations.

Each family-inherited plot of land was also called their possession (חֵלֶק). Thus, Leviticus 14:34 says, "When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession [חֵלֶק לְכֶם לְאֶרֶץ].” The Pentateuch regularly uses the term to describe the land in which the patriarchs lived or the land that they were promised (see Gen 17:8; 48:4). The use of this term emphasizes that the land is a “gift of property from Yahweh.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua frequently mention the land that “the Lord is giving” to Israel “to possess” (Gen 15:7; Lev 20:24; Num 27:11; Deut 3:18; Josh 1:11; et al.). Because Yahweh gives the land, it is ultimately the “possession of Yahweh” (Josh 22:19) and as such, it is a “perpetual possession” (Gen 17:8; 48:4; Lev 25:34) for Israel. Since Yahweh can never lose title to the land, Israelites will never lose title to the land because Yahweh has given it to them as an everlasting possession. When these terms are taken collectively together, they emphasize the fact that Israel's possession of the land, whether as individuals or collectively, is integrally connected to the merciful gift of Yahweh.<sup>65</sup> Wright summarizes that the two chief characteristics of the land-gift are its

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<sup>63</sup> The records in Num 26 and Josh 13 show that each household received land according to their need.

<sup>64</sup> William T. Koopmans, “חֵלֶק,” in VanGemeren, *NIDOTTE*, 354.

<sup>65</sup> Koopmans, “חֵלֶק,” 354.

equitable distribution and its inalienability.<sup>66</sup> This two-fold description is difficult to improve upon and captures the essence of Israel's understanding of the land.

The terms discussed are not the only terms used to describe Israel's land. The terms מְגָרָשׁ and שְׂדֵה are frequently used to describe common land that could be used for cultivation or pasturage.<sup>67</sup> Thus, a “mixed economy” in Israel combined private ownership and private use. This dual function of the land continues into modern Palestine.<sup>68</sup>

The theory that all of the land was communal land owned by the tribe and subject to redistribution as occasion demanded has prevailed over the past century in critical scholarship.<sup>69</sup> Scholars such as E. Ginzberg and Norman Gottwald have shown that such theories assume that all societies must have had a period of communism before ideas of individual ownership took hold.<sup>70</sup> Several counterpoints make the tribal-ownership viewpoint unconvincing and show that private ownership, not communal ownership, was primary in Israel.<sup>71</sup> First, this theory is based on another theory; namely, that Israelites were originally nomads who slowly infiltrated into and subsequently settled the land of Canaan. Both the archaeological and biblical record support a conquest view of Israelite settlement.<sup>72</sup> Second, the principle of inalienability is required for multiple laws

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<sup>66</sup> See Wright, *Mission of God*, 295.

<sup>67</sup> C. J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 70.

<sup>68</sup> North, cited in Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 70n76.

<sup>69</sup> See Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 66-70, for an overview of this theory and thorough critique of it. My summary and critique of the tribal-ownership viewpoint follows that of Wright.

<sup>70</sup> For the critiques, see E. Ginzberg, “Studies in the Economics of the Bible,” *JQR* 22 (1932): 392; and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 435-63. For scholars who exemplify a tribal-ownership viewpoint, see K. H. Henry, “Land Tenure in the Old Testament,” *PEQ* 86 (1954): 9; and Henry Schaeffer, *The Social Legislation of the Primitive Semites* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1915), 228ff.

<sup>71</sup> Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 69.

<sup>72</sup> For a helpful overview of theories of Israel's conquest of the land and latest research, see Trent Butler, *Joshua 1-12*, 2nd ed. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 7a (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014),

in the Old Testament to make sense, including laws of inheritance, levirate marriage, “You shall not steal,” the Jubilee, and laws on moving boundary stones. Third, the family land was also the location of the family burial place, which made subsequent generations attached to that specific plot of land.<sup>73</sup> Fourth, the law assumes that the boundaries are going to stay in place (e.g., Exod 22:5-6; 23:10; Deut 19:14; 27:17). One could cite Psalm 16:5-6 or Micah 2:5, which imagine the boundary lines being cast in a favorable way. However, these do not necessitate the idea of the family’s original plot being reduced or expanded. These verses could imagine a later division of the common land; or, these verses could be purely metaphorical and solely referring to one’s spiritual inheritance with the Lord; or, these verses could metaphorically remember how the lines were drawn for that family during the initial redistribution of the land.

### **Tribes, Clans, and the Father’s House**

The Jubilee institution dictates certain responsibilities within the sociological structure of Israel. This structure is divided into the tribe, the clan, and the extended family-unit.<sup>74</sup> In Joshua 7:13-18, after Israel was defeated by Ai, the search for the guilty party outlines the nomenclature for Israelite social units: the tribe (שִׁבְטָא or מִטָּה), the clan (מִשְׁפָּחָה), and the house of the father (בֵּית־אָב): “In the morning therefore you shall be brought near by your tribes [לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם]. And the tribe that the Lord takes by lot shall come near by clans [לְמִשְׁפָּחוֹת]. And the clan that the Lord takes shall come near by households [לְבָתִּים]. And the household that the Lord takes shall come near man by man” (Josh 7:14).<sup>75</sup>

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94-131.

<sup>73</sup> See Herman Brichto, “Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife—A Biblical Complex,” *HUCA* 44 (1973): 1-54.

<sup>74</sup> See the helpful article by C. J. H. Wright, “Family,” in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:761-69.

<sup>75</sup> The house of the father is often designated by the patriarch alone. Thus, the Exod 6:14

The clans were more recognizable units of belonging than the tribes. A clan was a unit of recognizable kinship that consisted of many extended families living in one geographic region together.<sup>76</sup> Numbers 33:54 says that the land was divided by lot into a single inheritance for each clan.<sup>77</sup> This clan was then further divided into smaller units, each with its own inheritance.<sup>78</sup> The typical father's house consisted of 50-100 persons who were all descendants of a single, living, patriarch, including the slaves and hired servants. These 50-100 persons would have lived on the same piece of property, perhaps in multiple homes.<sup>79</sup> The father's house, paired with its residence on the ancestral land, was the focus of the Israelite's identity, status, responsibility, and security.<sup>80</sup>

The Jubilee aimed to protect this extended family. Wright explains, "The primary purpose of the jubilee was to preserve the socioeconomic fabric of multiple-household land tenure and the comparative equality and independent viability of the smallest family-plus-land units."<sup>81</sup> Thus, the Jubilee is not concerned with redistribution. The Jubilee is focused on restoration. The father's household was where Israel found economic vitality through the land, where many judicial matters were settled (see Deut

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genealogy of the tribe of Reuben is sorted by the "heads of their father's houses [רִאשֵׁי בֵּית־אֲבוֹתָם]," which is the normal nomenclature.

<sup>76</sup> Wright, "Family," 2:762.

<sup>77</sup> The case of Zelophedad's daughters in Num 36 illustrates the close connection between the clan and their inheritance.

<sup>78</sup> Wright, "Family," 2:762. The inheritance given to each family was inalienable. It could not be bought or sold, only leased (see 1 Kgs 21). Further, Num 36 shows that the land had to stay within each clan and was inherited patrilineally. The land was God's gift, not only to Israel as a whole, but to every individual Israelite. To be a descendant of Abraham meant that one had inalienable rights to a portion of the land of Canaan. Wright explains, "The tribal lists of Numbers 26 (especially note vv. 52-56) and the detailed territorial division of land recorded in Joshua 13-21 are the documentary evidence that the original intention of Israel's land system was that the land should be distributed throughout the whole kinship system as widely as possible." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 291,

<sup>79</sup> Wright, "Family," in *ABD*, 2:762.

<sup>80</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 297.

<sup>81</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 295.



21:18-21), and where one's covenant relationship with Yahweh was learned and practiced (see Deut 6:20-24).

Another central component to Israel's social structure was the role of the kinsman redeemer (גֹּאֵל). A גֹּאֵל came from the father's household or the clan. The גֹּאֵל acted as a protector who was obligated to redeem a kinsman from a dire situation, especially a situation that threatened the autonomy of a father's household.<sup>82</sup> The גֹּאֵל was also responsible to avenge the murder of a kinsman (Num 35; 2 Sam 14:4-11); raise a male heir for a deceased relative and manage his land (Deut 25:5-10; Ruth 4); redeem land within the clan when a kinsman was forced to sell it (Lev 25:23-28); and redeem or maintain a dependent-kinsman (Lev 25:35-55). As will be shown in chapter 4, the practice of redemption provided a means by which the Jubilee's objectives—restoration of an extended family to their land and to economic solvency—could be achieved at any time.

### **Economic Structure**

Wright has employed the designation “multiple-household land tenure” to describe the agricultural economy of Israel.<sup>83</sup> This is an apt designation as it captures the way in which Israel's relationship with Yahweh and with each other affected their approach to the land and to agricultural production. Despite Israel's unique monotheism and relationship with Yahweh, their system of land tenure is common to the ANE: “Such a system of land tenure is hardly unique. In fact it is widespread among tribal cultures, and on a village-wide rather than tribe-wide basis persisted into modern times among Palestinian Arabs.”<sup>84</sup> The term “egalitarian” instead of “multiple-household” perhaps

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<sup>82</sup> Wright states, “These were largely protective measures in emergency situations that sought to preserve the autonomy of a father's household or member-family if the *beth-av* could not perform the function.” Wright, “Family,” 2:763

<sup>83</sup> Wright, *Mission of God*, 295. I prefer the terminology of “egalitarian land tenure,” which better captures the two-fold truth of the land gift: it was inalienable and it was equitably distributed.

<sup>84</sup> Kaufman, “Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 280.

better captures the idea that the land was distributed equally within an already equitable tribal and clan-based social structure. Deuteronomy 15:4 stipulates, “But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess.” Israel’s social and economic framework was, in part, designed to ensure that no poor would exist in the nation. Of course, the equitable structures also supported the theocratic element within Israel. All Israelites were equal because they all served one Lord and God.<sup>85</sup>

This egalitarian social structure extends to the nature and extent of slavery within Israel as well. While Israelites could hold foreign slaves permanently, they were forbidden from enslaving each other. Of course, famine and other economic hardships often necessitated that an Israelite work for another Israelite. However, even if the destitute Israelite was severely indebted to the master Israelite, he was not to be treated as a slave but as a hired servant. Leviticus 25:39-40 is clear: “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee.” The logic was simple. Israel was not to recreate their Egyptian experience in the land of Israel. Deuteronomy 15:12-17 commands that Israelite debt-slaves be released every seven years and that they be provisioned by their master. The law gives its basis in the Israelite experience in Egypt: “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” (Deut 15:15). These laws were striking when compared to Israel’s neighbors. Under Pharaoh, Israel had experienced the harsh life of slavery. Israel’s experience in Egypt was a familiar experience throughout the ANE. Slavery was common and oppression was rampant. Yet, God’s people were called to a different lifestyle, one of freedom and liberty.

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<sup>85</sup> It is granted that Israel became a hierarchical society in terms of class divisions. Nevertheless, the Israelite ideal embodied by the law imagined a society free of class. This is not denying that there was hierarchies of authority such as men in general, the head of the household, the king, etc.

The concept of egalitarian land tenure also captures the agricultural aspect of Israel. They were largely an agricultural society that survived through subsistence farming. The demands of running a family farm were extensive and all consuming. A small limestone plaque called the “Gezer Calendar” dating to the tenth century BC (Solomon’s reign) is one of the oldest Hebrew inscriptions. This seven-line tablet illustrates the agricultural cycle and the normal activities in which an Israelite farmer would have engaged. The calendar divides a twelve-month year into eight periods of agricultural work that begin in the Fall. William Albright has suggested that this calendar was a “school exercise” designed to train adolescents in writing script and to inculcate the agricultural calendar.<sup>86</sup> His argument is based on the sloppy handwriting and that the lines are in verse. The calendar thus may have been a mnemonic for children. While Albright’s suggestion is plausible, more evidence is needed to establish the tablet’s original purpose. Whatever the calendar’s original purpose, it captures the demands of subsistence farming in ancient Israel. The text of the Gezer calendar reads as follows: “His two months are (olive) harvest, / His two months are planting (grain), His two months are late planting; / His month is hoeing up of flax, / His month is harvest of barley, / His month is harvest and feasting; / His two months are vine-tending, / His month is summer fruit.”<sup>87</sup>

The language of “his month” is idiomatic, referring to the time in which one works at a specific task. First Kings 4:27 (MT 5:7) provides a good example: “And those officers supplied provisions for King Solomon, and for all who came to King Solomon’s table, each one in his month [אִישׁ בְּחֹדְשׁוֹ]. They let nothing be lacking.” While 1 Kings 4:27 refers to each officer’s appointed time to provision King Solomon’s table and not to a specific agricultural task, the idea is clear. The Gezer Calendar is teaching that there is an

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<sup>86</sup> William F. Albright, “The Gezer Calendar,” *BASOR* 92 (1943): 16-26. For an up-to-date discussion of the tablet, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 87-89.

<sup>87</sup> See *ANET*, 287.

“appointed time” for each agricultural activity. As the calendar demonstrates, the agricultural cycle was quite demanding. The abundance of agricultural metaphors employed in the Old Testament testify to the widespread demands of agriculture (see Gen 37:7; Ps 126:6; Isa 41:15).

Israel’s agricultural cycle, as testified to in the Gezer calendar, followed the climate and seasons of the Levant. Palestine’s climate is subtropical and has experienced little change since biblical times.<sup>88</sup> The Mediterranean Sea and its westerly winds has the largest influence on the climate with the majority of the rain coming between mid-October and early March. Generally, rainfall decreases from north to south and from west to east.<sup>89</sup> The timing of the rain was as important as the amount of the rain. There is rain in general (מָטָר), but also the all-important early rain of late October (יִזְרֵה) that softened the soil for plowing and sowing, the heavy rains (גֶּשֶׁם) of winter that soaked the ground and filled cisterns, and the later rain (מִלְקוֹשׁ) of early March that fostered the growth of grain crops.<sup>90</sup> Even though the rainfall is regular, the hilly terrain of the country makes it difficult to control and collect. Israelite farmers built cisterns and terraces to help gather and store the water. Despite multiple rainy periods, drought was somewhat common and if the fall or spring rains were late, it could lead to a severely diminished harvest. The Israelite farmer also had to deal with crop diseases, raiding armies, and locusts. Thus, a good crop was not guaranteed and could be severely diminished by several factors.

The archaeological record testifies to the widespread existence of subsistence agriculture in ancient Israel. Stone-lined and plastered storage pits are a common find in archaeological dig sites throughout Palestine. These have been uncovered at Gezer, Megiddo, and other sites and range from the time of King Solomon to the Persian period

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<sup>88</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 86.

<sup>89</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 86.

<sup>90</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 87.

(ca. 450 BC). Tripartite pillared buildings dating to the monarchic period have been found at various sites, including Megiddo. Among other things, these buildings are believed to have been used as storehouses and stables.<sup>91</sup> Archaeologists have also found abundant remains of agricultural tools, including scratch plows, knives, sickles, beam presses for olives, and wine presses of various construction.

Even the Israelite style of home construction points toward the agricultural lifestyle. Many of the homes were two stories, with the second level and roof being used as the family's living quarters. The bottom level would have had pens for storing animals at night, rooms for storage, and areas to store water, cook bread, and process food.<sup>92</sup> As the biblical narratives attest, the Israelites were both farmers and shepherds, primarily of sheep and goats. Thus, while the terminology of egalitarian land tenure is supported by the evidence, it can be made more specific by saying that Israelites practiced a combination of farming and pastoralism (raising of animals). King and Stager have helpfully termed this *agropastoralism*.<sup>93</sup> Thus, while some members of the family would tend to the crops, others would tend to the flock, taking it to grazing grounds that may be some distance from the family land.

The average Israelite, then, would have been responsible for growing wheat, barley, olives, and grapes in abundance. While some regions and soils were better suited to one type of crop than the other, it seems that the average Israelite would have grown all of these on their land. They also would have had sheep, goats, and cattle that required ever new grazing grounds and sources of abundant water. In addition, the average Israelite family would have grown legumes, fruits, and spices in smaller amounts.

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<sup>91</sup> See King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 91, for pictures.

<sup>92</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 28-29.

<sup>93</sup> King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 112.

The land given to each Israelite was their entire source of economic support. This is why the land was at the center of Israelite identity, why Naboth refused to sell his land to the king, and why the Jubilee legislation was essential. The Jubilee was the final stop-gap measure that ensured Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure remained intact, and therefore, that every Israelite was given the opportunity to provide for themselves through the gift of the land.<sup>94</sup>

### **The Covenant Structure**

What does economic structure have to do with the biblical Jubilee? The land was every Israelite's means of existence. The Jubilee ensured that every Israelite would have access to that means of existence throughout their generations. If an Israelite had no land, then they had no way to survive. The options were slavery, work their own land, or leave Israel. Yet, the land was more than a means of existence. The land was also where the average Israelite experienced their relationship with Yahweh day-by-day. For the average Israelite, the truth that their plot of land had been given to their family by Yahweh was quite significant, as shown by the incidents with the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 and 36. The blessings and curses of the covenant listed in Leviticus 26 demonstrate the land's vital importance in the covenant. In Leviticus 26:3-5, God's blessing is tantamount to God blessing the land:

If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely.

If Israel is faithless, Leviticus 26:16b, 19-20 promises the exact opposite—

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<sup>94</sup> The correspondence between Israel's socioeconomic situation and the Jubilee legislation also provides an important rejoinder to critical theories on the Jubilee. Most critical scholars agree that the provisions of the Jubilee legislation are ancient ideas even if they date the composition of Lev 25 to the exilic period because of their adherence to broader critical theories regarding the composition of the Pentateuch. Bergsma has critiqued the exilic dating of the Jubilee legislation on just these grounds. See Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 75-78, for a fuller discussion.

God's cursing of the land: "And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. . . . And I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit."

Blessings and curses associated with the land meant that an Israelite family experienced the covenant as they worked upon their land. If the rains came on time and the crops were fruitful, then God was blessing that Israelite. If drought or disease or locusts came, then God was cursing that Israelite. Wright takes this link a step beyond that of experience, arguing that the land was the direct evidence to an Israelite family that they were in covenant relationship with Yahweh: "For the Israelite, living with his family on his allotted share of YHWH's land, the land itself was the proof of his membership of God's people and the focus of his practical response to God's grace. Nothing that concerned the land was free from theological and ethical dimensions—as every harvest reminded him (Deut 26)."<sup>95</sup>

Thus, for an Israelite to lose their land, even to another Israelite, was more than just a practical problem. It was a theological problem. The covenant relationship was threatened. This is the basic argument David makes to Saul when Saul is pursuing his life. David tells Saul that Saul's pursuit is forcing David out of the land, away from the inheritance of his family, and therefore, away from the worship of Yahweh: "Now therefore let my Lord the King hear the words of his servant. If it is the LORD who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering, but if it is men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods' (1 Sam 26:19)."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Wright, *The Mission of God*, 292.

<sup>96</sup> See Wright, "גִּזְרֵי," 77.

## **Debt-Slavery in Ancient Israel**

A final consideration before moving into more detailed explication of the Sabbath year and Jubilee year is the nature of slavery in ancient Israel. There is a significant difference in the laws between how native slaves and foreign slaves were to be treated by Israelite masters. In fact, one must be careful to distinguish between laws that deal with chattel slaves and laws that deal with debt slaves. The two general types of slavery are vastly different. Foreign slaves were typically chattel slaves, while native Israelite slaves could only serve as debt slaves for limited terms. In fact, it is within the Jubilee legislation that Moses commands that Israelites not be treated as foreign slaves but as hired workers (see Lev 25:39-46, 53-55). This command was so central to the fabric of Israelite society that Deuteronomy 24:7 compels obedience via capital punishment for one who enslaves another Israelite.

### **Manumission of Debt-Slaves**

The law forbade Israelites from enslaving one another (Lev 25:39; Deut 24:7). As such, violators were subject to capital punishment if they did enslave another Israelite. Leviticus 25 compels Israelite masters to treat other Israelites as hired workers. In other words, an Israelite could only become a debt-slave to another Israelite. A master could not acquire an Israelite person as property as he could a foreigner. An Israelite master could only acquire another Israelite's capacity to work. Furthermore, Exodus 21 and Deuteronomy 15 limit the length of service to seven years: "When you acquire a Hebrew servant [כִּי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עִבְרִי], he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing" (Exod 21:2, my translation).

Limited term debt-slavery was common in both Israel and in the ANE.<sup>97</sup> For example, LH §117, a law discussed earlier, limits the term of debt-slavery to three years. 2 Kings 4:1-7 reports Elisha intervening in the sale of dependents as debt slaves.

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<sup>97</sup> See Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 86-112, for an overview of the laws in the ANE.



Nehemiah 5:1-13 likewise reports the prominence of debt-slavery among the returned exiles and Nehemiah's subsequent intervention. The oppression of debt-slaves is also mentioned frequently in the eighth-century prophets. For example, Amos chides the Israelites for selling the needy for a pair of sandals (Amos 2:6-7). In other words, they were selling their debt-slaves (fellow Israelites) for items of luxury. As these examples show, debt-slavery was both common in ancient Israel and quite different from chattel slavery.

**The problem of Exodus 21:2.** While it is clear that there were two general forms of slavery in ancient Israel (debt-slavery and chattel slavery), it is not always clear which type of slavery the law codes have in mind. This is a particularly difficult problem in Exodus 21:2, where the slave is qualified as an עֶבֶד עִבְרִי ("Hebrew servant/slave"). The noun עֶבֶד can be translated "servant" or "slave" depending on the context. Scholars are split on which translation is most appropriate to the context of Exodus 21. Translating "servant" implies that it is a debt-slave whose term is limited, while translating "slave" generally implies that a chattel slave's term is limited. While the concerns of Exodus 21:2 may seem far removed from the concerns of the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25, they are not. Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15 all deal with the manumission of slaves. Yet, determining who those slaves are is not as straight forward as one might hope. Discerning the identity of the עֶבֶד עִבְרִי is a *crux interpretum* for discerning the relationship between these manumission laws and how the Jubilee legislation ensured and protected the system of manumission.

The issue is made more difficult by the limiting noun עִבְרִי. Who was the "Hebrew slave?" There are two predominant views, both of which argue that this slave law legislated the sale of people because of insolvency.<sup>98</sup> The debate centers around the

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<sup>98</sup> Gregory Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, JSOTSup 141 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 200.

way in which one interprets עֶבֶרִי. Scholars who argue that עֶבֶרִי is an appellative believe that the text describes a slave of the Hebrew-type, while those who argue that עֶבֶרִי is a gentilic believe that the text describes an Israelite debt-slave.

The general arguments concerning the עֶבֶרִי עֶבֶד are as follows. Most scholars tend to argue that עֶבֶרִי is an appellative and thus denotes a slave of the Hebrew-type.<sup>99</sup> These scholars look to a litany of historical and legal cuneiform documents spread all over the ANE that are dated to the second millennium BC. These texts frequently mention a class of people known as *ḥabiru*, who were migrants, rebels, servants, and mercenaries. On the other hand, scholars who wish to harmonize the various manumission laws within the Pentateuch argue that עֶבֶרִי is a gentilic and thus describes an Israelite. They look to the context of Scripture instead of ANE parallels to provide the meaning of עֶבֶרִי. They do not see a direct link between עֶבֶרִי and the ANE *ḥabiru*. and argue that עֶבֶרִי in the Hebrew Bible usually refers to an Israelite.<sup>100</sup>

Scholars frequently cite the Code of Hammurabi when attempting to discern who the עֶבֶד עֶבֶרִי is. While LH §114-119 addresses and restricts the practice of both seizing and giving of persons as pledges on defaulted loans, LH §117-119 are the most pertinent to the questions raised by Exodus 21:2ff.<sup>101</sup> LH §117 stipulates that the extent of a debt-slave's service is to be limited to a full three years: "If an obligation is

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<sup>99</sup> See Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 200-206; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 43-48, 134-35; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 3b (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 2251-57, for a bibliography and an up-to-date and in-depth discussion on the identity of the עֶבֶד עֶבֶרִי in Exod 21:2. Other important literature on the topic include C. J. H. Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel? Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for the Land, Debts and Slaves, Part II," *EQ* 56, no. 4 (October 1984): 193-201; Moshe Greenberg, "The *Ḥab/piru* and Hebrews," *AOS* 39 (1955): 3-12, 125-26; Nadav Naaman, "Habiru and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere," *JNES* 45, no. 4 (October 1986): 271-88; Jean Bottéro, *Le Problème des Habiru à la 4e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* (Paris: Impr. Nationale, 1954), v-xxii; Raymond Westbrook, *Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Law* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1988), 125-26.

<sup>100</sup> See Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 345-47, for a summary of the chief arguments in favor of this view. See also Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 87.

<sup>101</sup> See Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 60-62ff.; Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 85-112, for a full discussion of these laws.

outstanding against a man and he sells or gives into debt service his wife, his son, or his daughter, they shall perform service in the house of their buyer or of the one who holds them in debt service for three years; their release shall be secured in the fourth year.”<sup>102</sup> LH §118 stipulates that a chattel slave’s term of service may be indefinite and does not have to be limited like that of the debt-slave’s term of service: “If he should give a male or female slave into debt service, the merchant may extend the term (beyond the three years), he may sell him; there are no grounds for a claim.”<sup>103</sup> LH §119 stipulates that a man must redeem his slave-woman if she has given birth to his children: “If an obligation is outstanding against a man and he therefore sells his slave woman who has borne him children, the owner of the slave woman shall weigh and deliver the silver which the merchant weighed and delivered (as the loan) and he shall thereby redeem his slave woman.”<sup>104</sup>

The concerns of LH to protect debt-slaves and chattel slaves who have borne their master’s children are similar to the laws in Exodus 21:2-11. Just as LH §118-119 are special cases that amend the law in §117, so Exodus 21:2-11 deals with special cases for both male and female debt-slaves. Further, Exodus 21:7-11 specifically protects the rights of a female debt-slave who has been sold as a wife, which is similar to Exodus 21:7-11. At present, the goal is to establish a sufficient background to assess the various arguments made by scholars regarding the identity of the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי in Exodus 21:2. LH §117-119 gives good reason for wanting to identify the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי as a debt-slave and for thus translating עֶבֶד as “servant.”

**The Hebrew-slave view.** Scholars who argue that עֲבָרִי is an appellative base their arguments on references to the *ḥabiru* in the Amarna letters (EA) from thirteenth

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<sup>102</sup> Translation from Roth, *Law Collections*, 103.

<sup>103</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 103.

<sup>104</sup> Roth, *Law Collections*, 103-4.

century Canaan.<sup>105</sup> The *habiru* in EA generally refers to a group of rebels who opposed Egyptian authority in Canaanite city-states.<sup>106</sup> The etymological similarity between *habiru(m)* and עֶבְרִיִּים, along with the geographical and chronological proximity of the Canaanite city-states to the Israelite settlement/conquest, have led scholars to argue that the two terms refer to the same ethnic group. However, excavations at ancient Nuzi in northern Iraq in the 1930s also mention the *habiru*. The *habiru* in the Nuzi documents are not rebels but individuals of varied ethnic backgrounds that entered the community to trade work for food, housing, and other life necessities.<sup>107</sup> The Nuzi *habiru* were not chattel slaves; however, they were not debt-slaves either. They were indentured servants. According to Shalom Paul, the Nuzi *habiru* often found themselves in lifelong service as procuring release was unlikely: “No time limit was placed upon the length of their service. Should they infringe their agreement, they would have to make either a payment of silver or gold to their patron, incur a severe penalty, or provide a substitute in their stead.”<sup>108</sup> This evidence complicates the apparent link between the *habiru* and the עֶבְד עֶבְרִי.

Scholars now realize that *habiru* cannot be simplified to one ethnic group. The term is used over a wide region of the ANE and refers to various peoples of various ethnic groups in various social positions.<sup>109</sup> A number of scholars rightly argue that the term

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<sup>105</sup> The Amarna letters (EA) are an archive of over 380 tablets or their fragments found in 1887, at El-Amarna (the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten) on the eastern bank of the Nile a few hundred miles south of Cairo. These letters are a royal archive and cover about a thirty-year span of time dated to the middle of the fourteenth century. The most up to date edition of all the letters is by William L. Moran, Dominique Collon, and Henri Cazelles, *Les Lettres d'El-Amarna: Correspondance Diplomatique du Pharaon* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1987).

<sup>106</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 201.

<sup>107</sup> Martha A. Morrison, “Nuzi” in Freedman, *ABD*, 4:1157.

<sup>108</sup> Shalom M. Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant in the Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law*, VTSup 18 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1970), 46.

<sup>109</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 201.

*habiru* should convey the idea “act of migration.”<sup>110</sup> Thus, depending on the context, “refugee, immigrant, alien, displaced people, etc.,” is an appropriate gloss for the term.<sup>111</sup> The term takes on a particular meaning in the Amarna Letters, denoting those who rebel against Egyptian authority.<sup>112</sup> However, the term disappears from the extant literature at the beginning of the first millennium BC.<sup>113</sup> As a result, the etymological and semantic links between *habiru* and עֶבְרִי are limited. Therefore, modern scholars who continue to argue that עֶבְרִי is an appellative argue that a lower-class social or political element within Israel was called the עֶבְרִי.<sup>114</sup>

Within the scholarly camp that continues to argue that עֶבְרִי is an appellative, they suggest that the term עֶבְרִי is semantically and etymologically connected to *habiru*.<sup>115</sup> Scholars in this latter view further argue that biblical references to the עֶבְרִי are usually ethnic designations for the Israelites, unless the context has strong parallels to the ANE *habiru* literature. For example, Shalom Paul argues that the עֶבְרִי עֶבֶד in Exodus 21:2 is a Hebrew-type slave because the form of Exodus 21:2ff. is parallel to Nuzian service contracts. Paul argues that (1) the term תִּקְנָה (“you buy”) in Exodus 21:2 means, juridically, to acquire as one’s property;<sup>116</sup> (2) the adjective חֶפְשִׁי in Exodus 21:2 refers to “belonging to the class of freedman” because it is parallel semantically and etymologically to the Nuzi social designation *hupšu*, which refers to members of the lower social classes; (3) the term חֵנָּה (“without payment”) in Exodus 21:2 is indicative of

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<sup>110</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 203.

<sup>111</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 204.

<sup>112</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 204.

<sup>113</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 204.

<sup>114</sup> For examples, see Michael B. Rowton, “Dimorphic Structure and the Problem of the ‘*apirû*-‘*ibrîm*,’” *JNES* 35, no. 1 (1976): 14; Na’aman, “Habiru and Hebrews,” 272.

<sup>115</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 206.

<sup>116</sup> Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant*, 46.

the requirement that Nuzi *habiru* to pay for their release or provide a substitute servant;<sup>117</sup> and (4) the verbs יָבֵא and יֵצֵא in Exodus 21:3 are legal terms for entering and leaving the slave status.

Wright depends on an analysis similar to that of Paul. However, Wright does not believe the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי to be a foreigner as does Paul.<sup>118</sup> Instead, Wright argues that the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי in Exodus and the released slave in Deuteronomy 15:12 refers to a landless class of Israelite freedmen. Wright is correct in his desire to harmonize the released עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי of Exodus 21:2 and the “slave, your brother” of Deuteronomy 15:12. He is also correct to not rely on the convenience of various critical theories on the composition of the Pentateuch. Thus, according to Wright, when the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי is set free, they become חֶפְשִׁי, just as the Nuzi *habiru* did.

The views of Paul, Wright, and others are dependent on the social and legal parallels between the biblical terms עֶבֶד and חֶפְשִׁי and the Nuzian terms *hupšu* and *habiru*. In general, their arguments depend on the terms עֶבֶד and חֶפְשִׁי being used to define a social class.<sup>119</sup> Thus, their argument contends that עֶבֶד has been changed from the social designation—i.e., member of the lower social class—to a more general designation of “landless class.” חֶפְשִׁי maintains the same semantic value but is applied differently. Bergsma also consents to this line of interpretation, finding the parallels valid and arguing that עֶבֶד is an ethnic term.<sup>120</sup>

The key to arguing that the עֶבֶד עֲבָרִי is an appellative (i.e., Hebrew-type slave) are the Amarna and Nuzi parallels. The argument requires scholars to reconcile Exodus 21:2 with Deuteronomy 15:12, which calls the released servant “brother”: “If your

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<sup>117</sup> Paul, *Studies in the Book of the Covenant*, 47.

<sup>118</sup> See Wright, “What Happened in Israel, Part II,” 193-201.

<sup>119</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 210.

<sup>120</sup> See Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 43-45.

brother [אָחִיךָ], a Hebrew man [הָעֶבְרִי] or a Hebrew woman [הָעֶבְרִיָּה], is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free [תְּפַשִּׁי] from you.” Scholars in favor of the appellative interpretation argue that Exodus is older than the updated Deuteronomy and therefore the sociological interpretation (Hebrew-type slave) is still valid in Exodus 21:2.<sup>121</sup> Others argue that the term אָחִיךָ does not designate the servant as an Israelite. Wright summarizes the argument well:

But the word *‘ahikā* is of very wide meaning, and the phrasing of Deut. 15:12a shows rather that it is the ‘brother’ who is being defined (i.e. limited and qualified) as a “Hebrew,” not vice-versa. That is, the phrase *hā ‘ibrîyyāh* is a specific qualification of the broader term *‘ahikā* for the purpose of indicating clearly the social status, not the nationality, of the person referred to—viz. a “Hebrew.” If it were merely ethnic in sense, the phrase would surely be tautologous. . . . It was sufficiently understood in the latter texts that a person described as a “Hebrew” belonged to a landless class of people who sold themselves or were acquired as a way of life or means of livelihood—not as the result of a sudden reversal of fortune as implied by [Lev 25:39ff.].<sup>122</sup>

Wright also argues that the slave release law in Deuteronomy 15:12ff. leaves out a number of elements found in the release laws of Leviticus 25. Leviticus 25:39b requires that the Israelite debt-slave be treated as a hired workman, not a slave. Further, Leviticus 25 includes provisions for the redemption of the debt-slave, which are left out in Deuteronomy and Exodus. Finally, Leviticus 25:41, 54 stipulates that the debt-slave should go out with his wife and children, while Exodus stipulates that a Hebrew might give up his wife and children upon his release.

**Critique of the Hebrew-slave view.** Wright’s arguments are weighty, avoid the pitfalls of critical dating, and rightly attempt to harmonize the texts. Yet, they ignore the established semantic range of עֶבְרִי. If one approaches the Pentateuch with the assumptions of Mosaic authorship, Wright’s interpretation is the only option available for reading the עֶבְרִי in Exodus 21:2 as a separate class of people. Nevertheless, little evidence

<sup>121</sup> Wright, “What Happened in Israel? Part II,” 196; Bergma, *The Jubilee*, 43-45.

<sup>122</sup> Wright, “What Happened in Israel? Part II,” 196.

within the Old Testament designates that the term עֶבְרִי is a separate social class. It seems that archaeological or documentary evidence, especially within the book of Joshua, would support the existence of such a class in early Israel. However, none exists. Furthermore, the fact that the Israelite nation is regularly referred to as the “Hebrews” within the book of Exodus lends credence to reading the עֶבְרִי as a gentilic that denotes the servant as a fellow-Israelite. It can be added that all those who came up from Egypt, who were indeed a mixed multitude, were made beneficiaries of the covenant promises. Finally, while the term “brother” can denote someone who is not an Israelite, the term generally means a fellow-Israelite. In this case, Wright has engaged in special pleading.

Greg Chirichigno has devoted an entire monograph to sorting out the relationship between the manumission laws in Exodus 21, Leviticus 25, and Deuteronomy 15. As mentioned, discerning the identity of the עֶבְרִי עֶבֶד is a *crux interpretum* for discerning the relationship between these manumission laws. It is also a *crux interpretum* for understanding what happens at the Sabbatical release (Deut 15:1ff) and at the Jubilee release (Lev 25:10ff). Chirichigno argues that the answer to this question is often approached wrongly because critical scholars want to date the covenant code (along with its parallels in the holiness and Deuteronomy codes) to a particular *Sitz im Leben* within Israel. Scholars who have attempted to answer this question also suffer from an ignorance of the ANE social and legal background to these texts.<sup>123</sup>

After extensive investigation into the ANE background of debt-slavery as well as into the relevant El-Amarna and Nuzi literature, Chirichigno argues that the עֶבְרִי עֶבֶד is an Israelite debt-slave, thus reading עֶבְרִי as a gentilic. Chirichigno provides a point-by-point critique of both Paul and Wright. A summary of Chirichigno’s critique is as follows. First, he contends that there is “no textual or historical evidence that the lower social class represented by the term *ḥupṣu* ever existed during the various periods of

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<sup>123</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 27-28.



Israelite history.”<sup>124</sup> Second, the *ḥupšu*’s non-existence is underscored by the fact that the *ḥupšu* of Nuzi do not show up in the *ḥabiru* contracts. They are absent from the *ḥabiru* contracts because the *ḥupšu* were Nuzi citizens of a lower social class while the *ḥabiru* at Nuzi were foreign immigrants.<sup>125</sup> Third, even though Paul cites a Nuzian legal background for the use of the term חֲנִיךָ in Exodus 21:2, the evidence actually works against Paul. The Nuzian service contracts stipulate that the *ḥabiru* provide a substitute if they wish to go free. Exodus 21:2 gives no such stipulation.<sup>126</sup> Fourth, while the language of “entering” and “leaving” is legal terminology found in Nuzi service contracts, it is also found in Nuzi *tiddennūtu* contracts made between free citizens and is extant in other service contracts throughout the ANE.<sup>127</sup> Chirichigno’s conclusion is appropriate: “Therefore, the use of similar terminology does not demonstrate that the biblical law refers specifically to the Nuzi service contracts.”<sup>128</sup>

The same general critique can be applied to the remaining arguments that attempt to link the biblical legislation to a Nuzi *ḥabiru* contract. Paul’s contention that the formal rite declared in Exodus 21:5 has legal overtones like Nuzi is a false comparison because, once again, the term shows up in *tiddenūtu* contracts, not *ḥabiru* contracts. Finally, regarding the biblical stipulation in Exodus 21:4 that a master may keep the wife and children of the עֶבֶד עֵבֶר when he goes out free, Paul argues correctly that this law is parallel to Nuzi service contracts. However, this type of stipulation is common in the ANE

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<sup>124</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 212. So also N. Lohfink, “חפשי,” in G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 5:114-18; A. F. Rainey, “Institutions: Family, Civil, and Military,” in Loren R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, ed. F. Brent Knutson et al. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1972), 49-51; and A. Phillips, “The Laws of Slavery: Exod 21.2-11,” *JSOT* 30 (1984): 55.

<sup>125</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 213.

<sup>126</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 215.

<sup>127</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 215.

<sup>128</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 215.

and accepted practice (see LH 119). Phillips final critique of Paul and other attempts to link Nuzi service contracts to Exodus 21:2ff. is appropriate: “[These comparative analyses] place too much reliance on apparent resemblances at the expense of essential differences in the societies from which the [laws and customs] emanate and which, if recognized, would have rendered any attempt at comparison suspect.”<sup>129</sup> As Chirichigno rightly observes, the best method for determining the semantic value of a term is current usage.<sup>130</sup> An analysis of the term עֶבֶד עֲבָדִי in the Hebrew Bible supports the contention that the עֶבֶד עֲבָדִי of Exodus 21:2 is an Israelite debt-slave. This is an important element to this dissertation as helps shed light on how the Jubilee operates within and complementary to the other sabbath release laws. The Jubilee does not revise them, nor do they revise the Jubilee. Instead, they complement one another. The legislation in Deuteronomy 15:12ff., which is intimately tied to the Sabbath year, releases dependent debt-slaves who are Israelites. This is essential to understanding the Jubilee release rightly, namely, that it entails the release of a head of household.

### Summary

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of the various biblical and contextual backgrounds that inform and underpin the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25. This chapter began with an overview of parallels to the Jubilee and redemption laws within the ancient Near East. The Jubilee legislation shares several similarities to other proclamations of freedom throughout the ANE. While these proclamations were dependent on the good will of the king who was ruling at the time, the biblical Jubilee required that freedom be granted on a regular and cyclical basis. While the Jubilee shares much in common with these proclamations of freedom, the differences in detail demonstrate that the Jubilee has no direct dependence on a parallel ANE institution.

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<sup>129</sup> A. Phillips, quoted in Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 217, emphasis added.

<sup>130</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 218n1.

Similarly, the redemption of both persons and land was widespread in the ANE. The sharing of a common and widespread agricultural society with few movable assets meant that such laws were necessary to any healthy society. All ANE societies looked to their rulers to establish “justice and righteousness,” a concept that had the socioeconomic well-being of a country’s citizens within its purview. As a whole, the release and manumission laws extant in the ANE and the Bible share this common goal. This is essential to supporting the overall thesis of the dissertation, that the Jubilee was a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel’s system of egalitarian land tenure. Since ANE proclamations of freedom are both ancient and also sought to preserve economic stability within their respective societies, then it is warranted to expect the Jubilee to also be ancient and to seek to provide economic stability.

The rest of the chapter explained the social and economic foundations of ancient Israel, arguing that the nation operated within a system of egalitarian land tenure that ensured each family could provide for themselves. Once again, establishing that Israel operated within a system of egalitarian land tenure is vital to supporting the overall thesis that the Jubilee aimed to preserve this system. Finally, the chapter discussed the two types of slavery in ancient Israel: debt-slavery and chattel slavery. The chapter then concludes by arguing that the provisions in Exodus 21:1-11 deal with the release of debt-slaves. The argument that the “Hebrew slave” is an Israelite dependent debt-slave is essential to understanding how the Jubilee relates to the sabbath-year manumission laws. Chapter 3 will argue that the Sabbath year and Deuteronomy 15:12ff. releases dependent debt-slaves while Leviticus 25 releases heads of households along with any family members who had not entered into dependent debt-slavery. This is critical to proving that the Jubilee intended to preserve Israelite families as a part of the general egalitarian system of land tenure.

## CHAPTER 3

### ISRAEL'S SABBATH SPECTRUM

The Jubilee is a super-Sabbath year and is the capstone of Israel's Sabbath spectrum.<sup>1</sup> The spectrum includes God's rest at creation, the weekly Sabbath, special Sabbaths during Israel's feasts, the Sabbath year, and the Jubilee.<sup>2</sup> The Jubilee occurred at the end of seven cycles of Sabbath years, at intervals of forty-nine years.<sup>3</sup> This chapter involves an examination of Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 16:21-30; 20:8-11; 23:9-12; 31:12-17; Leviticus 25:1-7; Numbers 15:32-36; Deuteronomy 5:12-15, and 15:1-18; and Deuteronomy 31:9-13. This chapter will show that Israel's Sabbath spectrum, including the Jubilee, looked back to the creation rest Yahweh enjoyed at creation and Yahweh's redemption of Israel at the Exodus, while providing physical, spiritual, economic, and social rest to humans and physical rest to the land, and looking forward to God's restoration of all things in the new creation. Because of shared timing, concepts, and goals, this chapter will also demonstrate that the Jubilee year belongs to the Sabbath year and is the climax of the Sabbath spectrum.

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<sup>1</sup> I borrowed the word "spectrum" from Jonathan Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society: Aspects of Law and Legality in the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 197. By using the word "spectrum," I mean to communicate the continuous and interrelated sequence of Sabbaths that occurs between the Sabbath Day and the Jubilee year. While I could use the language of "Sabbath laws," I fear this weakens the intimate connection between each of the Sabbath laws and their interrelated nature as a system. The language "spectrum of Sabbaths" may capture the idea best since the biblical text never uses the language of "Sabbath Spectrum" or "Sabbath System," yet "Sabbath Spectrum" is still best for clarity and economy of words.

<sup>2</sup> Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC, vol. 3a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 283.

<sup>3</sup> The timing of the Jubilee and how the Sabbath year and Jubilee year functioned together is dealt with in chap. 4 of this dissertation. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a broad and general framework of Sabbath theology and practice in the Pentateuch to rightly understand the Jubilee within its proper context.

## Genesis 2:1-3

The Jubilee is a Sabbath. Thus, in order to understand the Jubilee, the Jubilee needs to be understood in light of God's Sabbath rest, which is set up as the model which Israel is to mimic in all her Sabbaths, including the Jubilee. A proper understanding of the Sabbath is rooted in God's own rest. The connection between Israel's Sabbath law and God's own Sabbath is made explicit in Exodus 20:9-11:

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exodus 20:11 grounds Israel's required seventh day of rest in God's original seventh day of rest at creation. Since Moses grounded Israel's Sabbath day observance in the pattern of creation rest, it seems prudent to begin with the creation rest.

God's original day of rest is described in Genesis 2:1-3: "Then the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were finished. And God had finished on the seventh day from all his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy for on it he rested from all his labor which God created and made."<sup>4</sup> While the Sabbath is not mentioned in this text—the noun שָׁבַת does not appear here—the related verbal form שָׁבַת occurs twice.<sup>5</sup> First, Moses reports that God's activity of creating is finished. Genesis 2:3 reuses the verb בָּרָא from Genesis 1:1 to provide a narrative frame. This narrative frame signifies that this special period of creative activity had come to completion (i.e., this is why כָּלָה in 2:1 is translated as "finished"). Second, the text indicates that God "rested" (שָׁבַת) from his

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<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> Robinson calls the link between the verb שָׁבַת and the noun שָׁבַת into question, arguing that the verb describes a variety of people and concepts coming to an end, e.g. times and seasons (Gen 8:22), wealth (Ezek 30:10), the wicked (Ps 119:119), mirth (Hos 2:13), sacrifices (Dan 9:27), etc. Even if the noun did not develop directly from the verb, Exod 20:8-11 makes the connection between the Sabbath and God's seventh day "ceasing" explicit. See Gnana Robinson, "The Idea of Rest in the OT and the Search for the Basic Character of the Sabbath," *ZAW* 92, no. 1 (1980): 32-42.

creative activity. The concept behind this verb is “ceased,” as in, “work stopped.” However, “rest” can be an appropriate translation as long as there is a distinction made between divine rest and human rest. The idea in Genesis 2:2 is closer to “completion” than it is “cessation.”<sup>6</sup> The absence of formulaic elements from the previous six days of creation indicates that creation will remain in its completed state (resting state) perpetually.<sup>7</sup> Third, the text tells in 2:3 that God both blessed and sanctified—declared it holy in previous translation—the seventh day. Fourth, the uniqueness of this special day is also indicated by the fact that the seventh day lacks a paired day like the other six days in Genesis 1. This uniqueness is emphasized through the repetition of the ordinal “seventh” three times.<sup>8</sup> The result is that, on the seventh day, both God and creation enter a new mode of being or mode of action. God suspends his creative activity and begins his sustaining activity while creation remains in a state of completion.<sup>9</sup>

The text says that God “blessed” creation and “declared it holy” in 2:3. Since the material of creation is blessed in days 1 to 6, it seems that the time of day 7 is blessed.<sup>10</sup> Thus, divine blessing brings God’s mercy, provision, and promises to bear. This connection between blessing and active relationship can be seen in the priestly blessings of Numbers 6:23-26: “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, ‘Thus you shall

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<sup>6</sup> BDB, s.v. “שבת.”

<sup>7</sup> Mathews note a number of literary elements that separate the seventh day from the other six days of creation. Note the absence of the introductory formula (“then God said”) and the closing formula (“evening and morning”). When the absence of a paired creation day, mentioned above, is considered, the seventh day is not a day for creation. It is altogether different. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC, vol. 1a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 176. See also Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–5*, WBC, vol. 1 (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1987), 35-37.

<sup>8</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 176.

<sup>9</sup> The insistence that God shifts to a mode of sustaining activity is not indicated in the text but is a legitimate implication of the text with ample support from other biblical texts, which make clear that God watches over and actively cares for his creation (i.e., Ps 104:13ff; John 5:17). See A. G. Shead, “Sabbath,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 745.

<sup>10</sup> Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 179.

bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” The Aaronic blessing asks that God would protect the people of Israel (“keep”), give them grace and peace, and make his face known and his countenance known. It is a prayer for protection and, on a very basic level, for knowledge of God and God’s knowledge of them. It is a prayer for God and Israel to exist in harmonious relationship. Thus, when God blesses the seventh day in Genesis 2:3, he is bringing it into relationship with himself. When God blessed the creation, he let it be known that he would maintain an active relationship with the creation, including humanity. The blessing of the seventh day is more about relationship than it is about material benefits.<sup>11</sup>

What does Genesis 2:3 mean when it says of the seventh day that God “declared it holy”? The root here is  $\text{שׁוּב}$  in the *hiphil* stem. The gloss of “holy” unfortunately compartmentalizes this term’s lexical range into moral categories that are not necessarily intrinsic to its meaning. This word finds its root meaning in the character of God: “Be holy, for I am holy” (e.g., Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26). Holiness belongs to Yahweh alone; anything else that receives the designation only has a derived holiness.<sup>12</sup> However, the quality of “holiness” can be granted to places and objects (e.g., the tabernacle and its furnishings, Exod 40:9), persons (e.g., priests, Lev 21:6), and times (Sabbath, Exod 16:23). The noun and adjectives built from  $\text{שׁוּב}$  mean “apartness, sacredness, holiness,” while the related verb means “to be set apart, consecrated.”<sup>13</sup> Brown notes that the

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<sup>11</sup> See J. McKeown, “Blessings and Curses,” in T. Desmond Alexander, ed., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 85-86.

<sup>12</sup> See John E. Hartley, “Holy and Holiness, Clean and Unclean,” in Alexander, *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 420.

<sup>13</sup> BDB, s.v. “ $\text{שׁוּב}$ .” These basic glosses and conceptual definitions are widely accepted across the field of lexicography.

original idea behind holiness is “separation, withdrawal.”<sup>14</sup> Peter Gentry has recently challenged this basic tenet for קֹדֶשׁ, instead arguing that its root idea is “devotedness.”<sup>15</sup> Perhaps it is best to see the notion of “separation, withdrawal” not as intrinsic to קֹדֶשׁ, but as a practical outworking of Yahweh’s holiness. When Israel was made into a “holy nation,” Yahweh did not necessarily make Israel into a “morally pure nation.” He made Israel into a “devoted and distinctive” nation. Thus, when Yahweh declared the seventh day holy, he declared that it was set apart from the other six days and existed in a new mode of time devoted to the service and worship of God. Jointly, the merism in 2:3 that “God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy” signifies that the seventh day was a time in which all of creation existed in a harmonious relationship with God and existed for the glory and worship of God. As a result, creation was called to not only enjoy its relationship with God but to declare that God was the owner of time itself.

### **The Pattern of the Seventh Day**

Israel’s Sabbath spectrum looked back to the seventh day to derive both its purpose and its warrant. Israel was given the Sabbath so that they might worship God and to guarantee harmonious relationships with other humans (horizontal) and with the land (downward). This is why Exodus 20 grounds the Sabbath Day command in the pattern of the seventh day:

Remember the Sabbath day [זָכוֹר אֶת-יְמֵי], to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God [יְמֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִיהְנֹחַ שַׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִי]. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For [כִּי] in six days the LORD made heaven and

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<sup>14</sup> BDB, s.v. “קֹדֶשׁ.” Brown himself admits that his root definition is only the result of deduction, and is only conjecture. See the helpful overview article, H.H. Schmid, “קֹדֶשׁ” in *TLOT*, ed. Ernst Jenni with Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 724.

<sup>15</sup> Peter J. Gentry, “The Meaning of ‘Holy’ in the Old Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170, no. 680 (October 2013): 400-417. Arguing from Moses’ meeting with Yahweh in Exod 3, he contends that *qadosh* represents a place of meeting and presence, not distance or radical separation. Similarly, Israel’s status as “holy” in Exod 19:6 means they are wholly devoted to the service of the Lord.



earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested [וַיָּנַח] on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day [הַשַּׁבָּת אֶת־יְיָ] and made it holy. (Exod 20:8-11)

The use of כִּי at the beginning of verse 11 indicates that a reason, or ground, for the above is being provided.<sup>16</sup> In this case, it logically answers the question, “Why should you remember the Sabbath?” The reason for the command is the paradigm God instituted in the creation of six days of work followed by a seventh day of rest.

### **Was the Seventh-Day a Sabbath?**

Scholars are divided over whether the seventh day at creation was a Sabbath. As mentioned previously, the *qal* verb שָׁבַת is present in Genesis 2:3, but the noun is absent. Is the noun required for the seventh day to be considered a Sabbath day? There are multiple times in the Pentateuch in which the noun is not present, but the Sabbath day is clearly discussed. For example, the noun is missing in Exodus 23:12 and 34:21, where the Sabbath day is clearly in view, which suggests the noun does not need to be present in order for the Sabbath-idea to be present.<sup>17</sup> The manna narrative in Exodus 16 likewise indicates the link between seventh day and the Sabbath day, where the seventh day is first called a day of “solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord” (שַׁבְּתוֹן, Exod 16:23). Before the people receive the Sabbath command at Sinai in Exodus 20:8-11, the people are commanded not to search for manna on the seventh day because it is a Sabbath day. Furthermore, the people began to collect double the amount of manna on the sixth day without being commanded to do so (Exod 16:22). From this narrative, it can reasonably be concluded that the seventh day was understood as a day of rest before the Sabbath command was given.<sup>18</sup> This is further supported by Leviticus 23:3, which refers to a

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<sup>16</sup> See Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd rev. and exp. ed., ed. John C. Beckham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §444 for the causal use of כִּי.

<sup>17</sup> So Paul A. Barker, “Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Jubilee,” in Alexander, *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 695.

<sup>18</sup> One might argue that Exod 16 is narrative and Exod 20 is law in order to explain the absence of the command. However, the timeline still holds: the Manna narrative precedes the giving of the law at Sinai.

“seventh day” as a “Sabbath of solemn rest [הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שְׂכָחוֹן].” The repetition of the root שָׁכַח emphasizes the absolute prohibition on work. Significantly, the “seventh day” is equated with “Sabbath” in the strongest terms. While not definitive, this link between Sabbath and the seventh day hints toward a Sabbath understanding of the seventh day in Genesis 2:3. There is a sense that the cycle of time instituted at creation is such that the seventh day is ordained in the natural order as a day of ceasing activity.<sup>19</sup> The very idea of Sabbath is built into the natural order, beginning with God’s Sabbath on the seventh day of creation. Once again, just as God’s ownership of time is declared through the rhythm of the seventh-day rest, so God’s ownership of Israel’s time is declared through the rhythm of the seventh-day Sabbath rest.

The Decalogue strengthens the contention that the seventh day of creation was a Sabbath itself. Exodus 20:11 directly calls the seventh day of creation a Sabbath day: “For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” The fourth commandment looks back to the paradigm of creation and recalls the new mode (blessed and sanctified) in which the seventh day, the Sabbath day, existed. If this interpretation is correct, then Exodus 20:11 explains that the seventh day in Genesis 2:3 is in fact a Sabbath day.

A final link between the Sabbath institution in Israel and the creation Sabbath is the idea of rest. Because God rested, Israel was also commanded to rest. Genesis 2:3

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<sup>19</sup> Gleason Archer summarizes the significance of the seventh day in the natural order of time: “The religious year is dominated by the sacred number seven (symbolizing the perfect work of God). Hence (a) every seventh day is a holy sabbath; (b) every seventh year is a Sabbath year of rest for the crop-bearing land; (c) after seven sevens of years the fiftieth year is to be hallowed as a jubilee, in which all mortgaged lands are to be returned to the original family; (d) Passover is held at the end of the second heptad of Abib, on the evening of the fourteenth; (e) the Feast of Unleavened Bread is celebrated for the next seven days; (f) the Feast of Pentecost is celebrated after seven sevens of days following the offering of the wave-sheaf (hence on the “fiftieth” day); (g) the seventh month, Tishri, is especially sanctified by three holy observances: the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles; (h) the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated seven days (fifteenth to twenty-second of Tishri), plus an eighth day for the final convocation.” (Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 259-60, originally seen in Rooker, *Leviticus*, 283)

(“שָׁבַת”) and Exodus 20:11 (“וַיָּנַח”) recall that God rested on the seventh day. The replacement of שָׁבַת from Genesis 2:3 with וַיָּנַח in Exodus 20:11 should be noted. Even though the text uses a different verb, each verb describes the same activity (e.g., Exod 23:12). נָח is used to describe the cessation of something in motion while שָׁבַת is used to describe the cessation of habits, customs, objects, cycles, etc., coming to an end of their own accord.<sup>20</sup> It is not clear why Moses switched to a different verb in Exodus 20:11, but the connotation is the same: Israelites are to cease their normal, daily activities.

While Exodus 20:11 makes explicit that they are not to do any work on the seventh day, Deuteronomy 5:14 strengthens the link to God’s paradigm, explaining that the purpose of the Sabbath is “that your male servant and your female servant may rest [“וַיָּנַח”] as well as you.” Exodus 23:12 uses both שָׁבַת and נָח to reiterate the necessity of rest on the Sabbath day: “Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest [תִּשְׁבֹּת]; that your ox and your donkey may have rest [וַיָּנַח], and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed [וַיִּנְפֹּשׁ].”

It should be observed that the creation rest was a different kind of Sabbath than the rest experienced by Israel. The seventh-day rest of creation was a Sabbath-rest that was to occur forever, day after day. This creation rest also included work for humanity. Israel’s Sabbaths forbade work and only lasted a set period of time. The command in Exodus 20:8 begins with “remember.” Israel was to look back at the creation rest in Eden every Sabbath. The use of this “remember” language strengthens the argument that the creation was a Sabbath. Israel is directed to a pattern and reality that already exists. They are to emulate Yahweh’s pattern of rest and their cyclical rest points back to the reality of the original creation rest. The temporary nature of Israel’s rest would have naturally inculcated a desire and longing for the Yahweh’s rest, which is made qualitatively different by its permanence. The similar vocabulary, as surveyed, used between Exodus

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<sup>20</sup> Robinson, “The Idea of Rest,” 37.

20:8-11 and Genesis 2:1-3 causes the hearer of the Decalogue to recall the hallowed seventh-day. Sarna agrees that Exodus 20:8-11 is making an explicit connection back to creation: “Not only is the vocabulary of the present passage interwoven with other Pentateuchal references to the Sabbath, but the connection with Creation is made explicit in the first version of the Ten Commandments, given in Exodus 20:8–11.”<sup>21</sup>

Given that Israel’s rest derives its meaning, pattern, and goal from God’s Sabbath rest in the creation, it is helpful to briefly consider the nature of God’s rest and how that shaped the aim of the Jubilee. It was stated above that God’s rest was a ceasing from work as is the Sabbath, but it is qualitatively different in that the ceasing is permanent. The fact that the seventh day has no evening along with the three-fold repetition of the number seven in Genesis 2:1-3 signifies the theological importance of the seventh-day divine rest. The idea of cessation inherent in rest indicates that God has completed his activity and succeeded in establishing a dominion over which his rule is actualized on a permanent and ongoing basis without his direct effort. As mankind is called to imitate God’s rest, remember it, and be refreshed by it, mankind is subsequently called to return to the Edenic order where God’s rule reigns supreme and where matter and space are transcended by the quiet and reflective worship of the divine. The purpose of creation is not constant activity, but worship of God. Just as constant activity and productivity does not define God, so constant activity must not define mankind. Worship of God is the context in which mankind is to operate and defines the goal of mankind. Yet, the seventh day reminds mankind that attainment of this worshipful rest is not something that mankind can attain through toil and productivity. It is God who gives relationship and offers mankind the fellowship of his presence. The fixed nature of God’s rest thus has an eschatological dimension whereby it beckons Israel through all of their Sabbaths to return to worship and relationship with the Creator.

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<sup>21</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: Be-Reshit*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 14.

The Jubilee is the ultimate opportunity for mankind to enjoy the freedom to worship God and enjoy relationship with him. In a metaphorical sense, the Jubilee ensures every Israelite is freed to work their own garden in the presence of God, unencumbered freedom from toil, oppression, and debt. The Jubilee allows every Israelite to once again operate in the ideal of the seventh-day as God originally intended.<sup>22</sup> As Israel looked back, they were to long for the harmony that existed between the creation, humanity, and their creator, Yahweh. Israel's Sabbaths thus had a dual purpose: the Sabbaths provided for righteous treatment of humans, animals, and the land. In addition, Israel's Sabbaths reminded Israel of their need to seek the final and eternal rest of God that would constitute a return to the conditions of Eden and the mode of the original seventh day, including fruitful work.<sup>23</sup> In this way, the Jubilee remembered God's

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<sup>22</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 18.

<sup>23</sup> The question of whether the Sabbath is a creation ordinance is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The text does not contain any type of imperative or command. In fact, humanity is left completely out of the picture. Nevertheless, many scholars and believers through the ages have seen an implicit command that is further grounded by its extension to Israel in the Decalogue. It is argued that the Decalogue commands Sabbath observance precisely because it is a creation ordinance. The argument is then extended to say that the Ten Commandments are a morally binding code of law on all of humanity. When Christian worship on Sunday is considered, proponents of the Sabbath as a creation ordinance argue that the church simply changed the day of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2; Rev 1:10). Despite these arguments, it is my view that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance. While the seventh-day rest at creation may properly be called a Sabbath, there is no command for man to keep it and mankind is absent from the text of Genesis 2:1-3. The absence of a direct command in the text is conspicuous, both in Genesis 2:1-3 and in the rest of Scripture. Jesus identified his own mission with the fulfilment of the Sabbath (e.g. Matt 12:8; Mark 2:28; Luke 4:16-21), implying that observance of the Sabbath now expressed itself not through the cessation of activity but through the cessation of the attempt at establishing one's righteousness. Instead, Sabbath-keeping is expressed via faith in Jesus, who is called the believer's rest. Rest from labor is an essential part of humanity and the rhythm of life. It is true that Christians have an ethical obligation to give rest to those in their employ and to rest themselves. However, the New Testament commands, by example, that Christians celebrate their rest, who is Jesus, on Sundays in celebration of the Lord's resurrection. Finally, the Ten Commandments are not a universal, moral code of law. They are a summary of the Torah and a summary of Israel's covenant obligations. There is also a strong possibility, argued later in this chapter of this dissertation, that the Sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic Covenant. If this is so, then the Sabbath is fulfilled and no longer binding in the same way that the Mosaic covenant is fulfilled and is no longer binding (see Exod 31:12-17). An excellent overview of the major positions and their key arguments can be found in William M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983), 65-90. See also Charles P. Arand and Christopher John Donato, eds., *Perspectives on the Sabbath: 4 Views* (Nashville: B & H, 2011) and Andrew. T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A*

creation rest and even allowed Israel to partake of it, partially by time and degree, for a year. The super-Sabbath Jubilee year, in part, allowed Israel to experience a foretaste of these Edenic conditions for a full year. For Israel, when they observe the Sabbath, they “remember” (see Exod 20:8) how their relationship with God, each other, and the land ought to be: blessed, sanctified, and at peace.<sup>24</sup>

### **Summary of God’s Rest at Creation**

This section has shown that God’s seventh-day rest at creation established the pattern of Israel’s Sabbaths and looked forward to the eternal rest that would be accomplished at redemption. The seventh day stands apart from the other six days of creation, thus noting the completion, finality, and blessing of the creation by God. This section argued that the seventh-day rest is indeed a Sabbath since it uses common terminology with the Sabbath legislation, yet it is different in kind, being for God alone and eternal.

The seventh-day rest of God has ramifications for the Jubilee. As a super-Sabbath year, the Jubilee looked back to the rest God enjoyed and looked forward to its instalment in redemption as every Sabbath did. As will be shown later in this work, the Jubilee thus served as a paradigmatic type of God’s coming salvation. This typology is picked up by the prophets and by Jesus himself. The fact that the Sabbath is not a creation ordinance means that the Jubilee was for Israel alone and not for all of humanity.

### **The Sabbath Day**

The following section will provide an overview and exposition of the key texts on the Sabbath day within the Pentateuch. Later texts in the historical books and prophets will not be examined as the goal is to establish the Jubilee within the Sabbath spectrum of

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*Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 348-5.

<sup>24</sup> See chap. 4 of this dissertation for a full development of this argument.

Israel. The key Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25 will also not be examined given it will receive a full treatment in chapter 4. This section will show that the Sabbath day establishes the time framework of six-plus-one in which all Sabbaths operate, including the Jubilee. It will also show that the Sabbath day setup a dual focus on worship of God and providing relief (humanitarian focus) to humans and animals alike. This dual focus, vertical worship and horizontal rest for all of creation, informs the goal of the Jubilee: to preserve Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure. If Israelites' are away from their land and away from their family, then they are prevented from living in the true Sabbath rest which every Sabbath anticipates and was enjoyed in Eden on the permanent seventh day.

### **Exodus 16:21–30**

Exodus 16:21–30 is the first appearance of Israel's Sabbath in Scripture.<sup>25</sup> It is Exodus 16 that the timing of the Sabbath is established as six-plus one, which Exodus 20:8-11 will connect back to the creation six-plus-one principle. It is also in this text that Israel is first instructed to look to the Lord, not themselves, for provision on the Sabbath. These two principles, six-plus-one and trusting God's provision, are carried through the Sabbath spectrum all the way to the Jubilee.

He said to them, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over lay aside to be kept till the morning.' . . . Moses

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<sup>25</sup> The ANE origins of the Sabbath is extensively discussed in the literature. The main views are as follows: The Sabbath is (1) derived from Babylon's seventh-day weekly rest, called "a day of rest for the heart"; (2) developed from the lunar cycle in which the full moons were celebrated with a subsequent development into a once-a-week celebration of the monthly phases of the moon by ancient Arabs; (3) derived from the universal, socioeconomic need to have rest; (4) derived from the six-day week of ancient West Asia to which a seventh day was added; or (5) developed out of ancient Ugarit's seven-day festival week. For an overview of the views, see Harold H. P. Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," in Carson, *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, 21-22; and Gerhard F. Hasel, "Sabbath," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 5:850-51. The evidence cited by scholars is highly conjectural, often dependent on tenuous and supposed linguistic connections. Each viewpoint has multiple insurmountable difficulties. The conclusion of Dressler is appropriate: "Even if no theological reasons that necessitate an Israelite origin could be advanced, is it too daring and provocative to suggest that Israel herself might have been responsible for the creation of the seven-day week and a Sabbath? Or must we exclude Israel a priori, and state that she 'certainly could not have invented it'?" On this question, the evidence is unequivocal; only the ancient Hebrew literature speaks definitely about a seven-day week and a Sabbath" (Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 23).

said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.’ . . . See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day.” So the people rested on the seventh day. (Exod 16:23, 25-26, 29-30).

Israel has crossed the Red Sea and has now journeyed deeper into the Sinai Peninsula (Exod 16:1). They grumble for food and the Lord gives them manna in the morning for food, quail in the evening for food (Exod 16:2-3), and the Sabbath for rest and spiritual sustenance (Exod 16:23-30). The Sabbath institution begins with the Lord’s command. Moses received the instructions by the command (דְּבַר) of the Lord (v. 23). It is called a day of “solemn rest” and a “holy Sabbath.” In Hebrew, these two phrases are one clause in apposition to one another: מִקֵּחַ לַיהוָה שַׁבַּת־קֹדֶשׁ שַׁבָּתוֹן. The root idea behind שַׁבַּת is “to cease,” thus the seventh day is to be a day of ceasing, or stopping, for all Israelites. The doubling of the root along with the addition of the *-ôn* suffix, שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן, intensifies the day, marking it as especially significant and thus deserving strict observance.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the ESV’s translation as “solemn rest” is, perhaps, most appropriate. It is also denoted as “holy” and “to the LORD.” The significance of holy has been discussed in relation to Genesis 2:3. It is a day that is both set apart and devoted to the Lord. The ל-prefix attached to the divine name (“לַיהוָה”) indicates specification, possession, or purpose.<sup>27</sup> This phrase is also restated in verse 25: “For today is a Sabbath to the LORD” (הַיּוֹם כִּי־שַׁבָּת לַיהוָה). Whether one translates “for the LORD” or “to the LORD” does not really matter as the sense is clear: The LORD has designated this as a special day each week for the people to rest and to worship him (i.e., “remember” in Exod 20:8). Verse 26 demarcates the

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<sup>26</sup> The *-ôn* suffix may add either an adjectival or an abstract idea, “restfulness.” See Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, trans. A. E. Cowley, ed. E. Kautzsch, 2nd eng. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 2006), §86f, 240. שַׁבָּתוֹן accompanies commands for nearly the entire Sabbath spectrum. Bosman explains, “This derivation from שַׁבָּת designates the weekly Sabbath (Exod 16:23; 31:15; 35:2; Lev 23:3), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31; 23:32), the sabbatical year (Lev 25:4–5), the day of rest commemorated by trumpets (Lev 23:24), and the first and eighth day of the Feast of Succoth (Lev 23:39).” Hendrik L. Bosman, “שַׁבָּת,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. William Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1154).

<sup>27</sup> See Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 277.



“seventh day,” and thus every seventh day, as the day on which the Sabbath is to be observed. Finally, verse 29 calls it a gift to Israel. Verse 30 summarizes that the people “rested” (“הָעָם נִשְׁכָּחוּ”) on the seventh day.

The narrative in Exodus 16 lays the foundation for the Sabbath observance. It describes its nature as holy and worthy of careful observance. It further signifies that its function is for rest. The Sabbath was not designed as punishment or as a method of control. Through the Sabbath, Yahweh ensured that work would stop and the focus would turn to him. Thus, verse 29 commands each Israelite to “remain” in their place. They were not confined to their houses, were free to tend to milking and other necessary chores, to walk about, and, one can presume, to even recreate. The Sabbath’s purpose is jointly humanitarian and spiritual. As will be shown, this wedding together of the physical and the spiritual continues across the Sabbath spectrum.

### **Exodus 20:8-11**

Exodus 20:8-11 is perhaps the most well-known Sabbath text, positioned as the fourth commandment in the Decalogue.<sup>28</sup> This commandment explicitly connects Israel’s Sabbath to God’s Sabbath. This principle should be understood as the foundation of not

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<sup>28</sup> Matters of form and structure within the Decalogue are beyond the scope of the present work. It is sufficient to note that the Decalogue is known as apodictic law, which is in the form of simple negative or positive commands without qualification or explanation. The first and tenth commandment deal with matters of the heart and commandments 2-8 deal with outward conduct. Further, commandments 1-4 are generally understood as duties one owes to God, while commandments 5-10 are generally understood as duties owed to fellow humans. The form of the Decalogue also has a number of parallels and similarities with other moral law codes in the ANE. This is not surprising. As Sarna explains, “The affinities are to be expected. In order for the *berit* to be intelligible to the Israelites, it made sense to structure it according to the accepted patterns of the then universally recognized legal instruments. The Decalogue and its contents are, however, in a class by themselves. The idea of a covenantal relationship between God and an entire people is unparalleled. Similarly unique is the setting of the covenant in a narrative context” (Nahum M Sarna, *Exodus: שמות*, The JPS Torah Commentary [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991], 102). For an overview of major views on the form of the Decalogue and the Book of the Covenant (Exod 21-24), see John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, vol. 3 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 278-82. Form matters and ANE parallels are also considered in Raymond F. Collins, “The Ten Commandments,” in Freedman, *ABD*, 6:383-85; William Henry Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 2a (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 301-7; and T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 390-98. On the paradigmatic nature of biblical law, see Stuart, *Exodus*, 442-43.

just the Sabbath day, but also of the entire Sabbath spectrum, including the Jubilee. The text reads,

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Verse 8 gives the command with the verb זָכוֹר, “remember.” The verb carries with it the sense of “observe” or “commemorate.” The verb is an infinitive absolute in place of the expected imperative, thus stressing the verbal idea of “remembering.” The infinitive absolute can function as an emphatic imperative when context allows.<sup>29</sup> With the present verbal focus, the Israelites are commanded to do more than just recall the Sabbath. They are to actively think on it and ponder its significance. Although not usually emphasized, the fourth commandment also commands that the Israelites work six days.<sup>30</sup> It is on the seventh day that they are to rest. Later laws give specific instructions on what they could or could not do. They could not build a house (Exod 31:12–17), harvest their crop (34:21), kindle a fire (Num 15:32–36), or carry any burden (Jer 17:22). While there is no prescription for religious or cultic activity beyond rest for the original Israelite, the priests were to offer sacrifices on the Sabbath (e.g., Num 28–29; Ezek 45–46).<sup>31</sup> Verses

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<sup>29</sup> The infinitive absolute as emphatic verb is well attested. Gesenius’ grammar explains: “For an emphatic imperative, e.g. שָׁמֹר (thou shalt, ye shall), observe Dt 5:12; זָכוֹר (thou shalt) remember, Exod 13:3, 20:8 (the full form occurs in Dt 6:17 שָׁמֹר; 7:18 זָכוֹר); Lv 2:6, Nu 4:2, 25:17, Dt 1:16, 2 K 5:10, Is 38:5, Jer 2:2, followed by a perfect consecutive; Jos 1:13, 2 K 3:16, Is 7:4, 14:31 (parallel with an imperative; in Na 2:2 three imperatives follow). But הִבֵּיט Ps 142:5 may be only an incorrect spelling of הִבֵּיט imperative” (Gesenius, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, §113bb, 346).

<sup>30</sup> Collins, “The Ten Commandments,” 6:385.

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Tigay provides a summary of other activities that occurred on the Sabbath: “Its dedication to God was expressed by visits to sanctuaries and prophets (2 Kings 4:23; Isa. 1:13; 66:23), by special sacrifices and other activities in the temple (Num. 28:9–10; Lev. 24:8), by the recitation of a special psalm for the day (Ps. 92), and by a joyous atmosphere (Hos. 2:13; Isa. 58:13; Lam. 2:6).” Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 68.

9-10 outline the humanitarian aspect of the Sabbath, outlining in list form its universal application. No living thing within Israel, even servants, are to do work.

Verse 11 provides the ground, which is discussed above. A number of verbal connections to Genesis 2:3 are present in Exodus 20:11, which shows a dependence on Genesis 2:3. “The Lord made” (יְהוָה עָשָׂה) recalls “which he had done” in 2:2 (עָשָׂה אֲשֶׁר) and “which he had made” (לַעֲשׂוֹת) in Genesis 2:3. “Rested on the seventh day” (בַּיּוֹם וַיָּנַח) (הַשְּׁבִיעִי) mirrors Genesis 2:2’s “and he rested on the seventh day” (וַיָּנַח הַשְּׁבִיעִי בַּיּוֹם וַיָּנַח), although the verb is changed from שָׁבַת to נָח. נָח functions as a virtual synonym for שָׁבַת, although it also explains the “ceasing” of שָׁבַת with the “coming to rest” of נָח. In Exodus 23:12, the two verbs operate in parallel with נָח, restating and applying שָׁבַת. The blessing and sanctifying of the seventh day are also restated. Exodus replaces אֱלֹהִים with יְהוָה, which is expected, and has some minor variation in syntax. Generally, the verb order is the same and both בָּרַךְ and קָדַשׁ are in the *piel* with קָדַשׁ receiving the direct object attached in Genesis 2:3 and separated in Exodus 20:11. The most significant change is that “the seventh day” (הַשְּׁבִיעִי אֶת־יוֹם) in Genesis 2:3 is changed to “the Sabbath day” (הַשְּׁבִעִת אֶת־יוֹם) in Exodus 20:11.

Genesis 2:3—וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ

Exodus 20:11—עַל־כֵּן בָּרַךְ יְהוָה אֶת־יוֹם הַשְּׁבִעִת וַיְקַדֵּשׁהּ

The correlations between Genesis 2:3 and Exodus 20:11 demonstrate that Moses is making direct allusion to Genesis 2:1-3. The Sabbath command looks to the creation-rest as both its paradigm and as its goal. Just as the text of Exodus 20:11 quite literally remembers the rest in Genesis 2:1-3, so Israel is to recall and long for the eternal rest of God seen in creation. The Sabbath is a memorial to Eden and an appropriation of its harmony and blessing for Israel to experience every single week. By remembering the Sabbath, the Israelites enjoy the presence of God and liberation from work. As will be shown, this experience of remembering the original creation extends to a full year during both the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year.

## Exodus 23:10-12

Exodus 23 connects the Sabbath year with the Sabbath day. It follows the pattern of six plus one with the seventh unit containing the cessation of activity, in this case, sowing fields. The fallow year law likewise includes a list of animals and servants, once again highlighting the humanitarian focus of the Sabbath. The text reads,

For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard. Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your servant woman, and the alien, may be refreshed. (Exod 23:9-12)

Exodus 23:10-12 belongs structurally within a five-paragraph chiasmic unit in Exodus 23:10-19. The first two paragraphs begin with the number “six” (23:10, 12) and deal with the Sabbath while the final two begin with the number “three” (23:14, 17) and deal with the three annual pilgrimage festivals.<sup>32</sup> Verse 13 forms the middle of the chiasm with its emphasis on obeying Yahweh. Surprisingly, the Sabbath year is placed ahead of the Sabbath day. When the chiasm is taken into account, the reason for listing the Sabbath year ahead of the Sabbath day becomes apparent.

A—Sabbath Year Instructions (23:10-11)

B—Weekly Sabbath Observance (23:12)

C—Exhortation to Obey Yahweh (23:13)

B’—Three Week-long Annual Feasts (23:14–16)

A’—Yearly Annual Instructions (23:17)

The A panels provide instructions at the year-to-year level while the B panels provide instructions at the week-to-week level.<sup>33</sup> The linking between the Sabbath year

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<sup>32</sup> I am indebted to Alexander, *Exodus*, 520, for these notes on the form of the paragraph in 23:10-19.

<sup>33</sup> This is my own view. A survey of modern commentaries and works on the covenant code did not reveal an explanation for the ordering. An excellent analysis of the covenant code’s structure can be found in Joe M. Sprinkle, *Biblical Law and Its Relevance: A Christian Understanding and Ethical Application for Today of the Mosaic Regulations* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 49-68.

instructions and the Sabbath Day is significant. They are of the same essence. Both are described as Sabbaths and both are part of the Sabbath spectrum. The six units of work followed by one unit of rest initially commanded in Exodus 16:23ff is applied to the year-to-year cycle such that the land works for six years and then rests for a full-year. The Sabbath day instructions in 23:12 are virtually similar, condensing the list to a representative list, with a focus on animals and slaves. The seventh-year Sabbath and fallowing instructions are a new application of the Sabbath. The fallow year instructions of Exodus 23:10 will be dealt with in the next section. For now, it is sufficient to point out that the structural link in Exodus 23:10-17 communicates the link in form between the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year.

### **Exodus 31:12-17**

Exodus 31:12-17 provides further explanation about the purpose of the Sabbath and provides further warrant for obedience. God has finished giving instructions to Moses regarding the building of the Tabernacle.<sup>34</sup> As a matter of conclusion, the Sabbath law is reiterated in quite forceful terms. In this reiteration of the command, several new features of the Sabbath come to the fore. The text reads,

And the LORD said to Moses, “You are to speak to the people of Israel and say, ‘Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you. Everyone who profanes it shall be put to death. Whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn

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<sup>34</sup> As noted by Sarna, there is an intrinsic connection between the Tabernacle and the Sabbath, as seen in Lev 19:30 and 26:2: “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord” (Lev 26:2). The Tabernacle instructions are given in six parts with the Sabbath being the seventh (e.g. Exod 25:1-30:10; 30:11-16, 17-21, 22-33; 34-38; 31:1-11, 12-18). The Tabernacle demarcates sacred space while the Sabbath demarcates sacred time. Further, the Tabernacle recalled creation on several levels: the cherubim guarding the ark of the covenant mirrored the cherubim that garden Eden’s entrance; the menorah corresponded to the tree of life; the blessing and completion of the Tabernacle in Exod 39:32 recalls Gen 2:3; the priests “work and keep” the Tabernacle as Adam was to “work and keep” Eden [see Gen 2:15; Num 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6]; the veil had Cherubim woven into it. Just as the Tabernacle looked back to creation and looked forward to new creation, so also does the Sabbath. See Sarna, *Exodus*, 156. For a brief overview of the connections between the Tabernacle and creation, see R. E. Averback, “Tabernacle,” in Alexander, *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 817-19.

rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever. It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.’ (Exod 31:12-17)

First, the people of Israel are commanded to keep “my Sabbaths” (31:12). The “my” pronoun once again reemphasizes that the Sabbath is “to the LORD.” The plural, Sabbaths, may describe the fact that there are fifty-two Sabbath days each year. It also may describe the multiple kinds of Sabbaths to be kept each year. Given that Exodus 23:10-12 described both the Sabbath day and the Sabbath fallow year, it seems more likely that the plural refers to every type of Sabbath within the Sabbath spectrum. In other words, the Sabbath year (and the seventh Sabbath year, the Jubilee) is as important as the Sabbath day.

Second, these Sabbaths are designated a sign (תֹּאֲרָה) of God’s sanctification of Israel (31:13). The Sabbaths thus have a second didactic element. Exodus 20:8-11 indicates that the Sabbaths teach creation and rest from labor. Further, Exodus 31:13 teaches that the Sabbaths serve as a reminder that Yahweh sanctifies Israel. The Sabbaths remind Israel that God has set them apart for a relationship with him and remind Israel of his presence with them. This helps explain the tight relationship with the Tabernacle in the text. The Tabernacle allowed for God’s presence within Israel and the Sabbath guaranteed that presence was respected, recalled, and celebrated.<sup>35</sup> Because of God’s presence with Israel, Exodus 19:6 describes Israel as a “kingdom of priests.” By obeying the Sabbath, the people are enabled not only to rest, but also to meet with God and thus mediate knowledge of God to each other and to the world. The Sabbath was a reminder and a mark of their relationship with Yahweh and the fact that they belonged to him.

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<sup>35</sup> Sarna aptly explains the tight connection between God’s presence, the Tabernacle, and the Sabbath: “The resumption of the Tabernacle narrative in chapter 35 commences with the Sabbath law. This structural pattern is intended to make an emphatic statement about the hierarchy of values that informs the Torah: The Tabernacle enshrines the concept of the holiness of space; the Sabbath embodies the concept of the holiness of time. The latter takes precedence over the former, and the work of the Tabernacle must yield each week to the Sabbath rest” (Sarna, *Exodus*, 201).

Third, the penalty for profaning the Sabbath is death (Exod 31:14). It appears that singular *הַשַּׁבָּת* refers to the Sabbath day. Exodus 35:2-3 adds that no fires are to be kindled on the Sabbath day, a command which is enforced in Numbers 15:32-36. To reject the Sabbath is to reject the sign of God's covenant with Israel and is to reject Yahweh himself. Such behavior is akin to outright rebellion and is worthy of death. Positively, the sign of the Sabbath reminded Israel week-after-week of God's presence in their midst and their subsequent distinctness, thus renewing and energizing their relationship with Yahweh each week.

Fourth, Exodus 31:16 calls the Sabbath day a perpetual covenant (*עוֹלָם בְּרִית*). In other words, there is an agreement between Israel and Yahweh to keep the Sabbath. This is in addition to the Sinaitic covenant, which demonstrates the centrality and importance of the Sabbath to Israelite faith. All true Israelites who are faithful to Yahweh will observe all his Sabbaths. The prophet Isaiah picks up this centrality in Isaiah 56:2-7 and 58:13-14. Isaiah 56:2-7 promises eunuchs and foreigners who keep the Sabbath (among other acts of devotion to the Lord) a part in the coming kingdom. Isaiah 58:13-14 promises that those who keep the Sabbath and "take delight in the Lord" will "ride on the heights of the earth" and be well fed (Isa 58:14).<sup>36</sup> The practice of keeping Yahweh's Sabbath is a testimony to one's faithfulness to Yahweh.

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<sup>36</sup> One might argue that the Sabbath is the sign of the Sinai covenant as circumcision is the sign of the Abrahamic covenant and the rainbow is the sign of the Noahic covenant. See Hasel, "Sabbath," 5:852. It might be contended that the sign of the Sinai covenant is worship at Mount Sinai, based on Exod 3:12: "He said, 'But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.'" However, worship at Sinai signifies that God sent Moses, thus signifying Moses' credibility as Israel's leader and the viability of Moses' mission. Even if worship at Mount Sinai were understood as a sign of the Sinai covenant, it would only be the initial sign. If the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant, then the worship that takes place every Sabbath continues the original worship at Sinai and thus signifies the covenant at Sinai week-to-week, year-to-year, generation-to-generation. The text refers to the Sabbath as both a sign and as a perpetual covenant, but it never puts the two together to say that the Sabbath is the sign of the covenant. For purposes of the present argument, it is clear that the Sabbath is very central to Israelite faith. Pursuit of whether the Sabbath is a sign of the Sinai covenant is beyond the scope of this work.

Fifth, Exodus 31:17 describes the Sabbath day as a sign (אֵימָת) that God ceased to work after six days (31:17). As previously discussed, God's seventh-day creation rest provides the precedent for the weekly Sabbath. As Israel is called to "remember" the Sabbath in Exodus 20:8, so once again they are urged to look back to the creation and see God's rest. The looking back explains why they should rest and allow their family, workers, animals, and land also to rest. This retrospective aspect of the Sabbath also reminds Israel to long for the realities of Eden: uninterrupted fellowship with God, harmonious human relationships, fruitful work, and a blessed relationship with the ground. The retrospective role of the Sabbath undergirds the prospective hope that God will not just redeem Israel, but redeem the cosmos, turn back the curse, crush the head of the serpent, and cause his glory to spread across the face of the earth.<sup>37</sup>

As these realities of the Sabbath are considered, it should be recalled that the Jubilee is a super-Sabbath year. Like the Sabbath-day and the Sabbath-year, the Jubilee reminded Israel that God sanctified them, served as a covenant between Yahweh and Israel, and caused Israel to look back to creation and forward to new creation when God would make all things new. As Dressler puts it, the Sabbath "tells of God's grace (sanctifying His people), God's holiness (for the people and Yahweh), and God's authority (a covenant that must be obeyed)."<sup>38</sup> Hasel connects the present experience of God on the weekly Sabbath with the freedom that happens every Sabbath year and Jubilee year:

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<sup>37</sup> So also Hasel: "Its 'sign' signification is commemorative of God as Creator and Redeemer where the sabbath-keeping community confesses its continuing relationship to its covenant Lord; it is also prospective in signification in that it is a 'sign' of the covenant history moving forward to its appointed goal; it is at the same time a 'sign' signifying the believer's present posture vis-à-vis God with physical, mental, and spiritual renewal taking place in each sabbath celebration" (Hasel, "Sabbath," 5:852). Bosman argues similarly: "Therefore, the holiness of the Sabbath is rooted in the joyous commemoration of God as creator and redeemer in the past and in the experience of the presence of God in the rest on the seventh day as a sign of the covenant in the present. This enjoyment of the Sabbath by Israel as a whole is mirrored in the freeing of Israelite debtors and slaves during the Sabbath year and the Jubilee (Lev 25:10; Deut 15:1-11)." Bosman, "שָׁבָת," 1156. For similar connections between the Sabbath and the Jubilee, see Hasel, "Sabbath," 5:852 and his quote in n48 of this chapter.

<sup>38</sup> Dressler, "The Sabbath in the Old Testament," 26.



“Therefore, the holiness of the Sabbath is rooted in the joyous commemoration of God as creator and redeemer in the past and in the experience of the presence of God in the rest on the seventh day as a sign of the covenant in the present.”<sup>39</sup> This enjoyment of the Sabbath by Israel as a whole is mirrored in the freeing of Israelite debtors and slaves during the Sabbath year and the Jubilee (Lev 25:10; Deut 15:1–11).<sup>40</sup>

### **Deuteronomy 5:12-15**

The version of the Sabbath command in Deuteronomy 5 only has minor variations in wording but shifts the motivation from God’s rest at creation to the Exodus. There is an essential similarity between what happened at the creation and what happened at the Exodus. In the creation account, the wind of God (the Spirit) blew back the waters so that the dry land was revealed and mankind was brought into relationship with God. In the same way, at the Exodus, God blew back the waters so that the dry land of the Red Sea was revealed and Israel was brought into a renewed relationship with God.<sup>41</sup> The connection between the Exodus, the Sabbath, and God’s activity at creation is extended all the way to the Jubilee. The Exodus is cited as theological motivation for Israel in verse 38 and verse 55, providing concluding motivation clauses for two major sections that exhort Israelites to redeem one another. In the Jubilee, Israelites are called to effect the redemption God performed at the Exodus for their brothers and Israelites are called to effect the creation reality of freedom to work the land and worship God that was true in

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<sup>39</sup> Hasel, “Sabbath,” 5:852.

<sup>40</sup> Bosmann, “שָׁבֹת,” 1156. Hasel explains, The soteriological and freedom-from-slavery emphasis in Deut 5:14c–15a and the creation freedom-from-labor emphasis in Exod 20:11a indicate that one is dependent on the other and that both are humanitarian in essence. Man is to rest on the seventh day because YHWH, as rest-providing Creator, sets an example of rest for human beings and because YHWH, as liberating Redeemer, sets an example of rest from slavery so that all are able to rest (Exod 5:5). (Hasel, “Sabbath,” 5:852).

<sup>41</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 187.

Eden and effected by God's resting on the seventh day. The text of Deuteronomy 5:12-15 reads,

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day. (Deut 5:12-15)

Variations include the shift from “remember” (זָכוֹר) in Exodus 20:8 to “observe” (שָׁמַר) in Deuteronomy 5:12. Deuteronomy 5:12 also adds “as the LORD your God commanded you,” which provides a reference back to the either Exodus 16 or Exodus 20 and underscores the importance of the command. Deuteronomy also expands “your animals” in verse 14 to “your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock.” The use of the Exodus as motivation in verse 15 is wholly new to the Sabbath-day legislation, although God's redemption via the Exodus is listed as motivation in both the Sabbath year (Deut 15:15) and Jubilee year legislation (Lev 25:38, 42, 55).

The change of the imperative to שָׁמַר and the revised motivation are the more substantive changes in Deuteronomy 5. שָׁמַר is regularly included in contexts commanding celebration of a feast (Exod 23:15; 34:18; 12:17; Deut 16:1) and other Sabbath texts (Deut 5:12; Lev 19:3; 19:30; 26:2; Exod 31:13, 31:14, 31:16). It is also used in relation to the Mosaic covenant: keep covenant (Ezra 17:14); keep commands (Jer 35:18); keep and do (עָשָׂה) commands (Deut 4:6; 7:12).<sup>42</sup> Thus, the concepts of “celebrate,” “do,” or more loosely, “carefully do,” gives the appropriate sense behind “keep.” This is one of the Decalogue commands that are positive, which is perhaps one of the reasons why Sabbath is tied so intimately with keeping the Mosaic covenant. Obeying Sabbath is a positive action through which one can demonstrate faithfulness to Yahweh and his covenant.

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<sup>42</sup> BDB, s.v. “שָׁמַר.”

The motivation via the Exodus redemption deserves further comment: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day” (Deut 5:15). At first glance, the change may seem surprising. Moses is not countering the motivation given in Exodus 20:11. It might be argued that Exodus 20:11 is explaining the origin of the Sabbath while Deuteronomy is explaining its aim.<sup>43</sup> There is a link between the freedom granted from work in the creation and the freedom granted from slavery (and oppressive work) in the Exodus.<sup>44</sup> There is also a sense in which the Exodus was a new creation, creating a new nation.<sup>45</sup> Both motivation clauses—creation and Exodus—reminded Israel of their dependence on God as both Creator and Redeemer.

### **Days of Rest and the Feasts of Israel**

Leviticus 23 lists the six feasts of Israel: Passover (Lev 23:5; Exod 12:2-20); Festival of Unleavened Bread (Lev 23:6-8); Festival of Harvest/Weeks/Pentecost (Lev 23:15-21; Exod 23:16; 34:22); Festival of Trumpets (Lev 23:23-25; Num 29:1-6); Day of Atonement (Lev 23:26-33; Exod 30:10); Festival of Booths/Tabernacles (Lev 23:33-43; Num 29:12-39; Deut 16:13). The Feast of Unleavened Bread prescribes a holy convocation without work on the first and seventh day of the Feast, making these two days virtually equivalent to the recurring weekly Sabbath day (Lev 23:7-8). Likewise, a day of rest from work paired with a holy convocation is prescribed at Pentecost, which was fifty days after

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<sup>43</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 69.

<sup>44</sup> Hasel says it much more eloquently: “The soteriological and freedom-from-slavery emphasis in Deut 5:14c–15a and the creation freedom-from-labor emphasis in Exod 20:11a indicate that one is dependent on the other and that both are humanitarian in essence. Man is to rest on the seventh day because YHWH, as rest-providing Creator, sets an example of rest for human beings and because YHWH, as liberating Redeemer, sets an example of rest from slavery so that all are able to rest” (Exod 5:5). Hasel, “Sabbath,” 5:851.

<sup>45</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 157.

the waving of the grain at the sheaf offering and Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:11, 15-16, 21). A day of rest is also prescribed at the one-day Feast of Trumpets and on the one-day Day of Atonement (Lev 23:24, 28). The day of rest associated with the Atonement is referred to as “a Sabbath of solemn rest” (שַׁבָּתוֹן שְׂבֵתָה) (Lev 23:32). Finally, a day of rest is designated on the first and eighth day of the Feast of Booths, similar to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. While the purpose of the days of rest is never directly explained, they likely were treated as Sabbaths to the Lord in which the significance of the feast and what it celebrated before the Lord was remembered. Interestingly, the Jubilee calendar (every forty-nine years) and the Festival of Weeks/Pentecost (forty-nine days after Passover) share the same units of time.<sup>46</sup> The significance of this shared number scheme will be explored in chapter 4.

In addition to the extra rest days, three of these feasts required every male to pilgrimage to their nearest shrine or, later, to Jerusalem: Unleavened Bread, Harvest/Weeks/Pentecost, and Ingathering/Tabernacles (see Exod 23:14-17. These pilgrimage feasts allowed for an interruption from the normal cycle of work and daily life to remember, enjoy, and celebrate God’s presence. The Feasts along with their days of rest and pilgrimages are a significant component of Israel’s Sabbath spectrum. While only the Day of Atonement receives the designation “a Sabbath,” all the Feasts provide rest and celebration as did the Sabbath day. Their inclusion within the Sabbath spectrum is further supported by the fact that reminders to keep the Sabbath day head both the instructions about the feasts in Exodus 23:14-17 and in Leviticus 23:3ff. Through both the Sabbath day and the Feasts along with the Sabbath year and the Jubilee, celebration of Yahweh and his goodness was built into the very rhythm of Israel’s calendar and into the fabric of their society.

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<sup>46</sup> It seems best to read the “seven full weeks” of Lev 23:15 as forty-nine days and the “you shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath” as another way of saying the forty-ninth day. If you count from the seventh Sabbath, then the fourteenth Sabbath will be fifty days later, or an elapsed time of forty-nine days.

## **The Sabbath Year**

The Sabbath year occurred every seven years. It had four major elements: the fallowing of land, the remission of debts, the remission of debt-slaves, and the reading of the law. The following section will provide a general overview of the Sabbath year as a thorough understanding of its provisions is necessary to understand how it related to and complemented the Jubilee. This section will demonstrate that the Sabbath year provided another opportunity for Israel to experience the goodness, redemption, and provision of Yahweh while also ensuring that the practical effects of the redemption which Yahweh accomplished for Israel remained in place; namely, the Sabbath year aimed to maintain every Israelite's status as a free man who was able to work his land without the burden of any debt. The Sabbath year's goal is one degree short of the goal of the Jubilee, to preserve Israel's families' on their god-given plot of land. The Jubilee is, in effect, the logical and necessary extension of the Sabbath year.

### **The Fallowing of Land**

The covenant code demands that the land rest from agricultural production every seventh year. The rest was universal for all agricultural activity, whether it was sowing crops or harvesting fruit. Since it will be argued that the Jubilee is concurrent with a Sabbath year, the Jubilee also provides, indirectly, for fallow rest. In addition, the main Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 25:8-17 is wrapped by fallow year instructions (Lev 25:1-7; 18-22). For this reason, it is necessary to have a thorough understanding of the fallow year commands so as to have a full picture of what occurred during the Jubilee year.

**Exodus 23:10-11.** The covenant code gives a brief treatment of the fallow year; a provision which is paired with the Sabbath day, as discussed: "For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield, 11 but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the beasts of the field may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard" (Exod

23:10-11). Vineyards and olive orchards are representative of a universal prohibition against agricultural activity. The command is *וְנָטַתָּ וְנָפְלָתָּ*. The verb *נָטַתָּ* carries the sense of “let fall,” while *נָפְלָתָּ* carries the sense of “throw down, forsake, neglect.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, one might woodenly translate the command in verse 11 as, “but the seventh year you shall let it fall and forsake it” (my translation). The energetic suffix on *וְנָפְלָתָּ* adds some slight emphasis to the gravity of the command, perhaps anticipating a cynical reading of the command that would seek to circumvent its full force. The concern for the underprivileged poor matches the focus of 23:6-9 and 23:12-13. This fallow provision continues into the Jubilee and its neglect is one of the primary reasons for the exile.<sup>48</sup>

**Leviticus 25:1-7.** The introductory paragraph in the Jubilee legislation begins with the fallow year, providing a much fuller treatment than that of the covenant code in Exodus 23:10-11. The text reads,

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the Lord. For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the Lord. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food.” (Lev 25:1-7)

Leviticus 25:1-7 restates and further clarifies the command and prohibition of Exodus 23:10-11.<sup>49</sup> Leviticus 25:4 calls the seventh year a *שְׁבִיַּת שְׁכָתוֹן* (“Sabbath of solemn rest”) for the land, marking out the seventh year rest as analogous to the Sabbath day and

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<sup>47</sup> See Ezek 29:5; Isa 32:14; Deut 32:15 for these uses of *נָטַתָּ*. See also BDB, s.v. “נָטַתָּ,” and HALOT, “נָטַתָּ.” For *נָפְלָתָּ*, see BDB, s.v. “נָפְלָתָּ,” and HALOT, s.v. “נָפְלָתָּ.”

<sup>48</sup> See 2 Chr 26:20-23; Lev 26:34-35, 43; Dan 9:2; Jer 29:10; Ezra 1:1.

<sup>49</sup> Dependency of Lev 25:3 on Exod 23:10 is perhaps shown through the repetition of *שִׁשָּׁה שָׁנִים* (“six years you shall sow”) and *אָתָּה תִּבְרָאָתָהּ* (“gather in its fruits”).

as equally important as the Sabbath day.<sup>50</sup> The fallow year does not just have humanitarian motives. There is religious significance to its observance. Time and land are submitted to the will of Yahweh. Israel is reminded that they, their land, their time, and their crops belong to Yahweh. Just as Israelites enjoy a day of rest every week after six units (days) of work, so the land enjoys a year of rest every year after six units (years) of work.

Leviticus 25:5 furthers the prohibited activity on the fallow year by adding, “You shall not reap what grows of itself.” The technical term *אֲחֵרֵי* is usually translated “aftergrowth” and refers to what grows the second year from seeds dropped during the harvest.<sup>51</sup> At first glance, this appears to prohibit taking any fruit from one’s fields or from the uncultivated land in the region. However, verse 6 argues that the land “will provide food for you.” In fact, it is repeated in verse 7: “All its yield shall be for food.” The prohibition in verse 5 is from the normal agricultural activities of harvest, which would have included gathering, storing, etc. Just as Israel was only to gather enough manna to eat for the day in Exodus 16, so during the Sabbath year they can only gather what they need to eat. This day-to-day dependence on the land would have reminded all Israelites of all classes that Yahweh gives the land and gives the produce of the land.

In fact, this dependence continued past the Sabbath year. If an Israelite cannot harvest and plant, then he will be dependent on the sixth year’s harvest for more than a calendar year. Leviticus 25:19-22 addresses this practical problem of fallow-year food provision directly:

The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. 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.

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<sup>50</sup> The emphatic phrase *שַׁבָּת שְׁבִיִּית* designates the weekly Sabbath (Exod 16:23; 31:15; 35:2; Lev 23:3), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31; 23:32), the Sabbath year (Lev 25:4-5), the Feast of Trumpets (Lev 23:24), and the first and eighth day of the Feast of Booths (Lev 23:39).

<sup>51</sup> There is also what grows from the second growth, the *שְׂחָדָה*, “the self-seeded plant” (See 2 Kgs 19:29). See HALOT, s.v. “שְׂחָדָה.”

In the case of both the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year, the sixth year harvest will have to feed a family for the better part of three calendar years through a double portion. Just as Israel collected a double portion of manna on the sixth day (Exod 16:22), so they collect a double portion in the sixth year. The language of 25:4, לָכֶם לְאֶכְלָהּ, recalls God's provision for mankind in Genesis 1:29, which is likewise described as לָכֶם יְהוָה לְאֶכְלָהּ. Again and again, the narrative of the Pentateuch is punctuated with reminders that the Lord will abundantly provide for all of his people.<sup>52</sup> In the case of the fallow year, Israelites were to be reminded of the Edenic reality in which mankind freely eats food for which he has not worked.<sup>53</sup> It has even been suggested that the scraggly growth of the “untrimmed vines” parallels the scraggly growth of the Nazirite's untrimmed hair. Land and man are intimately related such that the law employs visual similarities between each when they are set apart to the LORD.<sup>54</sup> The practice of fallowing land is well-attested in the ANE and regularly practiced in agricultural societies.<sup>55</sup> Cultivating the land year-to-year leads to a long-term depletion of nutrients that diminishes the harvest.<sup>56</sup> While the main aim of the

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<sup>52</sup> Robert S. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 370-89, esp. 385.

<sup>53</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 199.

<sup>54</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 199-200; similarly, Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year,” 384. Burnside believes the only connection is the visual “scraggly growth” and rejects Kawashima's proposal of a connection between both the Nazirite and the field being consecrated. It seems, though, that this is quibbling over words and that perhaps both realities are alluded to through the parallel language. Burnside also cites Davis, who similarly argues that there is a parallel between leaving the edges of one's fields untrimmed and not trimming the edge of one's beard. See Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 79.

<sup>55</sup> For a more detailed treatment of how regular fallowing of the land added to the productivity of the land, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17-22*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 3a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2245-50.

<sup>56</sup> Sarna affirms this understanding: “Continuous cultivation of arable land leads to serious depletion of its nutrients and consequent loss of productivity. Hence, the effect of the Torah's seventh year fallow system is conservationist. It preserves the fertility of the soil and enhances future productivity.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 143-44. Levine explains that the regular fallow helps reduce the amount of sodium in the soil, which regular irrigation adds year-to-year: “Allowing the land to lie fallow every seventh year helped to reduce the amount of sodium in the soil, especially where irrigation was employed.” Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: Va-Yikra*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 170.



fallow is to cultivate dependency on God, it appears to have served a secondary purpose of setting up a pattern of caring for the soil's fertility.

Was the Sabbath year celebrated at the same time universally or was it localized to regions? While the text is not clear, the rest of the laws on the Sabbath spectrum are universally obeyed at the same time: the Sabbath day, the Sabbaths involving multiple feasts, the Sabbath year release, and the Jubilee year.<sup>57</sup> The repeated command that "the land" is to observe the fallow (Lev 25:4-6) appears to encompass the whole of Israel's land given to them by Yahweh. In other words, Israel was to observe a fallow year across the entire nation at the same time.

### **The Release of Debts and Debt-Slaves**

The second aspect of the Sabbath year is the universal release of debts at the beginning of the Sabbath year. The Sabbath year ensures that both land and mankind are released from their respective burdens. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 subsequently deals with the release of debt-slaves, which is not tied to the Sabbath year but operates on the six-plus-one principle of the Sabbath whereby debt-slaves are to be released after six years of service. As mentioned previously, the separation between the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year is one of degree. The Jubilee year completes the good work that is done in the Sabbath year. Thus, it is essential to understand the debt-release of the Sabbath year and the slave-release law which is connected to the six-plus-one timing of the Sabbath spectrum. Since the Jubilee is a Sabbath year and also releases Israelites from a form of slavery, the two laws must be viewed as complementary and it must be understood how

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<sup>57</sup> When looking at Exod 23:10-11 alone, Wright argues that a universal fallow would not benefit beasts and the poor on a year-to-year basis: "The poor of the people and the wild beasts would derive little sustenance from a single fallow every seven years, but the continuous presence of some land lying fallow in every locality would obviously provide some relief." C. J. H. Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel? Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for the Land, Debts and Slaves, Part II," *EQ* 56, no. 4 (October 1984): 131. This is an unfortunate reading that is controlled by the supposed merits of diachronic analysis and wrongly assumes that Leviticus developed after Exodus and represents a developed Fallow year tradition.

they worked together to ensure that every Israelite could remain free of debt and oppression so as to work their god-given plot of land.

The specifics of this debt-release show up in Deuteronomy 15:1-11. This debt-release law is found within a larger section, Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17, which compiles a unique set of laws performed at regular intervals: the annual and triennial tithe (14:22-29), the septennial remission of debts and debt-slaves (15:1–18), the annual sacrifice of firstborn animals (15:19–23), and the three annual pilgrimage festivals (16:1-17).<sup>58</sup>

Given the humanitarian concern of the fallow provisions in the Sabbath year, it is not surprising that this humanitarian concern continues into more practical matters of debt. Every society must deal with members who become insolvent, whether through their poor decisions or adverse circumstances. Given this reality, the Mosaic law ensures that fairness and generosity characterize Israel's lending practices. First, the Mosaic law forbids the charging of interest to fellow Israelites (Exod 22:25; Lev 25:35-37; Deut 23:19-20). Second, the Mosaic law limits the terms of the loan to seven years by demanding that every debt is cancelled (Deut 15:1-11) and every debt-slave is released every seven years (Deut 15:12-18).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Some have attempted to show a connection between the fourth commandment and 14:22–16:17, a contention based on the larger proposal that Deut 12:1–26:15 is structured as an exposition and application of the Decalogue. This may be the case but takes some special pleading and is difficult to prove. Nevertheless, it is clear that Deut 12:1–16:17 deals with proper worship of the Lord, both individually and within the sanctuary. In this sense, Deut 14:22–16:17 deals with the payment of proper tribute to the Lord with one's time, animals, produce, debts, debt-slaves, etc. Jeffries Hamilton has plausibly argued that all the laws in 14:22–16:17 provide relief as the Sabbath day does: relief from hunger, debt and enslavement, exclusion from public worship. Jeffries M. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy: The Case of Deuteronomy 15*, Dissertation Series / Society of Biblical Literature 136 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 115. For the argument that the structure of Deut 12–26 is based off of the Decalogue, see Calum M. Carmichael, "A Singular Method of Codification of Law in the Mishpatim," *ZAW* 84 (1972): 19-24; Stephen A. Kaufman, "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," *Maarav* 1 (1979): 105-58; and John H. Walton, "The Decalogue Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," 93-117, in Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth, *Interpreting Deuteronomy: Issues and Approaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> This is quite similar to the laws of Hammurabi, especially §117, which stipulates that debt-slaves only served for three years. See chap. 2 of this dissertation and discussion below.

The key verses in the debt release law are Deuteronomy 15:1-3. Deuteronomy 15:4-6 provides motivation for obeying the command while verses 7-11 encourage the creditor to release freely the debts of fellow Israelites.<sup>60</sup> Deuteronomy 15:1 commands, “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release [הַשָּׁמִטָה].” While the text does not explicitly indicate that the seventh year is the Sabbath year, several allusions back to the other Sabbath year laws indicate that Deuteronomy is expanding on those Sabbath year laws. First, Deuteronomy 31:10 sets the year of release at the end of a regular cycle of seven years: “At the end of every seven years, at the set time [בְּמָעַד] in the year of release [שְׁנַת הַשָּׁמִטָה], at the Feast of Booths.” The announcement of the release every seven years happened at the Feast of Booths, which celebrated Israel’s release from bondage to Egypt. As the Sabbath day is grounded in the Exodus redemption, so also the pairing of the Sabbath year with the Feast of Booths imbued the debt-release with a regular reminder of God’s past act of release in the Exodus. Second, there is a subtle linguistic connection with the Sabbath year legislation in Exodus 23. The verb “you shall let it rest” [תַּשְׁטִיחֶהָ] from Exodus 23:11 is alluded to in Deuteronomy 15:1. This verse uses the related noun הַשָּׁמִטָה (“release”). The verb itself shows up in 15:2 (וַתִּשְׁמָט) and in 15:3 (וַתִּשְׁמָט). Since הַשָּׁמִטָה is only used in this passage and Deuteronomy 31:10, it seems that there is a conceptual connection between the fallow provision and this provision of release. The idea is that both land and loans are to be released or let go. Third, there is a logical connection between the release of the land and the release of debts. The fallowing of land created the practical issue of no income with which to pay down a debt. The debt release is thus a logical extension of the land release (fallow) during the Sabbath year.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Duane Christensen suggests that Deut 15:7-11 forms the middle of a chiasmic structure, beginning with the triennial tithe, moving in with debt remission, then moving back out with debt-slave remission and sacrifice of firstborn livestock. While there is careful structuring in the text, it is not clear if the outer frames (triennial tithe and sacrifice of firstborn livestock) of Christensen’s chiasm actually match. Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1–21:9*, 2nd ed., WBC, vol. 6a (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 309.

<sup>61</sup> One might even argue that Deuteronomy is filling out a condensed law from Exod 23.

While the connection between the fallow year is typically granted, the object and scope of the release imagined in Deuteronomy 15:2 is heavily debated. This verse has been the subject of much discussion as it prompts two interrelated debates regarding what exactly is happening in the Sabbath-year release. First, commentators disagree on whether loans in general are released or just pledges for loans. Second, many disagree on the scope of the debt-release, some arguing it is a temporary relief while others argue it is permanent. The following will review the main lines of arguments for each viewpoint while arguing that the sabbath-year debt-release is permanent and applies to loans in general, which logically would include the release of pledges for loans.

The first debate concerns the object of the release at the end of every seven years. The debate centers around the meaning of the phrase “every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor” (שְׁמוֹט כָּל-בֹּעֵל מִשָּׂה יָדוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשֶּׂה בְרֵעֵהוּ).<sup>62</sup> The construct phrase כָּל-בֹּעֵל מִשָּׂה יָדוֹ literally translates, “Every owner of a loan of his hand.” This leads to the common English translation: “creditor” (cf. ESV, NASB, KJV, TNIV). However, North and Wright have argued against the traditional translation. They do not believe a full release of a loan’s principal was practical as it would discourage creditors from lending in the first place.<sup>63</sup> Second, they argue that it was only a debt-suspension since the שְׁמוֹט is parallel to the suspension of harvesting. As a result of these misgivings with the traditional reading of the text, they argue that Deuteronomy 15:2 releases pledged persons (i.e., debt-slaves) or pledged land, not loans themselves. The idea is that debt-slaves would have secured their loans by offering their work or the usufruct of their land as collateral and as a practical way of amortizing the debt itself.

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<sup>62</sup> For an in-depth treatment of this debate and major viewpoints, see Gregory Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the ANE* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 263-75; John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 115 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 131n102; R. North, “Yād in the Shemitta-law,” *VT* 4 (1954): 196-99, esp 199; Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, Analecta Biblica 4 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954), 185-87; C. J. H. Wright, “What Happened?, Part I,” 129-38.

<sup>63</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 185-86; Wright, “What Happened? Part I,” 136-37.

North and Wright justify that pledges are released and not loans from a creative translation of Deuteronomy 15:2. First, they argue that מִשְׁחָה should be rendered “pledge” instead of “loan.”<sup>64</sup> Second, they argue that וְיָדֹא modifies כָּל-בְּעָלִים and should be interpreted as “power,” “disposition,” or “control.”<sup>65</sup> The result is the translation: “Every holder of a pledge at his disposition shall release what he has received by pledge-loan contract with his brother.”<sup>66</sup> North cites cuneiform texts that describe a debtor’s self-sale “into the hands” (*ina qātē*) of the creditor, whereby the handshake signifies the debtor surrendering himself into the creditor’s custody. In this case, the debt-slave (whether the debtor or a dependent of the debtor) works off the debt while in the hands of the creditor. North goes so far as to argue, without any basis in the text, that the debtor, his family, and his land is possessed until the debt is worked off.<sup>67</sup> Wright argues that only land was taken as pledge since land would have been sold before family members. In addition to ANE parallels, North cites several scriptures as grounds for rendering מִשְׁחָה as “pledge.” These references are Job 17:3; Proverbs 6:1; 11:15; and 22:26.<sup>68</sup> North does not explain these citations and they do not appear to justify his translation as they tend to discuss the practice of pledges in general. Proverbs 22:26 does relate pledges to debts, but a correlation between the two does not necessitate that every loan involved a pledge necessarily.

Wright and North also argue that the loan for which the pledge stands is only suspended, which is the second large debate surrounding Deuteronomy 15:2.<sup>69</sup> In this view, the pledged person would have rights to return to their land, profit from its produce,

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<sup>64</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 187; Wright, “What Happened? Part I,” 135-36.

<sup>65</sup> Wright, “What Happened? Part I,” 135.

<sup>66</sup> North, “Yād in the Shemitta-Law,” 199.

<sup>67</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 187.

<sup>68</sup> North, “Yād in the Shemitta-law,” 198.

<sup>69</sup> Craigie argues for a temporary release since farmers would not be able to make payments during a fallow year. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 236.

and pay down their debt during the fallow year only. Wright argues, “Such a year would have been a very considerable relief.”<sup>70</sup> Wright finds warrant for the temporary release in the analogue of the land fallow, where the land is released temporarily for a year.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, Wright later concedes that a permanent cancellation of debt and permanent release of the pledge was possible.

Despite valiant effort to defend their views, Wright’s and North’s arguments are not compelling. Wright and North argue against the normal semantic range of the words in question, the inner logic of Deuteronomy 15:1-12, the constraints of the Mosaic law, and the general trajectory of debt-slavery in the ANE. The following rebuttals of the Wright-Chirichigno pledge-view also provide arguments in favor of a general release of loans. First, the traditional reading of the Masoretic Text is in keeping with the standard semantic range of the words in question. *יָד* can still hold the idea of “power” without a pledge being in view.<sup>72</sup> It is likely that a financial loan without pledge would have been secured by handshake. Second, *מִשְׁחָה* is a *hapax legomenon*, which requires that its meaning is strongly tied to the context. Nowhere in the passage is the typical Hebrew construction for seizing a pledge used. The verb *קָבַל* (“to pledge”), its denominative *קָבַל* (“a pledge”), and the verb *עָרַב* (“to stand surety for, to pawn, to pledge”) are typical for the taking and giving of pledges, yet neither is present in Deuteronomy 15. If Moses wished to release pledges alone, why did he avoid the typical language and leave the meaning obscure?<sup>73</sup> It is true that Deuteronomy 15:12-18 permits and limits the scope of debt-slavery, but this is an entire new section related thematically to the Sabbath-year release but is not related in timing. As is argued later, the Sabbath-year release happened periodically while the limit

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<sup>70</sup> Wright, “What Happened? Part I,” 137.

<sup>71</sup> Wright, “What Happened? Part I,” 137.

<sup>72</sup> See HALOT, s.v. “*יָד*.”

<sup>73</sup> See HALOT, s.v. “*קָבַל*,” and “*קָבַל*”; HALOT, “*עָרַב*.”

of a debt-slave to six years of service operated on an independent timetable whereby a debt-slave was released after six years, regardless of when the Sabbath-year release fell. It is also true that the  $\pi\tau\tau\eta\psi$  would have released pledges when it released all debts and loans. There is no doubt that the two are interrelated. The issue at stake is whether the release was specific to pledges alone or was broad to all manner of debts and loans. Seeing a limitation to pledges alone in Deuteronomy 15:2 simply strains credulity.

Second, the LXX interprets the phrase as a general release of loans: ἀφήσεις πᾶν χρέος ἰδίου (“you shall release every personal debt”). Third, a general and permanent release of all loans or debts is in keeping with the wider context of the passage. The language of verse 3, “but whatever of yours is with your brother,” presumes that a possession of the creditor is with the borrower, not vice-versa. The pledge viewpoint presumes just the opposite—that a possession or person belonging to a loan-holder is with the creditor. It is most likely that money or seed was given to the borrower by the creditor.<sup>74</sup> If this is the case, then Deuteronomy 15:2 is saying, “Let your claim go.” There are other indicators in the passage as well. Deuteronomy 15:7 provides some help in interpreting  $\text{מִשְׁכַּח יָדֶךָ}$  in verse 2. The language does not refer to power or control but to the holding of a loan in a greedy manner. Israelite creditors are, literally, to let the loan go, as if they were letting a piece of paper fly to the wind. This is evidenced by the language in verse 7, which sets a hardened heart parallel to a shut hand: “You shall not harden your heart or shut your hand [ $\text{תִּקְפֹּץ יָדְךָ}$ ] against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand [ $\text{תִּפְתַּח יָדְךָ}$ ] to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be” (Deut 15:7-8). Verses 7-8 help one to understand the idiom in verse 2. “Release the loan of his hand” simply means “let go of the loan.” Further support comes from Deuteronomy

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<sup>74</sup> Tigay agrees that charitable loans focused on a farmer’s livelihood is what this text generally imagines: “They were subsistence loans made to individuals so that they could survive. . . . A farmer, for example, might need funds, seed, or supplies because of crop failure; or a city dweller might become impoverished because of unemployment. Loans to individuals in such circumstances were acts of charity rather than commercial ventures, and the forgiving of such loans was an extension of the charity” (Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 145).

15:9–10, which commands, “You shall give to him freely.” The legislation encourages lending generously even if the release is near, which implies that the loan itself would be forgiven.

Fourth, Wright’s and North’s view contradicts the logic of the wider biblical legislation. The biblical law severely limits the practice of taking pledges and forbids the taking of interest (e.g., Exod 22:25; Lev 25:37; Deut 23:19; 24:6, 17; Ezek 17:16). Deuteronomy 24:6 and 24:10–13 restrict pledges to those that a debtor is not dependent on for livelihood. Instead, a creditor is to be content with the pledge that the debtor provides. While pledges of person or land may be given, their terms are limited by other passages (persons, Deut 15:12–18; land, Lev 25:13–17). Fifth, Wright and North assume that the pledged person’s capacity for work or the pledged land’s capacity for growth (usufruct) amortized the loan, but this is not the standard practice in the ANE. Pledged land or persons in the ANE typically worked to pay off the interest on a loan, not to amortize the debt itself.<sup>75</sup> In addition, it is unlikely that a debtor would have sold himself into debt-slavery, which is forbidden by the laws of redemption in Leviticus 25:39ff. and generally frowned upon in the ANE as well.<sup>76</sup> Chirichigno also adds that *misharum* and *andurarum* edicts typically involved the language, “Break the tablet,” which is a definitive sign-act that the loan itself is completely forgiven.<sup>77</sup> In fact, the Jews themselves in Second Temple time instituted the practice of *prosbol*, which allowed for a clause to be

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<sup>75</sup> See Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 74.

<sup>76</sup> See Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine, from the Middle of the Third Millennium to the End of the First Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 98. See also discussion in this current chap. of this dissertation.

<sup>77</sup> A. Kirk Grayson reports that debts were typically recorded on tablets and broken once the debt was settled: “Tablets recording loans and debts, on the other hand, were destroyed when the debt was paid, thus eliminating the need for a receipt. If a creditor could not produce a written document proving a debt against someone, he had no legal claim against that person.” A. Kirk Grayson, “History and Culture of Babylonia,” in Freedman, *ABD*, 4:770. Sarna explains Moses’ breaking of the tablets in Exodus 32:19 as typical of Akkadian practice: “In Akkadian legal terminology to ‘break the tablet’ (*tuppam tēpû*) means to invalidate or repudiate a document or agreement.” Sarna, *Exodus*, 207.



inserted into contracts that stipulated that the loan could not be forgiven at the Sabbath year debt-release.<sup>78</sup> When taken on the whole, the evidence supports the traditional interpretation of Deuteronomy 15:2. The semantic range of the terms, the inner logic of the passage, the constraints of the Mosaic law, and the trajectory of ANE practice along with the practice of Second Temple Judaism all provide compelling evidence that Deuteronomy 15:2 provides for the release of all types of loans, debts, and pledges.<sup>79</sup>

Verse 3 elaborates on the intended beneficiaries of the release, qualifying that it is only applicable to Israelites and excludes foreigners: “Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.” The debt-release is for Israelites. While the release is universal to the whole land and includes all debts, it does not include all who live within the bounds of Israel. The Sabbath release is particularly for Israelites, as Deuteronomy 15:2b indicates: “He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother [וְאֶת־אָחִיו אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ], because the LORD’s release has been proclaimed.” The phrase “his neighbor, his brother” clarifies that this release only applies to Israelites.<sup>80</sup> Some argue that foreigners are excluded because they are only in the land to trade.<sup>81</sup> The text does not give explanation for foreigners’ exclusion from the release. One can postulate that the

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<sup>78</sup> See *m. Šebu.* 10:3–6. Samuel Greengus explains that the *prosbol* was instituted officially by Hillel around 5 BC. The Talmud explains that the *prosbol* was instituted in order to encourage lending, and was only used for loans backed by pledges. Samuel Greengus, *Laws in the Bible and in Early Rabbinic Collections: The Legal Legacy of the ANE* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 102. According to Talmud *b. Git.* 36b: “The Rabbis ordained that it (i.e., the seventh year) should be operative, in order to keep alive the memory of the Sabbatical year; but when Hillel saw that people refrained from lending money to one another; he decided to institute the *prosbol*.”

<sup>79</sup> For further support, see Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 131ff.; Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1966), 105-6; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 144-45. The Halakhah precludes unpaid wages, bills on merchandise, and certain secured loans, which is similar to §8 of Ammisadaqu’a *misharum* edict, which precluded business loans. See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 145.

<sup>80</sup> There is some debate about the identity of this brother in 15:12. Wright and others have argued that the brother in 15:12 is a member of a landless class of Israelites called the “Hebrews” who are entitled to special treatment and generosity due to their impoverished status. A defense for the “brother” being an Israelite is provided below and dealt with in chap. 2 of this dissertation as well.

<sup>81</sup> See Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 146; Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 167.

exclusion is based on the wider covenant framework that the law governed. Those in the covenant enjoy the privileges of the covenant and those who are not in covenant do not. It should also be noted that expecting foreigners to forgive debt universally every seven years is an unreasonable expectation and not enforceable. Since the objective is the good of the entire Israelite society, every member enjoys the privilege of the release: “But there will be no poor among you” (Deut 15:4).<sup>82</sup> Verses 4-6 provide a contrast by arguing that there is no need for the poor to exist within Israel. While one might argue this is an idealistic viewpoint<sup>83</sup>; it is an exhortation toward what ought to be. Verse 5 commands obedience to the command and sandwiches the command in verses 4 and 6 with promises of God’s blessing, not just to individuals, but to the entire nation. If they obey the Lord, the Lord will make the entire nation prosper to the point that they lend as a nation, which presumes that the individuals of their society are prospering and not languishing in poverty.

Whether verses 4-5 are idealistic or not, verses 7-11 speak to the more likely situation. Israelites are commanded to lend freely to their poor and needy brothers, regardless of the amount needed or how near the release is to the loan. Denying the loan or giving it begrudgingly is tantamount to sin (15:9). After all, the release belongs to the Lord “because the Lord’s release has been proclaimed” (Deut 15:2). The Sabbath debt-release law reminds Israel that their King is Yahweh, who has given generously to them and requires that they give generously with open hands to one another. It is worth noting that there are no civil sanctions pronounced. Individual Israelites are sanctioned, instead,

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<sup>82</sup> Tigay comments that the law preserved society by preserving the citizens in that society, thus excluding foreigners: “The remission applies only to debts owed by fellow Israelites, not those owed by foreigners. Similarly, the *misharum* edict of the Babylonian King Ammitsaduka canceled only the debts of Akkadians and Amorites in Babylon. The distinction between citizens and foreigners may be due to the fact that forgiving debts is an extraordinary sacrifice. Collecting debts is a legitimate right that members of society are willing to forgo only on behalf of those who have a special family like claim on their generosity. In practical terms, remission of debts aims to re-establish economic equilibrium within a society, and since foreigners are only temporary residents they are not members of that society. Indeed, since foreigners were normally present in a country for purposes of trade, goods or money given to them on credit were usually investments or advance payments on goods, not loans because of poverty. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 146.

<sup>83</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 133.

by fear of God's judgment. The absence of sanction highlights the gravity of the release in the Lord's eyes. Deuteronomy thus provides an additional benefit to help alleviate the suffering of the poor. Not only is their inability to pay off debts redressed, but their inability to obtain loans is redressed.<sup>84</sup>

The general release of debts is an essential piece of Israel's social and economic structure and an essential piece of the covenant. The release's link to the Sabbath spectrum demonstrates that the aim of the release is more than practical. The release of debts points Israelites to the reality of their redemption by Yahweh and stirs up a longing in them to experience the rest that was present at creation before the Fall. The next section of Deuteronomy 15:12-18 goes a step further, setting a limit on the term of debt-slaves to six years.

### **The Release of Debt-Slaves**

Although Deuteronomy 15:12-18 is not directly connected to the Sabbath year or the Sabbath spectrum, it is logically and thematically connected to the Sabbath year release of debts and connected in principle to the release of persons in the Jubilee. In addition, Deuteronomy 15:12-18 has important implications for understanding the nature of the Jubilee release. This section will argue that Deuteronomy 15:12-18 releases dependent debt-slaves after six years of service and that this release is of a different character from the release commanded in the Jubilee. Before looking in detail at this release law, it is necessary to demonstrate the structural and thematic unity that verses 12-18 share with verses 1-11. The thematic unity of verses 1-11 and verses 12-18 is expressed by terms that recur throughout: the phrases "seven years/seventh year" (vv. 1, 9, 12), the description of a fellow Israelite as one's "brother" (vv. 2, 3, 7, 9, 11, 12), and references to God's blessing that make generosity possible and reward it (vv. 4, 6, 10, 14,

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<sup>84</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 144.

18).<sup>85</sup> In addition, there is a logical connection between verses 1-11 and 12-18. If a man is unable to repay his interest-free charitable loan, then he would have to take the next logical step: sell his dependents into debt-slavery to repay the balance. Verses 12-18 imagine the dependent son, daughter, or wife being sold to another Israelite. The situation of verses 12-18 is comparatively worse than the situation of verses 1-11.

It will be argued next that the manumission of debt-slaves is not tied to the Sabbath year. The period of debt-slavery is limited to six years, regardless of the timing of the Sabbath year.<sup>86</sup> Yet, the manumission of debt-slaves is connected religiously and theologically to the Sabbath spectrum. As has been observed, Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17 wraps the practical concerns of Deuteronomy 15 within a larger framework of regular practices of worship. The corporate nature of the three feasts outlined in Deuteronomy 16 gives emphasis to the necessity that all Israelites participate. Given this corporate requirement, the release laws of Deuteronomy 15 serve as guarantees that all Israelites actually can participate in the corporate religious life of Israel.

A brief look at the three feasts in Deuteronomy 16 demonstrates the rule that all must participate in corporate religious life. Deuteronomy 16:16 requires all males to participate in the three annual feasts: “Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deut 16:16).

In addition, the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:9-12) and the Feast of Booths (Deut 16:13-15) specifically command that all manner of Israelites from every economic spectrum are to participate. The command from Deuteronomy 16:14 will suffice as an example: “You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your male

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<sup>85</sup> Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 144.

<sup>86</sup> See Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 133n13, for a list of those who hold to a consecutive release.

servant and your female servant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns.”

Deuteronomy 14:22-27 requires a yearly tithe of grain while Deuteronomy 14:28-29 commands that a triennial tithe of all produce is due. Deuteronomy 14:29 likewise commands, like Deuteronomy 16:14, that the economically downtrodden (“the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow”) make themselves present before the Lord. The placement of Deuteronomy 15 in between commands to care for the poor and commands that ensure all Israelites, regardless of their situation, are present at key feasts implies that the entire nation is responsible for the participation of the economically and socially downtrodden in the religious rhythms of Israel.

Deuteronomy 16 also provides motivation to obedience via the Exodus, as does Deuteronomy 15:15. The Passover Feast (Deut 16:3) and the Feast of Weeks (Deut 16:12) specifically recall the nation’s release from slavery in the Exodus. As was shown in Deuteronomy 5:12-15, the Sabbath spectrum is intimately tied to the Exodus release. The Exodus is interwoven into the Sabbath mentality in such a way that the manumission of slaves would have also been motivated by memory of the Exodus redemption. First, because Deuteronomy 15:12-18 imagines a logical worsening of an Israelite’s situation, just as occurred under Pharaoh. Second, because the proper treatment of slaves is demanded by Israel’s own master, who delivered them from slavery. Finally, it should be noted that the six years of service is not surprising given the Sabbath spectrum’s focus on six units of work followed by a unit of rest.

In summary, Deuteronomy 15:12-18 shares a thematic unity with verses 1-11 through the repetition of multiple key phrases and a logical progression of worsening poverty. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 also matches the concerns of Deuteronomy 14:22–16:17, which share a common concern to provide the poor relief from hunger, debt, enslavement,

and exclusion from public worship.<sup>87</sup> Verses 12-18 also demonstrate a unified structure. Verses 12-18 can be divided into four sections by paying attention to the four clauses beginning with כִּי (vv. 12, 13, 15, 16). Verse 12 stipulates the manumission of any debt-slave after a six-year period of service. Verses 13-14 require that the Israelite master provision the debt-slave(s) upon release with livestock, grain, and wine. Verse 15 provides moral and religious motivation to obey, based upon the nation's deliverance from slavery in the Exodus. Verses 16-18 describe the process by which a debt-slave can elect to serve the master permanently.

**Manumission of the dependent debt-slave (v. 12).** The command of verse 12 is straight-forward. An Israelite debt-slave is limited to a six-year service period: “If your brother [אָחִיךָ], a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman [הָעֶבְרִיָּה אוֹ הָעֶבְרִי], is sold [יָמַכְרָ] to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free [תְּפַדֶּה] from you” (Deut 15:12). The master of the debt-slave must let any Israelite go free after six years. Given that Exodus 21:1 likewise requires release only after six years of service, it seems that that a debt-slave may have served through the Sabbath-year release. It is possible that the general debt remission of the Sabbath year also released debt-slaves. However, if this were the case, why would Moses take time to describe a separate release that operated on its own calendar?

While the matter of the release is clear, the identity of the slave is not clear. A number of evangelical and critical scholars argue that the Hebrew man or woman is not a landed Israelite, but a member of a landless class of Israelites.<sup>88</sup> As discussed in chapter 2, the argument that the Hebrew man or woman was a member of a landless class is dependent on a tenuous etymological connection with the *ḥabiru* of the ANE, a faulty

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<sup>87</sup> Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 115.

<sup>88</sup> See Wright, “What Happened? Part II,” 196-97; Stephen A. Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems of Ancient Israel,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon*, ed. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer, JSOTSS 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 282; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 134.

view that Deuteronomy 15:12 contradicts Leviticus 25:39ff., and an inventive argument that אֶחָד is defined and limited by the term הֶעֱבְרִי to indicate a social distinction between the master and the debt-slave.<sup>89</sup> The more logical reading of the text is that the אֶחָד הֶעֱבְרִי are Israelite dependent debt-slaves.<sup>90</sup> The term Hebrew is used in both Deuteronomy 15:12 and Exodus 21:2 in order to distinguish an Israelite עֶבֶד from a permanent עֶבֶד who was not an Israelite. Greengus makes a similar argument:

There is only one set of Hebrew terms for slaves and it is used without distinction both for chattel and debt slaves. Thus, adding the term ‘Hebrew’ helps clarify that in these cases we are dealing with fellow Israelites, i.e., originally free individuals, who were sold into slavery to pay off their obligations. These laws support the notion that debt slaves should not serve in perpetuity. All obligations, whatever the amount, were extinguished through six years of servitude.<sup>91</sup>

That Deuteronomy 15:12 is limiting the term of dependent debt-slaves and not a landless class of immigrants is also supported by multiple lines of evidence from the ANE. As was shown in chapter 2, selling dependents into debt-slavery was a typical practice in the ANE and ancient Israel (e.g., LH §117–119; 2 Kgs 4:1-7).<sup>92</sup> The situation in 2 Kings 4:1-7 is a classic example. The husband is dead, and a loan has come due. The creditor’s only recourse is to seize the dependents of the widow and force them into debt-slavery. As is consistent with ANE practice, the widow herself is not taken as a debt-slave. It appears that the practice of self-sale was frowned upon in the second and first millennium ANE. Ancient Babylonian documents and records from Nuzi (ca. 1750–1250

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<sup>89</sup> This dissertation argued in chap. 2 that הֶעֱבְרִי is a gentilic that denotes a servant who is another Israelite. This particular issue is a *crux interpretum* for understanding the relationship between the various manumission laws, including the Jubilee. See chap. 2 of this dissertation on manumission of debt slaves for a full discussion of the issues and a defense of the view set forth here.

<sup>90</sup> This is the obvious reading of Jer 34:9 as well, where הֶעֱבְרִי likewise describes the male and female slaves who are to be released. This text specifically calls these debt-slaves both “brother” and “Jew,” which is in keeping with the natural reading of Deut 15:12 proposed here. The text of Jer 34:9 reads, “That everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female [אֶת־עֶבְדֵּי וְאִשָּׁת־עֶבְדֵּי], so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. [אִישׁ אֶחָיו בְּיָהוּדִי עֶבְד־בָּם לְבָלְתִּי]”

<sup>91</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 87.

<sup>92</sup> See chap. 2 of this dissertation, “Debt-slavery in ancient Israel” for a description of debt-slavery in ancient Israel and the argument that Exod 21:2-6 regulates dependent debt-slaves.

BC)<sup>93</sup> have numerous examples of self-sale. Yet, according to Mendelsohn, the legal and business documents from the Hammurabi period (1792–1750 BC), Assyrian period (950–627 BC), and the Neo-Babylonian period (625–539 BC) do not contain one example of self-sale.<sup>94</sup> Chirichigno agrees with Mendelsohn’s conclusion: “The pledged person was often a member of the debtor’s family, or a slave of the household, although in some cases debtors pledged themselves . . . self-pledging by the debtor was considered illegal in the [Neo-Babylonian] period.”<sup>95</sup> A similar situation is envisaged in Nehemiah 5, where the Israelite landowners have to sell both their land and their children into debt-slavery in order to buy food and pay the king’s tax: “Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards” (Neh 5:5).

Nehemiah 5:5 illustrates that dependent debt-slavery was a last resort. It appears that these Israelites had first sold off their fields and vineyards, and now are forced to sell their dependents. The case in Genesis 47:13-26 is of a different character since the Egyptians resort to self-sale and permanently agree to give Pharaoh one-fifth of all their harvests. Nevertheless, it still illustrates that debt-slavery was a last resort as the Egyptians first procured grain with their silver, then they gave up their flocks and herds, and then, as a last resort, they sold themselves along with their land.

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<sup>93</sup> The Nuzi cuneiform tablets are notoriously difficult to date, with a rough date of the middle of the second millennium BC being a typical time reference. See Martha Morrison, “Nuzi” in Freedman, *ABD*, 1156, for a full discussion. The dates for the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian period taken from Martha T. Roth, *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed., Writings from the Ancient World (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 6:ix.

<sup>94</sup> Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 18. The lack of examples of self-sale in Babylon’s record is contrary to the practice in Nuzi, where self-sale appears to have been regular and debt-slaves would be virtually sold as slaves. Some sold themselves into debt-slavery for eight, twenty, and even fifty years, virtually selling themselves into permanent indentured servitude. See Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 29-31, for examples.

<sup>95</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 74n3.



The practice of selling dependents into debt-slavery was common enough that LH §117–119 puts severe limits on it, presumably to prevent a general collapse of the social order.<sup>96</sup> While this was covered in chapter 2, it is worth quoting LH §117 again given its similarity to Deuteronomy 15:12-18: “If an obligation is outstanding against a man and he sells or gives into debt service his wife, his son, or his daughter, they shall perform service in the house of their buyer or of the one who holds them in debt service for three years; their release [*andurāršunu*] shall be secured in the fourth year.”<sup>97</sup>

Hammurabi’s law limits the term of the debt-slave to three years, regardless of the type or amount of the loan provided. It is interesting to note that Israel’s law envisages a term double the length of Hammurabi. It is not clear why three years is chosen in LH or six years in Deuteronomy, although Deuteronomy 15:18 argues that the wages were roughly equivalent to double that of a hired worker: “It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years.”<sup>98</sup> While the reason for the term is not clear, it seems that both §LH 117 and Deuteronomy 15:18 view their respective year limits as matching the typical amount borrowed. Paragraph 20 from the *misharum* edict of Ammisaduqa (1664–1626 BC) likewise releases debt-slaves in certain cities, although it is a one-time release unlike the periodic release of LH §117 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18. The relevant section from Ammisaduqa’s law reads,

20: (25) If an obligation has resulted in foreclosure against a citizen of Numhia, a citizen of Emutbalum, a citizen of Idamaras, a citizen of Uruk, a citizen of Isin, a citizen of Kisurra, or a citizen of Malgium, (in consequence of which) he [placed]

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<sup>96</sup> Chirichigno agrees that these laws were meant to preserve social and economic stability: “It is clear that the *mēšarum*-acts were carried out in order to prevent the collapse and ruin of the economy and the state.” Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 87.

<sup>97</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 103.

<sup>98</sup> The Septuagint translates as “in lieu of an annual wage for the hired laborer,” removing the sense of “double.” Greengus follows the LXX, arguing that “double” is misleading and that “a more likely interpretation is that it describes a quantity of service equivalent to or comparable to that of a hired man.” Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 88n3. However, Greengus’ reading is not in keeping with the normal semantic range of the term. See HALOT, s.v. “מִשְׁכָּרָה,” and BDB, s.v. “מִשְׁכָּרָה.”

his own person, his wife (30) or his [children] in debt servitude for silver, or as a pledge—because the king has instituted the *misharum* in the land, he is released; his freedom (35) is in effect.<sup>99</sup>

Ammisaduqa's edict illustrates the common practice of dependent debt-slavery and the less common, but well attested, practice of granting a general manumission to restore economic order.<sup>100</sup> The case in Jeremiah 34, where Zedekiah decrees a general release, is another example of such random, general releases.<sup>101</sup> While these examples illustrate the typical practice of covering a defaulted loan through the selling of dependent debt-slaves, they do not give a full picture of its severity. In many recorded cases in the ANE documents, a debt-slave would work to cover the interest on a defaulted debt.<sup>102</sup> Interest was often quite high in the ANE, ranging from 20 to 50 percent per year, with cases of 100 percent also being attested. With such exorbitant rates, the debt-slave's capacity for work was only able to cover the interest itself. Mendelsohn explains, "Loans on security were common in Assyria, both in early and in later times. Houses, fields, slaves, and free persons were given as pledges. As a setoff against the interest of the loan,

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<sup>99</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 88. The full text of the decree can be read in *ANET*, §526-28. See Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 88-90, for a full discussion of paragraphs 20–21 in Ammisaduqa's decree. Mendelsohn cites that the Middle Assyrian law code, paragraphs 39, 44, 48, likewise granted the creditor the right to seize the dependents or the defaulting debtor himself. Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 28.

<sup>100</sup> Mendelsohn similarly argues that these releases were likely motivated by a desire to maintain social and economic order: "It is obvious that, like the earlier Babylonian counterpart, the subject of the Biblical law was not the common Hebrew slave but the Hebrew defaulting debtor. Like Hammurabi in his time, the Hebrew lawgivers realized the disastrous effects of a policy that, if unchecked, would finally lead to the enslavement of large numbers of freeborn people, and hence they tried by this law to stem the power of ruthless creditors" (Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 8).

<sup>101</sup> An in-depth treatment of Zedekiah's release and its relation to the Jubilee is dealt with in chap. 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>102</sup> For an overview of the practice of debt-slavery in the ANE along with examples, see Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 5019; Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 87-106. Mendelsohn reports that "the average interest charged in Ancient Babylonia was 20–25 per cent on silver and 33 ⅓ on per cent on grain. The Hammurabi Code maintained this rate and threatened those who charged a higher interest with the forfeiture of the loan [e.g. LH §83–89]." Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 23.

the creditor would occupy the house of a debtor without paying rent, or enjoy the usufruct of the pledged field, or the labor of the pledged person.”<sup>103</sup>

Mathews likewise agrees with this general understanding: “Legally, creditors were not buying land or selling slaves, just holding the land as collateral and collecting the wages of its owners as interest until the debt was repaid (Lev 25:35-46; 2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:1-5).”<sup>104</sup> Chirichigno agrees with this assessment, although he concedes that some debt-slavery contracts also amortized the principal balance:

The pledge could be taken by the creditor at the moment the contract was completed in order to dwell and work in the creditor’s house . . . most likely in order to pay the interest on the capital. . . . This antichretic pledge would be released after the debtor paid the capital. Usually, no specific date of repayment of the capital is mentioned in the documents since the interest would be paid automatically by the service of the pledge. However, in other documents a specific period is mentioned at which time the capital would be paid back. If the capital was not paid at the agreed time the pledge could then become the property of the creditor.<sup>105</sup>

If a debt-slave could not amortize the actual principal of the loan, it was highly unlikely that the loan would ever be paid off and highly likely that the debt-slave would become a permanent slave. This explains why a periodic release such as that given in §LH 117 was warranted to protect the stability of the social and economic order.

The above lines of evidence warrant the conclusion that Deuteronomy 15:12 is providing for the release of dependent debt-slaves. As discussed, debt-slaves were typically dependents who at times worked for set times to amortize either the interest or the principal balance of the loan. Despite the trajectory of ANE debt-slavery, one can presume that Israelite debt-slaves service amortized the principle because the Mosaic law forbids the collecting of interest. This section has also noted debt-slavery was common in the ANE and Israel while self-sale was frowned upon. For this reason, Mendelsohn argues that

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<sup>103</sup> Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the ANE*, 28.

<sup>104</sup> Victor Harold Matthews and Don C Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250–587 BCE* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 204.

<sup>105</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 74.

Leviticus 25:39ff. is one of the few examples in any ANE law code that mentions the case of self-sale or voluntary slavery. Grasping this key difference between Leviticus 25:39ff. and Deuteronomy 15:12-18 is essential to understanding rightly the Jubilee.

Mendelsohn argues that these two texts envisage entirely different situations:

The law of Leviticus 25:39ff. is of an entirely different character [from other ancient Near East law codes]. This law [in Leviticus 25:39ff.] has nothing in common with those of Exodus and Deuteronomy. There the subject is the defaulting debtor enslaved by his creditor; here it is the free Hebrew who voluntarily enters into the state of slavery because of adverse economic circumstances.<sup>106</sup>

A right understanding of Deuteronomy 15:12-18 allows a proper understanding of Leviticus 25:39ff. While most scholars presume conflict between Leviticus 25:39 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18 since the former allows for slavery up to forty-nine years while the latter limits slavery to only six years, there actually is no conflict. Deuteronomy 15:12-18 is limiting the term and treatment of dependent debt-slaves while Leviticus 25:39ff. deals with the more severe case of a landowner, a head of household or *pater familias*, selling himself into virtual slavery. This understanding of Deuteronomy 15:12-18 provides a more coherent picture of the relationship between the two law codes and does not require the typical efforts at reconciling the six-year release with the Jubilee release. To explain the apparent contradiction between these two laws, critical scholars argue that either Deuteronomy or Leviticus revised the other. Many evangelicals, following the lead of C. J. H. Wright, argue that Deuteronomy 15 is dealing with the sale of a landless class of immigrants known as the “Hebrews.” His viewpoints have been adequately critiqued in chapter 2 and previously in this chapter. While his desire to harmonize the texts and understand how they work together is commendable, his argument does not fit the more natural reading of “Hebrew” as referring to a landed Israelite, nor is there any extant evidence that a landless class of Israelites existed in

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<sup>106</sup> Mendelsohn, *Slavery*, 18-19.

settlement Israel, and his argument does not take into account the fact that debt-slavery was typically limited to dependents only in Israel's ANE timeframe.

Now that the identity of the "Hebrew slave" is established, there are a few other details to note from Deuteronomy 15:12. First, the term "brother" is given to remind the master that a debt-slave is a member of the covenant community with the master. Only foreign slaves can be held permanently (Lev 25:39-55). Israelites are forbidden from enslaving one another (i.e., Jer 34:9) and jointly hold special duties and obligations to one another. By using this term, the tribal framework is broadened to call upon the extended family of the entire nation to help this insolvent Israelite family.<sup>107</sup> Second, the addition of *הָעֶבְרִיָּה* is important as it establishes the right of both male and female debt-slaves and directly addresses the practical condition that females were more often sold into debt-slavery.<sup>108</sup> While Exodus 21:7-11 regulates the rights of dependent women who are sold as concubines or wives, Deuteronomy 15:12 specifies that the six-year term applies to both male and female debt-slaves.<sup>109</sup> The two texts do not contradict one another. Exodus 21:2 deals more broadly with the manumission of debt-slaves and then deals with practical matters of marriage and debt-slaves in Exodus 21:3-11. Exodus 21 is focused on the slave's rights while Deuteronomy 15 focuses more on the master's responsibilities to the debt-slaves. As a result, Deuteronomy deals more directly with the specifics of dependent debt-slave manumission. The two passages overlap and provide a complementary viewpoint of the manumission practice while dealing with separate matters relating to female debt-slaves. Exodus legislates marriage contracts while Deuteronomy focuses on the term of debt-slavery and the master's responsibilities.

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<sup>107</sup> Sara Japhet, "The Relationship between the Legal Corpora," in *Studies in Bible*, 1986, ed. Sara Japhet, Scripta Hierosolymitana 31 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1986), 63-89; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 278.

<sup>108</sup> Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 205.

<sup>109</sup> For a full discussion of the viewpoints on the identity of the *הָעֶבְרִיָּה*, see Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 279-82.

**Provision for the debt-slave.** The focus on the master's responsibilities continues into the next verses. Verses 13-15 add a provision that is not present in Exodus 21. It requires the master to provide the freed debt-slave with what may be called a life starter-kit. The text reads,

And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. 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.

Giving a debt-slave their freedom alone is not enough. Love for the poor requires more than a passive "letting go." It requires active sacrifice on the part of the master. The master is to provide the debt-slave(s) with animals, wine, and grain. The animals, probably sheep or goats, produced essential products such as milk and wool. Further, new animals could help begin a herd or strengthen an existing herd of the dependent's *pater familias*. The wine and grain provided for basic sustenance. It is likely that the grain from the threshing floor included seeds to allow for a new or further sowing of the land of the *pater familias*. The provision commanded by Moses in this passage is in keeping with the overall humanitarian and practical concerns of Deuteronomy.<sup>110</sup> A debt-slave's newfound freedom may not count for much if a way forward and opportunity is not provided for them. This starter kit also helps ensure that the debt-slave will not have to borrow money or enter into debt-slavery again to sustain life. Deuteronomy is not only regulating the release but is putting in place policies that can prevent poverty and debt-slavery in and of themselves. It also recalls the Exodus as motivation for the master to release freely and to provide generously. The motivation clause jointly reminds masters of God's authority over them while providing a reasonable explanation as to why they must make this sacrifice. To this motivation, verse 18 reminds masters that they received cheap labor and

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<sup>110</sup> Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 238.

that their obedience to the law is tied to God's blessing or judgment in their personal endeavors.

Since the Jubilee is a Sabbath year, it is likely that the Israelite Master gave provision to the released head of household. Chapter 4 will argue that the primary motivation for an Israelite going to live with another is to allow for a means of livelihood alongside the insolvent Israelite's family. It has also been suggested that the insolvent Israelite learned better farming techniques during their stay with their Israelite brother.<sup>111</sup> This on-the-job training could have provided assurance that the Israelite family not fall into poverty again. Of course, this is speculation as the text does not cite this as a goal of the residency. Nevertheless, it makes logical sense, especially given that Deuteronomy 15:13-15 requires the Master to provision the debt-slave.

**The debt-slave's option to stay.** The practical focus of Deuteronomy 15 continues into verses 16-18:

But if he says to you, 'I will not go out from you,' because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave you shall do the same. It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do.

What is a master to do if a debt-slave does not want to leave? Perhaps the debt-slave has no land or family to which to return or finds his/her standard of living to be better under this generous master. It is perhaps significant that the term "love" is used, indicating an affectionate relationship of care, concern, and trust. In such a situation, the master is to mark the debt-slave as a permanent slave by piercing his ear at the doorpost. It is not clear whether the doorpost is at the sanctuary or at the master's home, nor is it clear why the slave's ear is bored. Greengus argues that the bored ear either marked the person out as a slave, symbolized ownership, or perhaps represented a symbolic joining of the slave to

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<sup>111</sup> This was suggested to me by Dr. James Hamilton in a private conversation.

the master's home.<sup>112</sup> Either way, the ceremony solidifies the relationship that is for the mutual benefit of both the dependent debt-slave and the master.

**Summary of Deuteronomy 15:1-18.** The previous section argued that Deuteronomy 15:1-11 provides for a general release of all debts at the end of the Sabbath year. This law extends beyond mere pledges for debts and actually absolves any outstanding debt. It was also shown that this law extends to all Israelites. It was further argued that Deuteronomy 15:12-18 releases debt-slaves after six years of service. This release is counted from the time their work begins and is not tied to the Sabbath year directly, although it shares the same concerns as the Sabbath-year release. Both releases, debts and debt-slaves, operate together to ensure that the ideal stated in Deuteronomy 15:4 will be true: "There will be no poor" in Israel. The joining of these laws with those enumerated in Deuteronomy 14–16 demonstrate that the wider goal of the Sabbath year was to ensure all Israelites are free to meet with God as required and enjoy the redemption he has provided for them. This goal is likewise pursued in the Jubilee, restoring any lost land and any "enslaved" Israelite heads of households.

### **The Reading of the Law**

A final text requires attention to get a full picture of the Sabbath year. Deuteronomy 31:9-13 commands that the law is to be recited in the presence of all Israel at the end of the Sabbath year at the Feast of Booths. By reading the entire law, the year of release celebrated God's release of Israel by rehearsing the story and also called Israel to turn from their sin by causing them to hear the law again afresh:

And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast 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 little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, and that their children, who have

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<sup>112</sup> Greengus, *Laws in the Bible*, 88; Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel*, 205.



not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.” (Deut 31:10-13)

When the release is proclaimed during the Feast of Booths, the entire covenant community is to gather together to hear the entirety of the law read. While the overriding concern of the Sabbath spectrum is humanitarian, this ritual forces Israel to reflect on the covenant and their obedience to it. The reading of the law lifts the practical focus into the sacred realm. This is why the priests are responsible to organize and ensure the law is read (Deut 31:9). Interpretation, application, and obedience to the *תורה* law does not happen in a vacuum. It is a sacred duty to obey the entire law as a covenant member who has the privilege to participate in the story of Israel and God. By hearing the law and the story of Israel, which Deuteronomy rehearses, Israelites are forced to place themselves into the story and imitate the leading characters of the story: Yahweh, Moses, the patriarchs, and many others.<sup>113</sup> The public reading reinforces the law’s authority and continued relevance in the life of Israel, including the *תורה* law.<sup>114</sup> As Yahweh released Israel from slavery, so Israelites are to release Israelites from slavery. The Sabbath year brings together the very drama of redemption: the Feast of Booth reminds that God provided abundantly during their homeless wanderings, the Sabbath teaches that rest and enjoying one’s labor is not to be done to the exclusion of others. The reading of the law immerses these memories into the wider story of God’s redemption of Israel through the generations. All of this together, joined with the memory of Yahweh’s acts of great exodus deliverance and covenant election, forces the Sabbath year to be much more than an obligation.<sup>115</sup> It is a drama that calls all Israelites to remember, reinforce, and act out Israel’s redemption story. This drama is continued and heightened in the Jubilee, where the Israelites leaving their place of slavery and returning to their land emulates the beginning and end of the

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<sup>113</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 228.

<sup>114</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 395.

<sup>115</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 399.

Exodus. A record of Deuteronomy 31:10-13 being obeyed comes in Nehemiah 8:13-9:38. Nehemiah 8:18 specifically reports that they read the Book of the Law: “And day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read from the Book of the Law of God. They kept the feast seven days, and on the eighth day there was a solemn assembly, according to the rule.”

### **The Jubilee**

A goal of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Jubilee year is itself a part of the Sabbath spectrum. The difficulty in proving this is that the Jubilee is never called a “Sabbath,” nor does it necessarily constitute the span of a year, meaning it does not technically qualify as a Sabbath year. Despite this, the assumption that the Jubilee is, at least, a piece of the Sabbath spectrum, pervades scholarship. Some even argue that the Jubilee is the climax of the Sabbath spectrum. Jonathan Burnside provides the strongest and clearest example:

The sabbatical and jubilee years are both extensions to, and more intense forms of, the weekly Sabbath. The sabbatical year is a sort of “Super-Sabbath,” which I shall call the “Sabbath-plus” to differentiate it from the regular Sabbath, while the jubilee year begins at the end of the seventh sabbatical year. It is another sort of Super-Sabbath which I shall call “Sabbath-squared” to differentiate it from the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatical year. The Sabbath laws thus create a spectrum of Sabbaths, ranging from the weekly Sabbath to the jubilee year.<sup>116</sup>

Although it will be argued in chapter 4 that the Jubilee begins at the start of the Sabbath year, is Burnside correct in placing the Jubilee into the Sabbath spectrum?<sup>117</sup>

Several arguments can be advanced to support the fact that the Jubilee is in fact the climax of the Sabbath spectrum. First, the Jubilee falls during the Sabbath year, making the two inseparable. Leviticus 25:8-9 commands that the seventh Sabbath year include the Jubilee release on the Day of Atonement: “You shall count seven weeks

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<sup>116</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 197.

<sup>117</sup> See chap. 4 of this dissertation, where it is argued that the Jubilee occurred every 49 years and the use of the word “fifty” in Lev 25:10 is an example of inclusive counting.

[שְׁבַתָּה] of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. 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.” The phrase “seven weeks of years” (שִׁבְעָה שְׁבַתָּה שָׁנִים) employs the root שבת, which ties the Jubilee’s calendar directly to the Sabbath calendar. Unfortunately, the ESV obscures this term behind the gloss, “weeks.” As in the NASB, NIV, CSB and KJV, a more appropriate translation is “seven sabbaths of years.”<sup>118</sup> Second, the Jubilee’s connection to the Sabbath spectrum is strengthened by the fact that the day on which the Jubilee release is to be proclaimed, the Day of Atonement, is also a Sabbath day (see Lev 23:26-32, esp. v. 32). While arguing that the Jubilee happens at the start of the Sabbath year does not necessarily entail that it is likewise a Sabbath, the number of conceptual similarities between the Sabbath year and the Jubilee are compelling evidence that the Jubilee belongs to the Sabbath spectrum, which leads to the third line of evidence. The Jubilee laws directly follow the Sabbath-year fallow laws in Leviticus 25:1-7. This structure suggests that the two are logically related. This logical relation provides a fourth piece of evidence. Both the Jubilee (דְּרוֹר) and the Sabbath year (שְׁמִטָּה) grant a release. Although they are described with different terminology, the two release’s complement one another. The Sabbath year releases debts and dependent debt-slaves. The Jubilee extends or intensifies this release to land and the heads of households, such that the actions of release and return are not limited but extend to the whole of Israelite society. It is as if the Exodus redemption and its benefits is extended, once again, to every Israelite.

Third, the conceptual similarities between the Sabbath spectrum and the Jubilee are so alike that it can be said that they encompass the same goals. Like the Sabbath day, the Lord promises to give a double portion of food to the people (Exod 16:5; Lev 25:20-22). Like the Sabbath year and Sabbath day, the Jubilee has a humanitarian focus on

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<sup>118</sup> The LXX is slightly better than the ESV, employing ἀναπαύσεις, thus “seven rest-periods of years,” which at least ties it directly to the Sabbath year.

releasing people from slavery, labor, and burden. Like the Sabbath year and Sabbath day, the Jubilee also releases the land. The Sabbath year and Sabbath day release the land from work, but the Jubilee goes a step further and releases the land from the burden of what might be termed “land-slavery.” In other words, the land’s rightful occupants are returned to it and the land’s labor now serves its proper God-given stewards. These twin actions of release and return point back to the Exodus as do the other Sabbath laws, a point made explicit in the interconnected laws of redemption (25:38, 42, and 55). The drama of returning mankind to his proper place within the land likewise recalls the creation, where Adam and the  $\text{אָדָם}$  enjoyed a proper relationship that was destroyed in the Fall. All of this is predicated on the Lord’s ownership of time, people, and land (Lev 23, 25:23, 55), a theme that has been shown throughout this chapter to be intimately tied to the entire Sabbath spectrum<sup>119</sup> In summary, the Jubilee is tied to the timing of the Sabbath fallow and release, happens on a Sabbath day, and shares numerous conceptual links and goals with the Sabbath spectrum.

This evidence points to the fact that the Jubilee was the overriding concern of the seventh Sabbath year, causing this seventh Sabbath year to take on an entirely different character through which the rest, return, and release concepts so intertwined into the Sabbath spectrum are intensified and taken to their logical end. In some sense, the Jubilee is not a “year” itself, but a day. Yet, its effects were no doubt felt throughout the entire seventh Sabbath year such that it is appropriate, although perhaps not technically accurate, to call the seventh Sabbath year a Jubilee year, a year in which every generation was scheduled to experience the drama of, and the benefits of, the Exodus redemption all over

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<sup>119</sup> See chap. 4 of this dissertation on the structural relationship of Lev 23-25 and the relationship between the Jubilee to the feasts of Israel. For now, it is sufficient to point out that Lev 23-25 provides a climax to the book of Leviticus whereby Israel is enabled to meet with God. The various appointed times of meeting are all set, in one way or another, by the number seven and are considered Sabbaths. The connection between Sabbaths and meeting with God is also hinted at in Lev 26:2, where it connects the Sabbaths and the sanctuary: “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary.” By observing all the Sabbaths, Israel kept covenant with God, as confirmed by Exod 31:16, where Sabbath-keeping is tantamount to keeping the covenant, as previously discussed.

again. The nature of the Jubilee's release and the related laws of redemption receive extensive treatment in chapter 4. For the purposes of this chapter, it is sufficient to observe that the Jubilee is itself a special Sabbath year that shares the same goals as the Sabbath spectrum as a whole: to ensure that all Israelites are free and can enjoy the benefits of God's redemption generation to generation.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated the retrospective, humanitarian, social, economic, and prospective focuses of the Sabbath spectrum, which constitutes the Sabbath day, special Sabbath's during the feasts of Israel, the Sabbath year, and the Jubilee. The Sabbath spectrum is retrospective in that its goal is to cause Israel to remember and even return to the creation rest that existed in Eden before the Fall. The Sabbath spectrum is humanitarian in that it specifically ensures that all members of Israel—including land, animals, and slaves—rest on the seventh day and participate in the yearly and septennial religious feasts of Israel. The release of debts on the Sabbath year and the logically related release of debt-slaves after six years of service up the ante of the Sabbath spectrum's humanitarian focus as the releases aim to preserve Israel's social and economic stability. The release of land and any enslaved families, especially the *pater familias*, in the Jubilee furthers the Sabbath spectrum's efforts to preserve Israel's social, economic, and religious order. All of the Sabbath spectrum's provisions ultimately aim to make Israel a holy and just nation that enjoys, from generation to generation, the benefits of their redemption by Yahweh.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE JUBILEE

#### **Introduction**

Leviticus 25:8-55 introduces and outlines the Jubilee. Every fifty years, the nation of Israel was commanded to press the reset switch, as it were. In essence, the Jubilee set free both land and Israelite heads of households that had been sold to another. It is the thesis of this chapter that the Jubilee was thus a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure, recalled the Sabbath rest of creation, and reenacted Yahweh's liberation of Israel from Egypt. The Jubilee legislation complements the Sabbath year debt and debt-slave release laws by releasing and restoring a *pater familias* to his land along with any members of his family who had been sold as debt-slaves.<sup>1</sup> The Jubilee thus ensured that all Israelites were released from poverty and restored to their plot of land at least once a generation.

The goal of the Jubilee was to curb the accumulation of power and money by a wealthy class, while also ensuring that no Israelite family would find themselves in a state of perpetual landlessness. The Jubilee thus kept Israelites from exploiting one another, while also providing a mechanism whereby they could work out their vertical covenant commitments on the horizontal, socioeconomic plane. Because the Jubilee happened on the Day of Atonement, it taught faith in God's providence, a faith that was motivated by the memory of the Exodus redemption.

The drama of the Jubilee recalled the Sinai covenant as Israelites heard loud horns blown throughout the land and heard the entire law read as their ancestors did at the

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<sup>1</sup> *Pater familias* is latin for "father of a family" and stands in for the head of the father's house in ancient Israel.

foot of Mount Sinai. This drama also recalled the Exodus redemption as Israelites found themselves released from an enslaved status while carrying a portion of their former master's goods with them. Furthermore, the Jubilee drama reenacted the conquest of the land as families once again took possession of their God-given plot of land. While this drama looked back to remind Israelites of all that the Lord had done for the nation, it naturally looked forward to a time when God would bring rest not just to Israel, but to all of creation through Israel. The tenets and practice of the historical Jubilee is outlined in Leviticus 25. This chapter will look at the placement of the Jubilee within the theology and structure of Leviticus, provide a detailed exegesis and outline of Leviticus 25:8-55, and discuss within the exegesis of the passage how the Jubilee related to the Sabbath debt and slave release laws. The chapter will then consider other texts that mention or potentially allude to the Jubilee. The chapter will conclude by considering and critiquing other theories regarding the aim of the Jubilee.

### **Structure and Setting of Leviticus**

The Book of Leviticus falls within the broader narrative frame of Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10, which describes the events at Sinai, instructions for building and erection of the Tabernacle, Moses' reception of the laws in Leviticus, and Israel's preparation to set out from Sinai toward Canaan.<sup>2</sup> In this narrative frame, Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan slows down and focuses on initiating and maintaining their relationship with Yahweh. This slowing is signified by the timeline. While the rest of the Pentateuch marks out the passing of years, Exodus 12 to Numbers 10 is counted by months.<sup>3</sup> The entire book of Leviticus comprises one month within this narrative frame.

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<sup>2</sup> For support and discussion of this narrative frame, see Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC, vol. 3a (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 40; L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 35-38.

<sup>3</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 35-36.

Thus, Exodus 40:2, “On the first day of the first month” and Numbers 1:1 (“on the first day of the second month”) report that a month of time elapsed while the instructions recorded in Leviticus were given. Morales points out that the book itself is “timeless and spaceless” given that it entirely lacks the typical “itinerary notices and chronological markers.”<sup>4</sup> The absence of chronological and geographical markers points to the one of the major concerns of Leviticus: sacred space and time. The central theological concern of Leviticus is how to live with Yahweh.

Sacred space and time are so central to Leviticus that they are built into its structure. Mark Smith argues that a ring structure that encompasses all of Leviticus puts the Day Atonement in Leviticus 16 at the center, where the most sacred space and most sacred time converge at the Tabernacle.<sup>5</sup> The converging of these two central motifs, sacred space and sacred time, at the Tabernacle points once again to the wider goal of Leviticus: Israel’s meetings with Yahweh, or how to live with Yahweh. The centrality of the Tabernacle is likewise confirmed by the wider narrative of Exodus 19:1 to Numbers 10:10, which likewise frames the tabernacle within Israel’s time at Mount Sinai. This framing can be visually represented as follows:

Wilderness journey → Mt. Sinai → Tabernacle → Mt. Sinai → Wilderness journey.<sup>6</sup>

While the Tabernacle forms the center of the wider geographical narrative, the Day of Atonement forms the center of Leviticus.<sup>7</sup> The entire narrative structure is driving at the

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<sup>4</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 36.

<sup>5</sup> Mark S. Smith and Elizabeth Bloch-Smith, *The Pilgrimage Pattern in Exodus*, JSOT 239 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 186-87, cited in Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 35-36.

<sup>6</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 36.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Douglas has suggested that Leviticus 19 is the center of the book with its focus on the meaning of righteousness, practically described as loving one’s neighbor (Lev 19:16) and committing to just judgments and measures (Lev 19:35-6). Douglas’ reading of the book is built around the two narratives in Leviticus 10 and 24:10-23. In this reading, the tripartite structure of Leviticus’ laws mirror the tripartite structure of the tabernacle. As one moves through Leviticus, one moves from the entrance of the tabernacle,



central theological concern of meeting with Yahweh. The Tabernacle provides the place, the Day of Atonement provides the means, and all of Leviticus flows toward and then out of the climax of Leviticus 16. The central importance of the Day of Atonement can be seen in the ring structure or chiasmic structure of Leviticus:<sup>8</sup>

Lev 1 – 7 Sacrifices

Lev 8–10 Institution of priesthood/inauguration of *cultus*

Lev 11–15 Clean/unclean in daily life

Lev 16 Day of Atonement

Lev 17–20 Holy/profane in daily life

Lev 21–22 Legislation for the priesthood

Lev 23–27 Festivals/Sacred Time

This general ring structure is confirmed by the fact that eighteen divine speeches occur on either side of Leviticus 16.<sup>9</sup> In this structure, the way that the book flows toward and then out of the Day of Atonement is evident. Leviticus 1–15 deals with approaching God while Leviticus 17–27 deals with communing with God. The outer panels of Leviticus

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to the outer courtyard, to the sanctuary, and finally to the holy of holies. The set of laws in each section match the concerns in each section of the Tabernacle. Quite interestingly, by her reading, the Jubilee is an outer frame around the central chapter of chapter 26, which reiterates the covenant that sits in the ark of the covenant. Chapter 25 deals with “person-to-person obligations” (p. 244) while chapter 27 deals with obligations to the Lord. In chapter 27, the Lord himself comes under the powers of the Jubilee laws. Douglas’ contention is in broad keeping with Morales’ argument in that Douglas’ likewise sees the Tabernacle as the very center of Israel’s cult and understands the Jubilee as picturing the everyday culmination and fulfillment of living in the presence of God. While there is no disagreement that Leviticus 19 is central to the theology of Leviticus, her scheme requires an odd ring structure between Leviticus 1-7 and Leviticus 11-15. It is the ritual and moral purity achieved at the Day of Atonement that then allows for a daily life of moral purity (Leviticus 17-25). Despite this disagreement, her explanation of the role of the blasphemer narrative in Leviticus 25 is compelling. The one who blasphemes the Name is put to death just as the curses promise that the one who breaks the laws and so blasphemes the Name will also be put to death. Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Chiasm reproduced from Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 29.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus*, Biblical Interpretation Series 35. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1999), in Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 28. For a full bibliography of scholars who see a ring structure in Leviticus, see Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 27-29.

connect spiritual reality with everyday reality: sacrifice of life (Lev 1–7) and living a life of sacrifice (Lev 23–27). The outer panels once again point to the main goal of the book, which is how to live in Yahweh’s presence.

Morales has argued that the literary structure of Leviticus moves Israel from a cult that worships a God who dwells in his מִשְׁכָּן (“dwelling place”) to a community who enjoys God’s presence in their midst at the הֶאֱהָל מוֹעֵד (“tent of meeting”). In other words, the shift in language yet again shows that the goal of Leviticus is to prepare the people to meet regularly with their God. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu drive the program of Leviticus through the Day of Atonement and out into the affairs of everyday life, where Yahweh expects his covenant people to emulate his own holiness. Leviticus does this by making sacred people (Lev 1–10, 17–22), sacred space (Lev 11–15), and sacred time (Lev 23–25). The Levitical legislation is thus an “invitation to life with God.”<sup>10</sup> As one moves closer to the presence of God in the Tabernacle, fuller and fuller life is offered. Holiness grants a full life under God’s merciful care, such that “the tabernacle’s grades of holiness are seen rather as grades of life, with the holy of holies representing the fullness of life.”<sup>11</sup>

The broader structure of Leviticus 23–25 reinforces the idea that the program of Leviticus sought to bring fulness of life in the presence of God. Leviticus 23 describes the Sabbaths of Israel while Leviticus 25 describes the ultimate Sabbath for the land, the Jubilee. In the middle of these chapters is Leviticus 24:1–9, which describes the twelve loaves of bread basking in the light of the seven lamps of the menorah. The twelve loaves signify Israel and the seven lamps signify the light of God’s presence. In other words, the loaves and lamps symbolize the ideal of Israel living in the continual light of God’s

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<sup>10</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 31.

<sup>11</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 31. The Hebrew term for lamp is מְאֹר, which is typically used to describe the sun and moon, especially in the creation account (Ps 74:16; Gen 1:14–16; Ps 136:7). Moses could have used the word נֵר to describe the lamp. The choice of מְאֹר appears to purposefully recall the sun and moon from the creation account.

presence. Through the regular meetings with God, which are prescribed in Leviticus 23, Israel is enabled to do just that. Leviticus 25 likewise acts as a defensive measure, ensuring that every Israelite is free to experience the generous benefits of God's rule on their allotted land. Leviticus 23 provides for regular meetings with God while Leviticus 25 ensures that every Israelite can experience the joy of God's presence every single day.

This symbolism has important ties to the creation account, which hints that the goal of Leviticus is much more than just Israel meeting with their God. The goal is much more grand: the restoration of Israel to the original purpose for mankind within the cosmos through fellowship with God. By virtue of the Jubilee's placement within the program of Leviticus, it is shown that the Jubilee's goal is much broader than just ensuring every Israelite is free to live and work on their God-given land. The Jubilee's goal is to ensure that every Israelite once again enjoys the privilege of a right relationship with God and a right relationship with the land, as Adam experienced in Eden before the Fall. This goal of restoration helps highlight why the land is so significant in Israel's covenant. The goal of the covenant is not merely to restore Israel to God, but also to restore Israel, and thus mankind, to its caring dominion of the land. In support of this argument, Morales' words bear presenting in full:

Once more I suggest that the goal of the tabernacle, in harmony with that of the cosmos, is portrayed symbolically in Leviticus 24:1-9. We have already noted the correspondences between the lamps of the menorah and those of the cosmos, along with the Sabbath *tāmīd* and the seventh day. In short, all the necessary elements of Genesis 1:1–2:3 are found in Leviticus 24:1-9 for the sake of presenting a cultic picture of Israel's basking in renewing light of God's Sabbath-day Presence—a beautiful, theological symbol for the significance of the tabernacle cultus as it has unfolded in Leviticus. . . . The unfulfilled purpose for which the cosmos was created may now be realized through the tabernacle cultus of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

The goal of the Jubilee is that every Israelite can bask in the light of God's presence day-to-day. For this to happen, all Israelites had to conduct themselves with holiness, including how they treated their impoverished neighbors and relative. The Jubilee thus provides an

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<sup>12</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 200.

important component in ensuring the overall holiness of Israel as it guaranteed holy business transactions, prevented socioeconomic injustice, and ensured every Israelite family was free to enjoy the presence of God as they worked their land. In other words, the Jubilee served as a defensive measure that protected against unholy economic practices.

This Edenic goal is further confirmed by the fact that the Jubilee year is a super-Sabbath year. If the purpose of Leviticus is meeting with God, then the Sabbath is the time set apart specifically for the meetings to happen. This is one reason why Leviticus 26 connects keeping Sabbaths with keeping the covenant (Lev 26:2). The covenant is ultimately about relationship, and the Sabbaths are the “dates” set apart for that relationship to flourish. Just as the sun and moon govern the cycle of days, evenings, and seasons, so the Sabbaths govern the cycle of coming into God’s presence on a regular cycle. This Sabbath cycle is symbolized in the seven lamps of the menorah.<sup>13</sup> The Lord will meet with Israel at the appointed Sabbath times: weekly (Sabbath Day), annually (Day of Atonement on seventh month), septennially (Sabbath Year), and super-septennially (Jubilee).<sup>14</sup> The goal of Israel’s Sabbaths, as with the covenant, is likewise fellowship and relationship with God, a theme which unites all of chapters 23–25.

Morales explains this intimate connection between the Sabbaths and the covenant:

There are seven major festivals, seven days of rest, several festivals occurring on the seventh month, every seven years being a sabbatical year, and there is a grand sabbatical year after the seventh of the seven-year cycles. As Jay Sklar remarks, this structure: “brings a Sabbath feel to the entire year and thus a constant reminder of the covenant the Sabbath signifies.”<sup>15</sup>

Within the wider structure of Leviticus and the spectrum of Israel’s Sabbaths, the Jubilee year is the climactic event in the cycle of Sabbaths where fellowship with God is not only enjoyed, but is returned to its proper form whereby every Israelite can “eat of

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<sup>13</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 190.

<sup>14</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 189.

<sup>15</sup> Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 189; Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, TOTC, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 277.

his own vine, and each one of his own fig tree, and each one of you will drink water of his own cistern” in the presence of God (Isa 36:16; cf. Mic 4:4; Zech 3:10). The goal of the Jubilee is the goal of the Sabbath and the goal of Leviticus: fellowship with God in the covenant and restoration of the cosmos to its proper order. Since the Jubilee is the climax of the Sabbath spectrum, it well remembers the rest of God at creation to which all the Sabbaths are so intimately tied (Exod 20:11). As was shown in chapter three, the Sabbath spectrum is also marked by significant humanitarian concern whereby all manner of workers (people, animals, land) are rested regularly and all forms of insolvency are severely limited (debts, debt-slavery, and complete insolvency). Hence, keeping Sabbath is also tied to keeping justice (Isa 58:1–13).<sup>16</sup> Obviously, the Jubilee does not accomplish this goal by itself, yet it provides a key to Israel’s Sabbath-keeping by protecting Israel’s egalitarian system of land tenure and thus ensuring that Israel loves their neighbors and cares for their land as they ought.

### **Structure of Leviticus 25**

Before embarking on a detailed exegesis of Leviticus 25, it is instructive to consider an overall outline of the chapter. The outline helps highlight the goal of the Jubilee, redemption/restoration of people and land. The outline also clearly shows the repeated structure for the successive stages of destitution in verses 39-55. It is within these three stages that the laws of redemption are explicated. As such, the Jubilee cannot be rightly understood without understanding the interrelationship between the Jubilee, the laws of redemption, and the successive stages of destitution detailed in Leviticus 25:39ff. The following is an outline of Leviticus 25:<sup>17</sup>

#### **I. The Jubilee is a Sabbath for the Land and for the People (vv. 1–22).**

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<sup>16</sup> For the Jubilee background of Sabbath-keeping in Isaiah 58, see chap. 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>17</sup> This outline is loosely adapted from Gregory Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the ANE* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 322.

Fear Motivation: “You shall fear your God” (v. 17a) [וַיִּירָאֲתָּ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ].

Covenant Rationale: “I am the Lord your God” (v. 17b) [אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיכָּ].

Excursus: *Practical Concern with the Fallow* (vv. 18–22).

## II. The Jubilee is for the Redemption of Property (vv. 23–38).

General Principle: “You shall allow a redemption of the land” (vv. 23–24).

Stage 1: An Israelite Needs to Sell Part of His Land (vv. 25–28) [כִּי־יָמוּךְ אַחִידָּ].

*Excursus: Practical Concern with Dwellings in the City* (vv. 29–34).

Stage 2: An Israelite Sells All of His Land and Needs Regular Support (vv. 35–37) [כִּי־יָמוּךְ אַחִידָּ].

Fear Motivation: “You shall fear your God” (v. 36) [וַיִּירָאֲתָּ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ].

Covenant Rationale: “I am the LORD your God” (v. 38a) [אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ].

Motivation: “who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (v. 38b)  
[אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ].

## III. The Jubilee is for the Redemption of Persons (Verses 39–55)

Stage 3a: An Israelite Sells Himself to Another Israelite (vv. 39–43)  
[כִּי־יָמוּךְ אַחִידָּ].

Egypt Motivation: “who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (v. 42a)  
[אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם].

Fear Motivation: “You shall fear your God” (v. 43b) [וַיִּירָאֲתָּ מֵאֱלֹהֶיךָ].

*Excursus: Practical Concern regarding Foreign slaves* (vv. 44–46).

Stage 3b: An Israelite Sells Himself to a Foreigner (vv. 47–54) [כִּי־יָמוּךְ אַחִידָּ].

Covenant Rationale: “I am the LORD your God” (v. 55) [אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיכָּ].

Egypt Motivation: “who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (v. 55b)  
[אֲשֶׁר־הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם].

The first section of Leviticus 25 presents the Jubilee as a Sabbath for the land and for the people. Verses 1–7 discuss the fallow year, while verses 8–22 discuss the Jubilee year in general, with an excursus about the fallow year in verses 18–22. The fact that the main Jubilee law is sandwiched between sections that discuss the fallow year signifies that the Jubilee is a Sabbath. This sandwiching also lends credence to what is

argued below, that the Jubilee occurred in the forty-ninth year and was concurrent with the Sabbath year. Verses 23-55 focus on laws for the redemption for property and persons, moving through three successive stages of destitution. The focus on property redemption continues until verse 38, which is enveloped by theological statements about the Lord's ownership of the land (v. 23) and the Lord's ownership of the nation Israel because of the Exodus (v. 38). "I am the LORD your God" (Lev 25:38, 55) provides justification for interest-free loans in stage two while also framing the third stage. God's dual ownership of both the land and persons of Israel both justifies the laws of redemption and provides moral motivation to Israelites to obey the laws of redemption and Jubilee. The third stage imagines complete loss of land and a subsequent entering into another's house as a hired servant. This repeated formula provides the moral and theological rationale for how Israelites are to treat their impoverished neighbor, not as slaves but as hired workers. The rationale is this: they are slaves/servants of Yahweh and therefore cannot be slaves of another. Just as Israelites are given rights to the land that is ultimately owned by Yahweh, so Israelites are given rights to serve one another though they ultimately belong to Yahweh.

This outline demonstrates the inherent unity and logical development of the text. Recognition of the outline helps one to understand the major emphases of the text. It also argues against the predominant critical view that the legislation went through various stages of redaction in order to adjust to the changing needs of Israelite society.<sup>18</sup> The logical development of the text paired with the direct ANE parallels for the Jubilee requires one to date Leviticus 25 to the time of Moses.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the evidence is against those who argue that the Jubilee is a later development after the pre-monarchic period.

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<sup>18</sup> An overview of critical views can be found in chap. 1 of this dissertation, as well as in C. J. H. Wright, "Year of Jubilee," in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:1027-28. Further interaction and critique of the predominant critical viewpoints are at the end of this chapter.

<sup>19</sup> Arguments for an early date for Lev 25 are at the end of this chapter.

The unity and coherence of the legislation is the most natural reading of the text. In addition to this, the excurses regarding urban houses and foreign slaves further prove the practicality and reality of the Jubilee. A text that was idealistic would not have taken time to deal with practical issues such as what to eat in fallow years, what to do with houses in walled cities, and what to do with foreign slaves. Direct interaction with critical viewpoints and critique of them can be found at the end of this chapter. The point here is to note the structural unity of the text.

It is also interesting to note that the text appears to be structured to match Genesis 47:9-13. The stages of destitution broadly match the three stages of loss experienced by the Egyptians during the great famine.<sup>20</sup> Just as Leviticus imagines several stages of ongoing destitution, so Genesis 47 reports a similar development that is somewhat parallel to Leviticus 25. In order to subsist, the Egyptians first spend all their money, then give up all their livestock, and then resort to selling themselves and their land into the hand of Pharaoh. Leviticus 25 imagines a partial loss of land, a loss of ability to support oneself, and loss of independence. While the stages do not match, the general trend in Genesis 47 and Leviticus 25 is from full ownership of land to complete loss of land and personal freedom.

### **Leviticus 25:8-12: Main Legislation**

The main tenets of the Jubilee along with its twin themes of release and return are found in Leviticus 25:8–12:

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

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<sup>20</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 323.



vines. 12 For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field. (Leviticus 25:8–12)

Verses 8–12 are broken into two key sections: the timing of the Jubilee (vv. 8–9) and the observation of the Jubilee (vv. 10–12). Verses 8–9 dictate that the Jubilee should occur every forty-nine years on the Day of Atonement. The year of reckoning may have begun in the month Tishri, although it is not entirely clear which month began the New Year in Israel as a New Year celebration is never indicated in the Bible.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of when the year itself began, the months remained consistent.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the Jubilee proclamation was set for early Fall (September or October, depending on the moon cycles), during the Day of Atonement. At this specific point in time, a trumpet was to be blown throughout the land. It is presumed that the priests bore this responsibility given their overall leadership in the Day of Atonement and the cult, although the text does not stipulate. Verse 10 stipulates that every Israelite is to return to their family's inherited plot of land. This command presumes what is stated clearly in Leviticus 25:25ff., that the Israelites who return had sold or lost their land in an effort to survive. Verses 11–12 affirms that the Jubilee year is a fallow year as is the regular seventh Sabbath Year.

### The Timing of the Jubilee

The question of how many years passed between each successive Jubilee has

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<sup>21</sup> James C. Vanderkam reports that there were four numbering schemes with Jubilee being reckoned by the Tishri-New-Year scheme:

*m. Roš Haš.* 1:1: "There are four 'New Year' days: on the 1st of Nisan is the New Year for kings and feasts; on the 1st of Elul is the New Year for the Tithe of Cattle (R. Eleazar and R. Simeon say: The 1st of Tishri); on the 1st of Tishri is the New Year for [the reckoning of] the years [of foreign kings], of the Years of Release and Jubilee years, for the planting [of trees] and for vegetables; and the 1st of Shebat is the New Year for [fruit] trees (so the School of Shammai; and the School of Hillel say: On the 15th thereof)" (trans. Danby). (James C. Vanderkam, "Calendars: Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish," in Freedman, *ABD*, 1:817)

<sup>22</sup> A fantastic overview of calendars, including how days, months, and years were calculated, can be found in Vanderkam, "Calendars," 1:814–20. A side-by-side chart listing the Babylonian month names, Hebrew month names, and modern month names can be viewed in Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, "Year," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1403–4.

been debated since antiquity. Four major views exist in the modern literature: (1) the Jubilee legislation is utopian and the exact span of years is a moot point; (2) the Jubilee year is an intercalary year of forty-nine days inserted into the calendar to align the Jewish calendar and the solar calendar; (3) the Jubilee year is concurrent with the Sabbath year; (4) the Jubilee year is consecutive to, or follows, the Sabbatical Year.<sup>23</sup> Option one is not a viable option given that many scholars date Leviticus 25 to the time of Moses and cite similar proclamations in the ANE as evidence that freedom proclamations like the Jubilee existed well before the exile.<sup>24</sup> Option two is likewise not viable as it requires an unwarranted emendation of the text from “years” to “days” in Leviticus 25:8. Options three and four do have merit. The debate between option three and four centers around the meaning of “fiftieth year” in verse 11 and the meaning of “crop sufficient for three years” in verse 21. Both of these options have much to commend them and the clear choice remains obscure. As will be shown below, the concurrent viewpoint (number 3) is

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<sup>23</sup> A helpful overview of major views can be found in John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 433; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 318-21; and Robert North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, *Analecta Biblica* 4 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1954); 120-34. For viewpoint 1, that the Jubilee is idealistic, see Robert Karl Gnuse, “Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus: Israel’s Vision of Social Reform,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, no. 2 (April 1985): 45-47; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 176-77; Raymond Westbrook, “Social Justice in the Ancient Near East,” in *Law from the Tigris to the Tiber: The Writings of Raymond Westbrook*, ed. Bruce Wells and Rachel Magdalene (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 222-23. For viewpoint 2, that the Jubilee is an intercalary year, see S. B. Hoenig, “Sabbatical Years and the Year of Jubilee,” *JQR* 59 (1969): 222-36; and Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1979), 302n4, 319. For viewpoint 3, that the Jubilee and Sabbath Year are concurrent, see Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 320-21; Stephen A. Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems of Ancient Israel,” in *In the Shelter of Elyon*, ed. W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer, JSOTSS 31 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 284; North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 129-34. For viewpoint 4, that the Jubilee Year and the Sabbath Year are consecutive, see John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation*, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 115 (Boston: Brill, 2007), 88-92; Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 3a (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2167-69. The previous list is only representative of major scholars and the major viewpoints. A concise and modern summary of the issue can be found in Robert S. Kawashima, “The Jubilee, Every 49 or 50 Years?” *VT* 53 (2003): 117-20; John Sietze Bergsma, “Once Again, the Jubilee, Every 49 or 50 Years?” *VT* 55 (2005): 121-25.

<sup>24</sup> See the section, “Was the Jubilee a Utopian Ideal?” at the end of this chapter for a critique of critical views of the setting and authorship of Lev 25. See also discussion of ANE freedom proclamations in chapter 2 of this dissertation.

to be preferred over the consecutive viewpoint (number 4) because it matches the general Sabbath spectrum, is the more natural reading of the text, and because it better fits the trajectory of Leviticus.

Two chief arguments are marshalled in favor of the concurrent view, that the Jubilee happened every forty-nine years. The first is that the numbering scheme in Leviticus 25:8 directly results in the number forty-nine, as the text itself states. Second, Leviticus 25:22 pictures the Israelite farmer sowing seed once again in the “eighth year,” which is the year after the Sabbath year fallow, or the fiftieth year. In other words, Leviticus 25:22 presumes that the Jubilee is concurrent with the Sabbath year on year forty-nine. The difficulty is that verse 22 also uses the language of “three years” as if there are two fallow years in a row: a sabbath-year fallow and then a jubilee-year fallow. However, “three years” likely just describes the fact that the fallow affects three different calendar cycles. In this understanding, the “crop sufficient for three years” in verse 22 refers to part of the sixth year, the entire seventh year, and part of the eighth year.<sup>25</sup> Cereal crops were sown in the Fall and reaped in the Spring. Thus, part of three agricultural years would have been affected by a single fallow year. In addition, it should be noted again that the structure of Leviticus 25, where the main Jubilee laws are sandwiched between laws regarding the Sabbath fallow (Lev 25:1-7; 18-22), signifies that the Sabbath year and the Jubilee year are the same. In fact, it is perhaps most fitting to describe the Jubilee as a proclamation that happens in the seventh Sabbath year on a

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<sup>25</sup> Hartley agrees: “The conclusive evidence that this promise does not think of two successive fallow years is the reference to sowing seed in the eighth year. If the year of Jubilee were the fiftieth year, that would be the eighth year, and sowing would not be allowed. This promise recognizes that every fallow year impacts parts of three years. In that a sabbatical year began in the fall, the fallow impacted the seventh and eighth years, reaching into the ninth year. If the counting of years was by a calendar that began in the spring, the fallow year would have covered parts of years seven and eight, and the produce from seed sown in the fall of the eighth year would not be harvested until the beginning of the ninth year” (Hartley, *Leviticus*, 436). Hartley helpfully adds that determining elapsed time is always fraught with difficulty and is somewhat ambiguous: “Although the text does speak of a fiftieth year, the ancient way of reckoning time does not exactly mesh with the modern way, especially when numbers are used symbolically. Every calendar offers difficulty in counting days; e.g., May 7 to May 10 is considered three days although it is part of four. Similarly, from Jubilee, the seventh sabbatical year, to the next Jubilee is fifty years.” Hartley, *Leviticus*, 436.

specific day, the Day of Atonement. In a strict sense, it is just as appropriate to refer to a Jubilee day as it is to a Jubilee year. This work will use the language of Jubilee year since this seventh Sabbath year is quite set apart from the other Sabbath years by virtue of the Jubilee proclamation that happens within it.

However, the main challenge to the concurrent view is the language of “fiftieth year” in Leviticus 25:11. Those who argue for a consecutive two-year fallow and date the Jubilee every fifty years argue that a full forty-nine years must pass by, and then the Jubilee happens a few days into the beginning of the fiftieth year. This seems unlikely for a few reasons. First, there is warrant to interpret “fiftieth” as a loose reference to forty-nine. There are a number of examples in which the Israelites practice what is known as inclusive counting, whereby one unit is counted twice.<sup>26</sup> Examples of inclusive counting include the circumcision on the “eighth day” that is actually day seven (Lev 12:3,) and the way the first and last year of a king’s reign in the northern kingdom was counted as one year.<sup>27</sup> This is best illustrated with the eighth day for circumcision. The birthday is considered the first day, making the eighth day exactly one week later or exactly seven days later.

In addition to the above arguments, it should be noted that the prophetic interpretation of the Jubilee appears to multiply the Jubilee by a number of ten, resulting in the number 490. Obviously, in Daniel’s scheme the number 490 is counted by the math of seventy times seven years, thus “seventy weeks,” which is a length of time that is equivalent to a tenfold the exile (Dan 9:24). Ezekiel’s cosmic Temple also employs a litany of measurements that are multiples of fifty, which points back to the Jubilee and

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<sup>26</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 318. A New Testament example of inclusive reckoning happens in John 20:26, where “eight days later” means a week later. North bases his argument on the fact that seven weeks pass before the Feast of Pentecost begins, yet it is considered to be the passing of fifty days. However, Lev 23:16 is much clearer, since the fiftieth day is counted as the “day after the seventh Sabbath.” See North, *A Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 109-12.

<sup>27</sup> John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, Concordia Commentary (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 538.

contrasts with Daniel's use of forty-nine. However, as will be argued in chapter five, multiples of fifty would still recall the Jubilee given that the ordinal number "fiftieth" is explicitly used in Leviticus 25:10-11. Further, measurements on the order of fifty are much simpler than measurements on the order of forty-nine. It seems that the prophets read the Jubilee as is argued here, with the specific number being forty-nine and the general number being rounded to fifty. Of course, it is granted that the prophet's use of the Jubilee number does not prove which year the Jubilee proclamation actually occurred.

While the concurrent view gives preference to forty-nine years, the consecutive view gives preference to fifty years. It argues that the Jubilee does not begin until a complete forty-nine years have been counted and cites the need for a three-year crop in Leviticus 25:22 as indications that the Jubilee is a separate, sequential or consecutive year to the Sabbath year. Both Bergsma and Milgrom cite the basis-of-fifty counting scheme for the Feast of Weeks, which they argue requires forty-nine days plus one day, as a parallel numbering scheme. "You shall count seven full weeks from the day after the Sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath. Then you shall present a grain offering of new grain to the LORD" (Lev 23:15-16).

In other words, the enumeration of years is the same as the enumeration of days.<sup>28</sup> Just as the Feast of Weeks requires two consecutive days of rest, so the Jubilee requires two consecutive years of rest.<sup>29</sup> The largest challenge to this viewpoint is the

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<sup>28</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> Milgrom explains regarding Lev 23:15-16: "So, too, the farmer counts fifty days, forty-nine (a number of perfection,  $7 \times 7$ ) plus one. Thus the fiftieth day is, as it were, perfection enhanced. I have already observed that the number fifty ( $7 \times 7 + 1$ ) is an enhanced number eight ( $7 + 1$ ), which is frequently encountered in the cult (vol. 1.571). Similarly, the jubilee cycle of fifty years constitutes forty-nine complete sabbath-weeks of years plus the jubilee-sabbath year (25:10-12). In both counts of fifty, the number forty-nine is a sabbath (day or year), and the number fifty is a "sabbath" (festival day or jubilee year)" (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 1999). Milgrom explains elsewhere: "The eighth day is integrally connected with the previous seven. This holds true throughout the cult, for example, circumcision (12:2-3), the firstling (Exod 22:20), eligibility for being sacrificed (22:26-27), the purification of the sanctuary (16:14-15, 18-19), of the *mēšōrā* (14:8-10, 23), of the *zāb* (15:13-14), and of the Nazirite (Num 6:9-10),

practical concern of two consecutive years of fallow. However, it should be noted that Israelite farmers were accustomed to storing crops and there is evidence that they could sustain sieges up to three years.<sup>30</sup> Despite this viewpoint having the merits of reading the 25:11 and 22 at face value, it is a more complex explanation than the concurrent view. If the Jubilee was designated for the fiftieth year, it seems logical to presume that Moses would have explained, “The Jubilee is after the Sabbath year” and “You will have two fallow years.” While the argument that the Jubilee uses the same pentecontal numbering scheme in the same way as the Feast of Weeks is initially compelling, the text of Leviticus 25 does not specify “after the Sabbath year” as the Feast of Weeks legislation specifies: “You shall count fifty days to the day *after the seventh Sabbath*” (Leviticus 23:15, italics mine). Finally, the weight of evidence is in favor of the concurrent understanding. The initial numbering scheme in Leviticus 25:8 and the assumption that the Jubilee is a fallow year in 25:11-12 point toward the forty-ninth year. The simpler reading that most fits the context is the concurrent reading, although it is important to note that a proper understanding of the Jubilee is not dependent on either interpretation. In the end, the evidence of Jewish practice would settle the matter, but such evidence is not extant and a definitive answer to the exact number of years between each Jubilee must remain obscure.<sup>31</sup>

## The Sound of the Jubilee

Leviticus 25:9 commands the Israelites, “Then you shall sound the loud

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the dedication of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kgs 8:65 LXX) and of Ezekiel’s altar (Ezek 43:18–27; see chap. 4, COMMENT J and the NOTE on 8:33), the duration of Sukkot (23:34–36, 39; Num 29:35) and of the Jubilee cycle,  $7 \times 7 + 1$  (25:8–10). . . . The eighth day marks the inauguration of the regular, public cult. During the previous week, the Tabernacle was consecrated and the priests were invested, all in preparation for this day. The eighth day is thus the climax of the foregoing seven, as in so many other rituals and events” (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 571–72).

<sup>30</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 91. See 2 Sam 21:1; 1 Kgs 18:1; 2 Kgs 17:5, 18:10, 24:1–3.

<sup>31</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, 318, holds to 49 years, as does North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 109ff.

trumpet [וְהִעֲבֵרְתָּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה] on the tenth day of the seventh month. On the Day of Atonement, you shall sound the trumpet [תִּעְבְּרִירוּ שׁוֹפָר] throughout your land.” In other words, the day of Jubilee was marked by the dramatic action and sound of a trumpet being blown throughout the land.<sup>32</sup> A שׁוֹפָר was fashioned from a ram’s horn (יֹבֵל, cf. Josh 6:5), from which the Jubilee institution derives its name. In 25:10ff, the term שׁוֹפָר is simply replaced with its synonym, יֹבֵל, meaning that the name “Jubilee” derives from its opening act: the blowing of trumpets.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the blowing of the trumpet bore a sense of agency in and of itself. The sound of this Jubilee trumpet signaled release and granted permission to Israelites to return to their land.

The use of the שׁוֹפָר was not incidental. The שׁוֹפָר trumpet was used regularly as a military instrument to signal and rally troops. It was also used in religious contexts to signal new moons, fasts, assemblies (especially the Feast of Trumpets), movements of the ark, and most importantly, the approach of Yahweh.<sup>34</sup> The theophany of Yahweh to Mount Sinai was signaled by the sound of שׁוֹפָר trumpets (Exodus 19:13, 16). Prophecies concerning the advent of the Day of the Lord in the prophets also signal the Lord’s advent with a trumpet (Joel 2:1; Zeph 1:16; Isa 27:13; Zech 9:14). The connection with

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<sup>32</sup> It is possible that the blowing of the trumpet was complemented by the setting of fire signals throughout the land. Mesopotamian freedom (*andurāru*) proclamations were through the means of a raised torch. See Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 89; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2163. The pairing of the *shofar* horn with lit torches is also attested in Jer 6:1. It is also likely that the priests blew the trumpets as they regularly bore the responsibility for summoning the congregation (e.g., Num 10:2) and the priests led the ark of the covenant around the walls of Jericho while blowing trumpets before the walls fell (Josh 6). The twice repeated verb וְהִעֲבֵרְתָּ is used in place of the standard תִּקַּע (see Num 10:3, 8 10; Jos 6:9; 2 Kgs 11:14; Zech 9:14; Neh 4:12) to indicate that the horns were to be blown throughout the land in consecutive order. See Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 537.

<sup>33</sup> After Lev 25:12, the term is used nine times with the article, הַיֹּבֵל. North has argued that the root יֹבֵל means to “conduct, bear along” since the LXX renders יֹבֵל with ἀφεσις, “release.” North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 104–8. This is not surprising, though. The LXX was simply trying to describe יֹבֵל accurately, so described it with its function instead of its proper title, thereby making it a synonym of the term דְּרוֹר, liberty/release,” in 25:10. See also Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 314–15.

<sup>34</sup> David Talley, “שׁוֹפָר,” in *NIDOTTE*, ed. William Van Gemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); HALOT, s.v. “שׁוֹפָר”; BDB, s.v. “שׁוֹפָר.” For examples, see Lev 23:23–27; Num 29:1ff.; Judg 3:27; 6:34; Jer 4:21; 2 Sam 6:15; 15:10; 2 Kgs 9:13.

Yahweh's presence is not insignificant. By instituting the Jubilee, Yahweh set himself up as all of Israel's redeemer with regard to their land, debt, and persons. This is intimately tied with Yahweh's ownership of both the land and all Israelites, as Leviticus 25:23 and 25:55 note. If another Israelite was unable to redeem them before the Jubilee, the Lord, who was their original redeemer, would redeem them yet again. Thus, the voice of the trumpet is akin to the voice of the Lord announcing, yet again, their redemption and announcing his ownership of their persons, their land, and their time.<sup>35</sup> When Israel heard the Jubilee trumpet, they would have recalled the stories of God appearing to Israel on Mount Sinai, specifically the deafening sound of trumpets. The fact that the entirety of the law was to be read during the Sabbath year, just a few days after the Jubilee (Tishri 15–21), lends credence to the idea that the Jubilee brought Israel's reception of the law and the covenant at Mount Sinai into remembrance. That the Jubilee reminded Israel of their reception of the Torah at Mount Sinai is also supported by the wider way in which the Jubilee causes the entirety of the Exodus release and conquest of the land to be reenacted every generation.

Given the litany of events happening all at once, it might be argued that the month of Tishri set the tone for the entire nation. The month was a unique month in Israel's calendar, marking the beginning of the year at the Feast of Trumpets, followed eight days later by the Day of Atonement, and ending with the Feast of Booths where Israel recalled God's provision for the nation during the wilderness wanderings and heard the entire law read every seven years, which fell on the Jubilee year. The Jubilee trumpet blasts on the tenth of Tishri coincided with celebrations during the month of Tishri that jointly recalled Israel's Sinai covenant. The Feast of Trumpets on the first of Tishri recalled Yahweh's theophany at Sinai which was accompanied by the sound of a loud trumpet (Exod 19:13, 16). The Jubilee trumpet continued this Sinai motif. Then, the Feast

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<sup>35</sup> Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 552.



of Booths occurred just five days after and required the reading of the law during Tishri 15–21, once again recalling the Sinai experience and the national covenant with Yahweh. In addition, the month of Tishri was the month of early rains and sowing seed. Thus, as Israel began its agricultural year, it was reminded of the gracious covenant to which it belonged. The blowing of horns, the sacrificial offerings on the Day of Atonement, and the reading of the Law all reminded Israel of their liberation from slavery and obligation to Yahweh. Perhaps more importantly, the events that occurred in the month of Tishri likewise reminded Israel of Yahweh’s obligation to them as well. In a sense, when the month of Tishri fell on a Jubilee year, Israel was enabled to experience anew the first generation’s experience at Mount Sinai. Interestingly, just as the first generation stayed a month at Mount Sinai, so every generation has the opportunity to reenact the experience *en toto* during the month of Tishri.

### **The Jubilee and the Day of Atonement**

The pairing of the Jubilee release with the Day of Atonement is no accident. The physical release from debt and slavery is paralleled by a greater spiritual release from the debt and slavery of sin.<sup>36</sup> By positioning the Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, Israelites are reminded that their greatest problem is spiritual debt and slavery, not physical debt and slavery. The LXX perhaps picks up on this connection, translating both דָּרוֹר with the accusative ἄφεσιν and יוֹכֵל with the genitive ἀφέσεως. ἄφεσις can be translated as “forgiveness, release, or remission.”<sup>37</sup> The choice of this word seems intentional since the LXX also translates שְׁמִטָּה of Deuteronomy 15:1 with ἄφεσιν. It seems that the LXX is replacing the name of both the Sabbath year release and the

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<sup>36</sup> See discussion of Isa 58:6 in chap. 5 of this dissertation, where Isaiah makes the link between release from spiritual bondage and release from physical bondage. For an in-depth treatment of the Day of Atonement and its relation to the other sacrifices in Leviticus, see Roy Gane, *Cult and Character: Purification Offerings, Day of Atonement, and Theodicy* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005).

<sup>37</sup> *BDAG*, s.v. “ἄφεσις.”

Jubilee with their general function: release. It is not clear why the LXX did not choose a more fitting translation for “freedom” like ἐλευθερία, “state of being free, freedom, liberty.”<sup>38</sup> It is possible that the LXX chose ἄφεσις to connect the Jubilee to the broader spiritual realities of the Day of Atonement. Shead concurs with this supposition:

Why has the translator homogenized his translation equivalents like this? It was not as if there were no synonyms available to him, and elsewhere the translator is characterized by a ‘love for variation’. Although this last feature makes it hard to be certain just how intentional his use of ἄφεσις was, we can at least be confident that in his mind the idea of release was of central importance to the jubilee, so that the MT’s focus on a period of time (yôbēl) becomes in the LXX a focus on the act of a release.<sup>39</sup>

Whatever the LXX translator’s intention was, it is clear that the pairing of these physical and spiritual liberations reminds Israel that the Jubilee is ultimately about ensuring Israelites can maintain a proper relationship with their Redeemer Lord. Since Yahweh is their Master, there can be no other master over them, whether another human or sin. This reminder of the master-servant relationship between Yahweh and Israel also reminds Israelites that Yahweh, not themselves, is the ultimate source of their provision. More importantly, the fact that the Jubilee recalls the rest and harmony of Eden cannot be forgotten. The Jubilee is proclaimed on the very day that the curse of sin is remedied. Although the remedy is insufficient, the pairing of the Jubilee with the Day of Atonement makes Israel long for and look to the day when God will reverse the curse and restore mankind to its proper relationship with the Lord and with the land. Andrew Shead captures the inherent longing that the pairing of the atonement and the Jubilee creates:

The goal of God’s creation as expressed in the seventh day and the sabbath day is fruitfulness, dominion and relationship. It is for the same goal that God redeemed Israel from Egyptian bondage and brought them to the land; the path to this goal was covenant faithfulness. The land was thus a new Eden, a new creation in miniature, and to live out the truth of this by obedient fellowship with God was to live sabbatically. By giving the land itself a sabbath the people had an opportunity this eschatology even more completely, as they and the land experienced a year-

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<sup>38</sup> BDAG, s.v. “ἐλευθερία.”

<sup>39</sup> Andrew G. Shead, “An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 1 (April 2002): 31.

long alleviation of the curse. At the top of the sabbatical pecking order is the jubilee, the ‘ultimate sabbath’....<sup>40</sup>

**The language of the Jubilee.** The key actions in the Jubilee are release (“liberty”) and return. However, Leviticus 25:8–12 employs seven different terms or phrases that provide a full picture of the Jubilee: consecrate, liberty, Jubilee, you, fallow, property, and return. Six of these terms (all but fallow) are all located in Leviticus 25:10: “And you shall *consecrate* the fiftieth year, and proclaim *liberty* [לְרִירוֹ] throughout the land to all its inhabitants [לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל]. It shall be a *jubilee* [יִבְלָה] for you [pl.], when each of you [pl.] shall *return* to his *property* and each of you [pl.] shall *return* to his clan [וְשָׁבוּ]” (*emphasis mine*). There is a chiastic structuring between verses 10–13 that further emphasizes the main purposes of the Jubilee and highlights many of these key terms.<sup>41</sup> The general thrust of the text has been paraphrased below to allow the general flow of the chiasm to be visible.

A 25:10 –And you shall CONSECRATE [וְקִדְשְׁתֶּם]...It shall be a Jubilee [יִבְלָה], it is *for you* [לָכֶם, pl.], when *each of you* [אִישׁ] shall return [וְשָׁבוּ] to his property [אֲחֻזָּתוֹ] and clan.

B 25:11 – That fiftieth year is a Jubilee [יִבְלָה] *for you* [לָכֶם, pl.], when *you shall not sow*.

B’ 25:12 – A HOLY [וְקִדְשֶׁתָּם] Jubilee [יִבְלָה] it is *to you* [לָכֶם, pl.]. You *may eat the produce of the field*.

A’ 25:13 – In this year of Jubilee [הַיִּבְלָה] *each of you* [אִישׁ] shall return [וְשָׁבוּ] to his property [אֲחֻזָּתוֹ].

The chiastic arrangement allows several emphases within the text to be observed more easily. The repetitive elements have been individually formatted to allow for each repetitive element to be recognized visually. First, the Jubilee’s consecration is repeated in both 25:10 and 25:12 with the repetition of the root קדש, giving unity to the two mirror

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<sup>40</sup> Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 24.

<sup>41</sup> I am indebted to Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2170, for initial observation of this chiasm.

images of the chiasm. In addition, the term Jubilee is repeated four times, emphasizing the element of freedom or release. Third, each clause repeats the pronoun “you,” giving emphasis to the fact that the Jubilee is for Israelites and is not for the sojourner or foreigner. Although English style requires a different preposition attached with each repetition of the second person pronoun, the repetitive emphasis uses the identical constructions in Hebrew, framed by the distributive use of *אִישׁ* which operates functionally as a second person plural pronoun: for you/each of you [*אִישׁ/לָכֶם*] (v. 10); for you [*לָכֶם*] (v. 11); to you [*לָכֶם*] (25:12); each of you [*אִישׁ*] (25:13). The term Jubilee and the second person plural pronoun are the only elements repeated through each panel of the chiasm, putting emphasis on the Jubilee’s main point: it is freedom for you.

The fourth repetitive element occurs within the inner B frames, which is legislation regarding the fallowing of the land. The final repeated element is the provision for return to one’s family and land. In both verse 10 and verse 13, the syntax is quite similar despite the varied word order:

*אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָדָתוֹ וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשֻׁבוּ* (v. 10)

*תָּשֻׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָדָתוֹ* (v.13)

Verse 13 leaves out “each man to his clan” in favor of the summary: “each man to his property.” The repetition of returning to one’s property signifies that the freedom granted by the Jubilee is freedom to return. The goal is restoration to one’s land and one’s family. In summary, the chiasm along with the repeated elements sets apart and emphasizes five key aspects of the Jubilee: holy, liberty/freedom, you (Israelites only), fallow, and return.

### **The Key Terms of the Jubilee**

To further understand the purpose of the Jubilee, a brief look at each of the seven key terms in Leviticus 25:10-13 is in order. The following will review the key terms consecrate, liberty, jubilee, you, fallow, property, and return. The headings will summarize the theological understanding which each terms imbues into the Jubilee.

**Term 1: The Jubilee is consecrated.** The first term is “consecrate” (קדשם).

The Jubilee is consecrated because it occurs on the Day of Atonement during the Sabbath year, and is itself a Sabbath, as argued in chapter three. Further, the Jubilee is also set apart as holy because of its theological motivation. Israelites are Yahweh’s slaves who have been redeemed from slavery to Egypt: “For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves” (Lev 25:42). This sacred and theological motivation extends beyond their persons to the land as well, which Yahweh also claims as his own: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23). As discussed in chapter 3, קדוש carries the connotation of “devoted.” Yahweh’s ownership of Israel and her land logically set her apart, devoted her, or consecrated her to the Lord. Yahweh’s ownership of the land is secondarily reinforced by the fallowing of the land, which connects the Jubilee with the Sabbath-year debt release and land fallow. Of course, the counting of the Jubilee at seven sevens makes it doubly sacred since seven is considered a sacred number. Seven sevens are more sacred or perhaps most sacred.<sup>42</sup>

Together, a holy triad is formed between Yahweh, mankind, and land.<sup>43</sup> This triad points back to the original harmony that existed in the pre-fall order between Yahweh, Adam, and the ארץ (“land”). The fact that the Jubilee is “consecrated” directly recalls Genesis 2:1–3, in which the seventh day is likewise “consecrated.”<sup>44</sup> In fact, God’s Sabbath rest, the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:11), and the Jubilee are all consecrated as three separate entities of sacred time within the Pentateuch. The Jubilee, like the

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<sup>42</sup> Hartley, *Leviticus*, 434.

<sup>43</sup> This triad has also been noticed by C. J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 196.

<sup>44</sup> Shead writes, “The act of ‘sanctifying’ the year puts it into the same class as the seventh day of Genesis 2:1-3 and the sabbath day of the decalogue (these are three pieces of ‘sacred time’ in the OT). God has set aside a time within which *derôr*, (‘emancipation’, ‘release’) should occur.” Shead, “Old Testament Theology,” 21.

Sabbath day, is consecrated because it has as its goal the realization of the rest and harmony that existed on the seventh day of creation before the Fall. As the Jubilee points back, it naturally points forward, creating a longing for a restoration of that original rest where mankind was free from physical bondage and spiritual bondage. The Jubilee is holy because its goal includes more than socioeconomic parity within Israel. The freedom and restoration that is gained on the horizontal plane reminds Israel of their sacred duty to Yahweh on the vertical plane, thereby reinforcing to Israel their covenant arrangement with the Lord. This covenant arrangement is holy itself and reminds every Israelite that they, along with all of their possessions and all of their activity, are holy to the Lord: “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine” (Lev 20:26).

Understanding this connection between Yahweh, individual Israelites, and their God-given plot of land is essential to understanding the goal of the Jubilee. As Israelites worked their God-given plot of land, they experienced the benefits of the covenant along with the presence and blessing of the Lord. C. J. H. Wright argues that an Israelite’s land was central to his identity as a covenant member of the nation: “For the Israelite, living with his family on his allotted share of the LORD’s land, the land itself was the proof of his membership of God’s people and the focus of his practical response to God’s grace.”<sup>45</sup> The Jubilee’s goal is thus much more than granting freedom or returning Israelites to their family and land. The sacred goal of the Jubilee is to restore the right order within the covenant between Yahweh, each Israelite, and his land. This restoration, as has already been mentioned, pointed back to the divine rest Yahweh experienced at creation and the harmony that existed in the garden of Eden between man, land, and Yahweh at the creation. Sabbath rest, the Jubilee, allows all Israelites to remember the divine rest while experiencing it in the present. As such, this remembrance

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<sup>45</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 201.

would naturally cause an Israelite to look forward to the time when the divine rest was restored to both Israel and the earth.<sup>46</sup>

**Term 2: The Jubilee grants liberty.** The second term is “liberty.” “Liberty” (לְרוֹר) describes the status all Israelites are granted universally at the Jubilee. There is some debate over the translation of this term, לְרוֹר. The options are: 1) release; 2) flowing; or 3) freedom.<sup>47</sup> The LXX consistently renders לְרוֹר with various forms of ἄφεσις, “release,” as mentioned above.<sup>48</sup> The concrete idea behind לְרוֹר is “flow,” as seen in the way that the word is used to describe viscous veins of myrrh that have congealed (cf. Exod 30:23).<sup>49</sup> The concrete action of “release” and the metaphorical idea of “freedom” naturally follow from the root idea of “flow.” Thus, “freedom” or “liberty” are sufficient translations, as supported by the Mesopotamian *andurarum* proclamations discussed in chapter two above, which use similar language and likewise release slaves from their commitments and provide them with a free status.<sup>50</sup> As noted in chapter 2, the major contrast between Israel’s Jubilee and ANE *misharum* edicts is the cyclical nature of the Jubilee and its origin with God.<sup>51</sup> Because it came from God and was encoded into

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<sup>46</sup> Support for this forward-looking aspect of the Jubilee can be seen in the way that the prophets used Jubilee imagery and the Jubilee itself as a type to explain the nature of the second Exodus and Israel’s glorious restoration on the Day of Yahweh.

<sup>47</sup> For the relationship between לְרוֹר and the Akkadian practice of *andarūrum*, see chap. 2 of this dissertation, section on “Social Justice and Proclamations of Freedom in the Ancient Near East.”

<sup>48</sup> The LXX also translates לְרוֹר with ἄφεσις in Isa 61:1; Jer 34:8, 15, 17; and Ezek 46:17.

<sup>49</sup> HALOT, s.v. “לְרוֹר.”

<sup>50</sup> So also Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2167. The granting of release, called *andarūru*, was a major piece of ANE *mīšarum* edicts that released lands and slaves, like the Jubilee did. Ancient Sumeria practiced a similar concept, known as *amargi*, that meant literally, “return to the mother.” Given this ANE context, there can be doubt that לְרוֹר signified a general status of “free,” whether applied to land, persons, or property. For examples, see chap. 2 of this dissertation and Westbrook, “Social Justice in the Ancient Near East,” 159. Milgrom has a helpful chart highlighting the released components by various ANE rulers, including Nehemiah. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2168.

<sup>51</sup> For similarities between the Jubilee and ANE *misharum* edicts, which granted לְרוֹר, see chap. 2 of this dissertation, section on “Social Justice and Proclamations of Freedom.”

the cycle of Israel's social and economic life on a cyclical basis, the granting of freedom and the subsequent economic and social parity that resulted was not based on the whims of a human ruler. It was instead the foundation of Israel's socioeconomic system.

**Term 3: The Jubilee is signaled by a trumpet blast.** The third term is “Jubilee,” which is used fourteen times in Leviticus 25.<sup>52</sup> The English gloss “Jubilee” is not connected with the Latin *jubilare* or the subsequent English term “jubilation.”<sup>53</sup> The gloss Jubilee is simply a transliteration of the Hebrew יִבְלֵה. While the exact etymology of the word is not known, the general consensus is that the term יִבְלֵה refers to a ram's horn and is a synonym for the שׁוֹפָר.<sup>54</sup> The fact that the שׁוֹפָר is identical with the יִבְלֵה is made evident in Exodus 19 and Joshua 6, where the two terms are used in exchange for one another. Exodus 19:13b reads: “When the trumpet sounds a long blast [בְּמִשְׁעֵי הַיִּבְלֵה], they shall come up to the mountain.” Exodus 19:16 then reports that there was “a very loud trumpet [שׁוֹפָר] blast,” using the term שׁוֹפָר instead of the term הַיִּבְלֵה that was used earlier: וְקָל שׁוֹפָר הָזָק מְאֹד. A similar conflation of the two terms occurs in Joshua 6, where Joshua 6:4 qualifies שׁוֹפָר with הַיִּבְלֵה: שִׁבְעָה שׁוֹפְרוֹת הַיִּבְלֵהִים (“seven trumpets of rams' horns”). The use of the two terms in construct further demonstrates their semantic connection. Joshua 6:4 uses הַיִּבְלֵה to qualify שׁוֹפָר, thus indicating that the יִבְלֵה may have been a type of שׁוֹפָר. As regards the identification with a ram, several cognate languages use the consonants y-v-l

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<sup>52</sup> Only אֶרֶץ (“land”) is used more, at twenty occurrences.

<sup>53</sup> For a discussion of how various Latin sources translate this text, see North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 96-98.

<sup>54</sup> For an overview of views regarding the etymology of יִבְלֵה, see North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*. The common arguments are that יִבְלֵה means gift, music, or release. The fact that horns were used to make wind instruments in ancient times argues against these other viewpoints. Whatever the etymology, the technical meaning is clear: it is the year when release is signified by the blowing of trumpets. The ram's horn trumpet should be distinguished from the priests' sacred trumpets, which were made from hammered silver (Num 10:2-6).



to signify a ram, including Arabic, which is *yubla*.<sup>55</sup> The LXX translates יֹבֵל as ἀφέσεως (“release”), following its translation of דָּרֹר with the accusative ἄφεσις.<sup>56</sup> This is perhaps significant. The translation of “release” by the LXX is significant as it indicates the main function of the Jubilee, which was release.

**Term 4: The Jubilee is for Israelites only.** The fourth term is “you.” As has been made clear in chapter 3 and will be revisited below in the section on Leviticus 25:39-43, the main recipients of this national release are the heads of households. This is who is meant by the repeated plural “you” in Leviticus 25:10-13. The “you” is emphasized so as not to confuse the Jubilee with the general Sabbath and Sabbath-year provisions. While the Sabbath provisions gave rest to Israelite and non-Israelites alike, both the sabbath-year release and jubilee-year release are limited to Israelites. The matter of the identity of “you” in verses 10-13 requires explanation.<sup>57</sup> It has been argued that this is not just any Israelite, but generally refers to a head of household or a *pater familias*.<sup>58</sup> While Leviticus 25 does not directly state this, a thorough understanding of how the Jubilee release complements the sabbath-year release leads to this conclusion. Chapter 3 covers this issue in-depth but a brief overview is warranted at this juncture. The Sabbath-year release granted forgiveness of all debts. While a universal forgiveness

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<sup>55</sup> See HALOT, s.v. “יֹבֵל.” יֹבֵל is also used to signify a ram in the Marseille tariffs (third to fourth century BC). See *ANET*, 656-57. While this parallel does not prove the etymology of the word, the use of a language like Punic, a derivative of Phoenician and similar to biblical Hebrew, indicates that “ram’s horn” is at least a reasonable conclusion. See Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5n10).

<sup>56</sup> North believes “release” is the appropriate translation of this term. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 96ff.

<sup>57</sup> There is some variation between the singular and the plural second-person pronoun in Leviticus 25. See end of the chapter for further discussion of these variations.

<sup>58</sup> It is true that someone other than a head of household would also be released by the Jubilee. One can imagine a scenario where a son acts in place of his elderly father as the head of the household, and thus is treated as a hired worker until the Jubilee release. Further, the text makes clear in Lev 25:41 that the impoverished Israelite enters into the other’s house along with his sons.

of debts would go far in creating new opportunity for impoverished and indebted Israelites, it did not give land back. Further, Deuteronomy 15:12ff. stipulates that any Israelite slave who has been sold is to be released by his master after six years of service. The language of “sold” tips the hat, as it were, to the wider context. The slaves being released after six years of service were dependent debt-slaves who would have been sold by a head of household (*pater familias*) as a way to cover unpaid debt. If a head of household ended up in such a point of insolvency that they had to sell themselves, they did not enter debt-slavery but instead entered into a role like that of a hired servant (Lev 25:40, 50, 53). When taken together, Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25 legislate that debts are to be released every seven years at the Sabbath year, dependent debt-slaves are to be released after six years of service regardless of the timing of the Sabbath year, and heads of households and leased lands are to be released at the Jubilee.<sup>59</sup>

**Term 5: The Jubilee gives rest to the land.** The fifth term is “fallow.” The Jubilee provided for release from all debt and burdens, including burdens on the land itself. Just as with the Sabbath year, the release of slaves and debts was accompanied by the release of the land from work.<sup>60</sup> The Jubilee extends this temporary freedom provided by the Sabbath day and Sabbath year to a permanent freedom. As mentioned above, the structure of Leviticus 25:1-22 allows one to see just how integrally related the Jubilee is to the fallow. The Sabbath year releases land, workers, debts, and debt-slaves from work. The Jubilee extends this “fallow” to heads of households and to land titles permanently.

**Term 6: The Jubilee restores Israelites’ lost property.** The sixth term is “property.” The Hebrew noun used, נָחֳלָם, emphasizes the idea that the land is a “gift of

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<sup>59</sup> This is directly opposed to the view popularized by Wright and others; namely, that the Sabbath-year provides release for a landless class of Israelites while the Jubilee-year release provides release for Israel’s landed class. For a full criticism of this viewpoint, see chap. 2 of this dissertation, section on debt-slavery and chap. 3 of this dissertation, section, “The Sabbath Year.”

<sup>60</sup> See chap. 3 of this dissertation for an in-depth treatment of the fallow laws.

property from Yahweh.”<sup>61</sup> The term “property” (נַחֲלָה) is a technical term in the Torah that describes the plot of land given to Israelite families by Yahweh during the conquest of the land. The idea of the נַחֲלָה carried with it two distinct concepts. First, the property was inalienable. Families owned a permanent deed to the property that could not be sold or revoked. The covenant stipulated that the land belonged to Yahweh permanently (Lev 25:23). Yet, Israel is to possess it perpetually (Lev 25:34). Other terms are used throughout the Pentateuch to describe the land include נַחֲלָה (“inheritance or hereditary property”) and גִּזְרָה (“allotment, plot, portion, share”). As discussed in chapter 2, the covenant allowed for a dual-ownership of the land in which both Israel and Yahweh own the land together.<sup>62</sup> Yahweh’s ownership becomes, then, the guarantee of each Israelite’s continued ownership. As long as Yahweh owns title to the land, no Israelite can lose his land.

Each Israelite’s land-plot was inalienable and, secondly, equitable. The land was distributed according to each family’s need. The equitable distribution highlights the purpose of the land: to provide food, security, and a residence for each Israelite family. Lest Israelites forget these principles of inalienability and equitable distribution, the noun נַחֲלָה is used thirteen times throughout Leviticus 25 in addition to the use of חֶזֶק twenty times. Given the prominence of land terminology, Leviticus 25 is one of the central chapters in developing a theology of the land for Israel. Leviticus 25 demonstrates just how central the land is to the identity and nature of both the nation, the covenant, and its law. In the grand scheme, it is Israel’s mission as the new עַם that links it inextricably and irreversibly to its given אֶרֶץ. The two belong together, rise and fall together. There is a real sense in which Israel’s proper conduct on the אֶרֶץ controls Yahweh’s conduct toward them, either blessing them in return for obedience or cursing them in return for disobedience (Lev 26).

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<sup>61</sup> See chap. 2 of this dissertation, section on the “Ownership and Division of the Land.”

<sup>62</sup> See chap. 2, of this dissertation section on the “Ownership and Division of the Land.”

**Term 7: The Jubilee enables return to restored property.** The seventh and final term is “return.” It is the twin concepts of liberty and return that describe the main thrust of the Jubilee. In other words, “liberty” and “return” describe the drama of the Jubilee. The verb “return” describes the functional movement that is to happen and is repeated eleven times throughout Leviticus 25. Israelites who have had to leave their land because they sold it are now granted entrance and usage rights to it once again. In other words, all Israelites throughout the land are released, assigned a free status, and are free to return to their land with their families. This language is also applied to the individual plots of land. All Israelite land throughout the nation is released from its obligations for the year and is subsequently returned to its original owners.

### **The Jubilee and Social Justice**

The Jubilee is the linchpin of Israel’s system of social justice.<sup>63</sup> Without the Jubilee, any family could permanently lose their land, their solvency, and their place in society. Worse, a family could lose its place within the social and economic structure of Israel, which would subsequently create a landless class of Israelites. While biblical legislation provides for the poor through the law of gleaning rights and the triennial tithe, the Jubilee is what ensures that the poor have a means of supporting themselves: the land. The main principle that drives the Jubilee is the inalienability of the land. This inalienability was established with the Sinai covenant and realized in the Joshua conquest.<sup>64</sup> While biblical legislation ensures no single Israelite dependent can fall into

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<sup>63</sup> By using the language of “social justice,” I do not intend to import modern categories and debates into the discussion. Instead, I use the term “social justice” to summarize the law’s humanitarian concern, especially for the poor, oppressed, widows, and foreigners. Obviously, this humanitarian concern is just one aspect of doing justice in Israel, which is a much broader concept and beyond the scope of this work.

<sup>64</sup> The inalienability of land is well-attested in ancient sources, especially in ancient Greece. Milgrom writes, “The evidence is particularly evident for ancient Greece. For example, in the foundation of a new community at Kerkyra Melaina, it was decreed that a portion of the original allotments to the first settlers belonged permanently to them and their descendants.” Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247.

systemic debt or debt-slavery through the sabbath-year release, the Jubilee ensures that no family falls into systemic debt. Without the Jubilee, Israel was doomed to fall into a cycle of social and economic oppression whereby the few wealthy landowners slowly gained power over their neighbors by permanently procuring title to their land. With the Jubilee, permanent title to the land is retained by Yahweh and usage of that land is permanently given to individual families.

In summary, the Jubilee is a release of property, persons, and land (fallow). This trifold release restores the system of land tenure to its starting point and restores kinship ties to where they belong, all of which are indirect promises of the covenant. This is why possession (הַיְחָלָה) and family (הַתְּשׁוּבָה) are key words in this chapter. The return of land and release of servants are “mirror images.”<sup>65</sup> Both the land and the people belong to Yahweh, and thus they could not be servants of another master. They were obliged to Yahweh. The review of the seven key terms in Leviticus 25:8-12 both highlight the goal of the Jubilee and provide more specifics as to its nature and extent. The consecration of the Jubilee connects it with Israel’s Sabbath spectrum and recalls the consecrated rest that existed in Eden on the seventh day of creation. The term “liberty” speaks to the fundamental action of the Jubilee, which is release. The term “return” speaks to the subsequent action, as those who are released are enabled to return. This return is announced with the blast of a trumpet, which gives this once-a-generation release its name: the Jubilee. The terms “you” and “property” signify the scope of the release: it is limited to Israelite persons and Israelite land. When taken together, these specific words point to the goal of the Jubilee: to preserve Israel’s egalitarian system of land tenure.

### **Leviticus 25:13-17: Rules on Sale Price of a Field**

Leviticus 25:13 restates the general principle of the Jubilee: “In this year of

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<sup>65</sup> Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 346.

Jubilee each of you shall return to his property.” Leviticus 25:14 then provides moral motivation: “And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another.” Verses 15–16 then explain how the price to sale a field is calculated: “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. 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.” Verse 17 then repeats the moral motivation to not defraud one another and adds fear of God as a theological motivation: “You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.” As in the preceding verses, Moses has used a chiasm to ensure that the method and motivation of calculating in this manner are clear to both the buyer and the seller.<sup>66</sup>

Verse 13 – General Principle: Each of you shall return to his property.

A Verse 14 – Do not wrong one another.

B Verse 15a – He is selling you the number of remaining crop years.

C Verse 15b – the more the years, the more the price.

C’ Verse 16a – the fewer the years, the less the price.

B’ Verse 16 – He is selling you a number of crops.

A’ – Do not wrong one another, but fear God

A few observations are necessary. First, there is no legal incentive for obeying. Instead, the incentive is the fear of the Lord, who is the landowner in the first place. Fear of the Lord as motivation to obey the provisions of the Jubilee pervades Leviticus 25 (e.g., Lev 25:36 and 25:43). Moses also encourages obedience by reminding them that they too were delivered from slavery in the Exodus (25:38a, 42a, 55b) and that they now are God’s servants/slaves (Lev 25:42a, 55a). Their covenant relationship with the Lord

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<sup>66</sup> So also, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2177, for a similar understanding, although Milgrom’s analysis is overly complex.

obliges them to treat one another as the Lord has treated them and ought to compel them to show mercy and fairness to one another. In fact, this covenant relationship is assumed in Moses' choice of the noun עֲמִית, which is typically translated as “neighbor” and carries the idea of “fellow citizen.” This term is used exclusively of Israelites, once again emphasizing that the Jubilee is for “you” who have received the covenant promises and obligations.<sup>67</sup>

The second observation regards the language of buying and selling. This language pervades the chapter. Within the text of Leviticus 25, The verb מָכַר (“to sale”) is used thirteen times while the related nominal, מִמְכָּר (“sold, sale”), is used seven times throughout Leviticus 25. Further, קָנָה (“to buy”) occurs three times and only here in Leviticus (cf. 25:14, 28, 30). The density of transactional language in this text reveals that the sale of land or persons is a pressing concern in Leviticus 25. The fact that אֶחָדָה occurs thirteen times and אֶחָדָה occurs sixteen times in Leviticus 25 means that its primary concern is the land.

The issue redressed in Leviticus 25:13-16, the price of crops, appears to contradict what is clearly stated elsewhere, that Israelites are to never sell their land and that the title to their אֶחָדָה is inalienable: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23). The verb מָכַר is best understood, then, as “to lease.”<sup>68</sup> It is perhaps significant that אֶחָדָה is not the object of מָכַר in verses 13–16. The only thing sold is listed in verse 15, “years of crops” (שָׁנֵי (תְּבוּאָה)). Thus, the idea is that rights of the land's usage, namely usufruct, is sold.

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<sup>67</sup> Milgrom notes that the term refers to Israelites exclusive of other nations and ethnicities (see Lev 18:20, 19:17 for key examples). Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 2177. This is confirmed by Ezek 18:6, 11, 15, which replaces עֲמִית of Lev 18:20 with רֵעַ, another term used exclusively for Israelites.

<sup>68</sup> *Qal* is most common, typically related to selling human beings as slaves (e.g., Gen 37:27; Exod 21:7-8, 16; Deut 21:14). Similar usage in regard to selling land can be found in Gen 47:20 and 47:22. See BDB, s.v. “מָכַר”. Of course, the text does not directly state “sale your land” here but that is the understanding presumed and אֶחָדָה is used later in this passage as an object of the verb מָכַר. See Lev 25:23, 25.

Leviticus 25:15-16 limits land transactions to a very specific timeframe, forty-nine years. Thus, as verses 15-16 make clear, the price is determined by the number of crop years that are available before the Jubilee. In other words, a buyer is only purchasing its “productive capacity.”<sup>69</sup> Israelites can only sell the rights to their land up until the Jubilee. Thus, if there are twenty-five years until the Jubilee, then the price is based on the price for twenty-five years’ worth of crops or twenty-five years’ worth of productive capacity.

### **Leviticus 25:18-19: Promised Blessing**

While many laws within the Pentateuch are motivated by sanctions, the Jubilee is motivated by Israelites’ common history, identity, and covenant. The Jubilee motivates through appeal to the “theological and moral sensibilities of the community.”<sup>70</sup> While it is true that Leviticus 25 offers no legal incentive or disincentive, the covenant does. It is significant that the blessings and curses promised by the covenant follow the Jubilee legislation in Leviticus 26.<sup>71</sup> After repeating the first commandment from the decalogue, Leviticus 26:2 commands Israel: “You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.” Leviticus 26:4-5 and 26:10 then promise productive land in return for keeping Yahweh’s Sabbaths, including the Jubilee. If Israelites defraud one another or ignore one another when they are impoverished, these blessings will not come.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2178. Milgrom notes that this principle applies also when the price of a dedicated field is taken into consideration. See Lev 27:16.

<sup>70</sup> Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge*, JSOT 155 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 106. See also Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247.

<sup>71</sup> Thematic ties between the chapters are indicated by the repetition of יָבִיל (“produce”) in 26:4, 20 which sounds like יִבֵּל, and the repetition of שָׁבַת roots (25:2; 26:6, 34, 35). So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 83. The repetition of the Exodus motif (Lev 25:55; 26:13) likewise connects the two chapters.

<sup>72</sup> See also the treatment of Isa 58 in chap. 5 of this dissertation, where true fasting and Sabbath-keeping is equated with doing justice for one’s kinsman.



If they do not keep the Sabbaths, then the Lord promises to visit them with difficulty, famine, and wasted effort in Leviticus 26:14ff. The curses go so far as to promise that they will be “sowed” out of the land (Lev 26:32, note the irony!) and the land will literally *הִרְצָה* (“pay off”) its Sabbaths that were not observed (Lev 26:34, 43).<sup>73</sup> The true landowner, Yahweh, keeps a tally of years when the land rights are used without permission. Israel’s land rights do not apply during the Sabbath and Jubilee years. The Chronicler reports that this is exactly why the exile was 70 years: “20 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, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years” (2 Chr 36:20-21; cf. Jer 29:10; 25:12-12; Ezra 1:1; Dan 9:1-2).<sup>74</sup> The exile allowed Yahweh to have exclusive land rights in order to pay back Israel’s debt of illegitimate land use over multiple centuries.

This covenant backdrop informs the first promise of Leviticus 25:18-19, which promises security, fruitful land, and filled bellies: “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.” Either the triangular relationship between Yahweh, Israel, and the land is in harmony, or it is broken and in complete disharmony. One must obey Yahweh and keep his Sabbaths in order to enjoy the fruit and rest of the land.

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<sup>73</sup> *הִרְצָה* is difficult to translate, especially in the *hiphil* stem, as here. In the *qal*, it has a range from “be pleased with” to “accept” to “make acceptable” to “pay” to “propitiate.” The ESV chooses the safe gloss of “enjoy,” which is surely insufficient given the lexical trajectory of this word. Nevertheless, the semantic range also carries a note of obligation to make right, whether relationally (“please”) or financially (“pay”). Thus, a wooden translation of the *hiphil* might read “to count out.” HALOT, s.v. “*הִרְצָה*”; BDB, s.v. “*הִרְצָה*.” HALOT sees two homonyms with the same consonants, which is not necessary. The *hiphil* is simply applying the relational category to a concrete financial scenario. Contra Bergsma, who argues “enjoy” is a better gloss because “make restitution” makes the land morally culpable. Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 209n16.

<sup>74</sup> See treatments of Jer 25:11, 29:10, and 2 Chr 36:20–23 in chap. 5 of this dissertation, where it appears that the number of years in exile was in direct proportion to the number of unobserved Sabbaths.

### **Leviticus 25:20-22: The Three-Year Crop**

The second promise deals with an anticipated problem. If the land is to lie fallow for a year, what will Israel eat? Leviticus 25:20–22 return to the topic of 25:1–7, thus framing the Jubilee legislation within the imperative of the Sabbath year. The text reads:

And if you say, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?” I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. 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. (Lev 25:20-22)<sup>75</sup>

The Sabbath and Jubilee years are inextricably linked together. They are concurrent every seventh year and together they both form major pieces of Israel’s Sabbath spectrum, a key component of God’s covenant with them.<sup>76</sup> It has been argued above that the Jubilee occurred every forty-nine years, meaning that the Sabbath-year fallow and the Jubilee fallow were concurrent. As discussed above, this leaves the question of how to interpret the language of “three years” in verse 21. If the consecutive view is granted, then year one is viewed as the fall and spring of the sixth year, year two is fall and spring of the seventh fallow year, and year three is the fall of the eighth year when sowing commences. This also helps explain the language of the “ninth year.” There is a promise of a full three years’ worth of crops, meaning the sixth year crop will be sufficient to eat from for year seven, eight, and part of nine until the sowing of the eighth year is reaped.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Milgrom sees a potential parallel structure here, with each parallel pane emphasizing God’s blessing. Analysis is beyond the scope of this work. See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2180 for explanation.

<sup>76</sup> See chap. 3 of this dissertation for a full explanation of Israel’s Sabbath spectrum.

<sup>77</sup> My interpretation follows that of Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 302-11. Milgrom argues that the text should read with the numbers 48, 49, 50, and 51. See Milgrom, *Leviticus*, 2182. Hartley argues that vv. 20-22 were originally part of vv. 1-7 and were later moved and affixed to the Jubilee legislation. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 437. Such redactional explanations are not necessary. The Jubilee year is indeed special, yet it remains a Sabbath year. In the logic of an Israelite, they would have counted in seven-year increments regardless of the Jubilee to determine which year was the fallow year. This presumed logic is yet another reason why the Jubilee likely is forty-nine years and concurrent with the fallow year. See also Wenham, who argues similarly. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 320

The practical question is, how can a field that normally provides enough for one year provide enough for two to three years? David Hopkins has argued that Israelite and ANE farmers in general likely followed a practice of biennial crop rotation.<sup>78</sup> In other words, they only worked half their land each year, rotating with the other half year to year. By this system, it is conceivable that a farmer could work both halves in year six, providing a double crop. The half of the farm used two years in a row could then be rested in both the fallow year and year eight to ensure it maintained appropriate rest.<sup>79</sup> Whether or not Hopkins is correct, the point of these verses is that God's blessing will defy normal logic and expectation. There is a very real concern that letting land lie fallow may result in starvation. The fallow rest of the Sabbath year and Jubilee year inculcate faith in the God of the covenant, Yahweh. C. J. H. Wright agrees with this assessment: "The theological principle was that obedience to the economic legislation of Israel would require, not prudential calculations, but faith in the ability of Yahweh to provide through his control of nature as well as history."<sup>80</sup> Such faith would also be required to obey the other provisions of the Jubilee. Releasing debts and releasing hired workers (units of work) would certainly cost the Israelite master. However, Israel was not to live on the basis of their own efforts but to trust in Yahweh to provide for their needs. Their first duty was to obey Yahweh and give way to his demands for the way his land is used and his people are treated.

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<sup>78</sup> See David C. Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan: Agricultural Life in the Early Iron Age*, Social World of Biblical Antiquity Series 3 (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 201.

<sup>79</sup> Hopkins, *The Highlands of Canaan*, 201, 273. Hopkins explanation has gained popular assent. He is cited in several of the more extensive and modern treatments on the Jubilee. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2249; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 87; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 310.

<sup>80</sup> C. J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 203.

## **Structure of Leviticus 23:23-55**

These verses begin the second major section of Leviticus 25, which argue that the Jubilee is for the redemption of land. While the content is focused on the laws of redemption which can preempt the Jubilee, the fact that each major law includes the Jubilee shows that the Jubilee concern has not left the author's mind. The Jubilee is the framework within which the laws for redemption of land and persons operate. This second section of Leviticus 25 follows a consistent structure, with each successive stage of destitution marked out by the formula: "If your brother becomes poor" (Lev 25:25, 35, 39, and 47).<sup>81</sup> This protasis is repeated four times since the third stage imagines two different worse-case scenarios, one in which an Israelite sells himself to another Israelite and another in which an Israelite sells himself to a foreigner. The structure follows a general "principle of priority," with each successive stage of destitution demanding more attention and priority.<sup>82</sup> In other words, the first stage is not as dire of a situation as the second stage, so on and so forth. The first section is interrupted by an excursus regarding the sale of city dwellings in verses 29-34, thus answering the practical question of whether urban houses applied or not. The third stage also deals with the practical question of foreign slaves in verses 44-46.

### **Leviticus 25:23-24: General Principle**

The final rationale for the Jubilee is given in verses 23-24: "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." The general decree in verse 24 is the governing principle of the Jubilee. Because the Lord owns the land, Israelites do not own it and therefore must respect his wishes for its use and management. The objective of the Jubilee derives from the principle of Yahweh's

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<sup>81</sup> See "Structure of Leviticus 25" at beginning of this chapter for a visual layout of this structure.

<sup>82</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 322.

ownership of the land. The objective of the Jubilee is to encourage Israelites to take action and preserve the socioeconomic system of land tenure. If they fail to do so or are unable to do so, Yahweh will intervene every forty-ninth year to set things back into right order. Further, the Jubilee is necessary even if Israelites intervened, as they ought to have in every impoverished situation through the rights of redemption. As C. J. H. Wright has pointed out, such action would have resulted in the land being controlled by a few families. Thus, the Jubilee functions as a necessary override to the function and practice of redemption.

It is tempting, at first glance, to see the practice of redemption and the observance of the Jubilee as the same thing, with different timing. However, they not only differ in timing, but also differ in purpose. Redemption focused on keeping the clan whole, both persons and land. The Jubilee focused on keeping families together and families tied to their ancestral land. This same understanding is argued for by C. J. H. Wright:

There were two main differences between the redemption and jubilee provisions. First, *timing*. Redemption was a duty that could be exercised at any time, locally, as circumstances required, whereas jubilee was twice a century as a national event. Secondly, *purpose*. The main aim of redemption was the preservation of the land and persons of the *clan*, whereas the main beneficiary of the jubilee was the *household*, or “father’s house.” The jubilee therefore functioned as a necessary override to the practice of redemption. . . . The jubilee was . . . a mechanism . . . to preserve the socio-economic fabric of multiple-household land tenure with the comparative equality and independent viability of the smallest family-plus-land units.<sup>83</sup>

As has been discussed at length already, a central rationale for the Jubilee is the Lord’s possession of the land and the Israelite people. You cannot sell what belongs to another. The language of verse 23 emphasizes Yahweh’s possession of the nation. The nation is referred to as “strangers and sojourners,” a hendiadys that is repeated in 24:35 and 25:47. A similar phrase is used in 1 Chronicles 29:15, “For we are strangers before you and sojourners.” Further, the language in Leviticus 25:23 is stronger than “before

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<sup>83</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 204-5.

you,” as it can be translated “Indeed you are aliens and strangers in my service.”<sup>84</sup> While Israelites may have individual holdings (נַחֲלָה), the reality is that they are resident sojourners in the land of Yahweh. He owns the title and they are his servants. This is the claim consistently made throughout Leviticus 25. The chapter ends with a reminder of Yahweh’s ownership: “For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:55).<sup>85</sup> The terms “strangers and sojourners” normally describes a class of people who lived among the Israelites in Canaan but were not ethnic Israelites.<sup>86</sup> As such, they had no land holdings and were dependent on hiring their services out to other Israelites to survive. This tenuous position made them vulnerable, which is why the law emphasizes the need to treat them with fairness and justice.<sup>87</sup> Israelites are in a similar position as these non-ethnic Israelites. Their rights to the land are dependent on the Lord’s generosity.

The Lord is master of the Israelites and he is also master of the land of Israel. Although נַחֲלָה is used here in Leviticus 25:23, the context demands that this be understood as a reference to the land of Israel. Moses regularly refers to the land of Canaan with נַחֲלָה (Lev 20:24; 23:22; 25:2, 4). The history of Israel has emphasized on many occasions that both the land of Israel and the earth belong to the Lord. The song of Moses celebrates Israel’s planting into the land of Israel, calling it God’s “mountain” and a “sanctuary”: “You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands

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<sup>84</sup> See BDB, s.v. “נַחֲלָה 3a.” See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2181-82 for a similar understanding of נַחֲלָה.

<sup>85</sup> Also Lev 25:38, 42.

<sup>86</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 201.

<sup>87</sup> See Exod 20:10; 23:9; Deut 5:14; 10:18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19-21; Jer 22:3; Ezek 22:7; Zech 7:10.

have established (Exodus 15:17).<sup>88</sup> The covenant itself grounds God's rights over Israel in his ownership of the entire earth: "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine" (Exod 19:5). Deuteronomy 26:1-11 connects divine ownership with the ethical response expected by Israel, demanding that they be faithful stewards. The Lord has entrusted his land to them, and that trust carries with it ethical obligations.<sup>89</sup>

Of course, Yahweh does not just own the title to the land. It is also described as his abode and his sanctuary (Exodus 15:16-17). A number of Old Testament texts imply that the land is an extension of the Temple (Exod 15:17; Isa 11:9; 57:13; Hos 9:15; Ps 78:54), which entails the conclusion that Yahweh resides in the entire land (e.g., Num 35:34; Josh 22:19).<sup>90</sup> For this reason, the land is a holy place that must be kept pure. Leviticus 18:27-28 threatens that the land will vomit Israel out if they defile it:

But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you. 27 (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), 28 lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (Lev 18:27-28)<sup>91</sup>

Yahweh's ownership and presence in the land is the reason for the negative command of Leviticus 25:23a. The apodictic and permanent clause, "shall not [לֹא] be sold," emphasizes to the buyer that he is only purchasing rights to the land for a limited term which ends at the Jubilee, without qualification. The right of redemption is theologically grounded in Yahweh's ownership. They received rights to use the land and

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<sup>88</sup> See J. G. Millar, "Land," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 623. For God's ownership of the land of Israel, see Deut 32:43; Josh 22:19; Isa 14:2, 25; Jer 2:7; Ezek 36:5.

<sup>89</sup> See also Ps 24:1.

<sup>90</sup> I am indebted to Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2186, for this overall point. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2004).

<sup>91</sup> See also Lev 20:22.

possess it by lot (Num 33:50-56; Josh 14–19). Because the Lord gave it to them, only the Lord can revoke those rights.<sup>92</sup> Wright argues that this tension between divine gift and divine ownership as regards the land meant that the land functioned as the fulcrum for Israel’s relationship with God:

This dual tradition of the land (divine ownership and divine gift) was associated in some way with every major thread in Israel’s theology. The promise of land was an essential part of the patriarchal election tradition. The maintenance of the covenant relationship and the security of life in the land were bound together. Divine judgment eventually meant expulsion from the land, until the restored relationship was symbolized in the return to the land. The land, then, stood like a fulcrum in the relationship between God and Israel (see its position in Lev. 26:40–45). It was a monumental, tangible witness both to that divine control of history within which the relationship had been established, and also to the moral and practical demands which that relationship entailed.<sup>93</sup>

God’s ultimate ownership is emphasized with the term *לְעֹלָמְךָ* with the *lamed* preposition, which is found only here and in 25:30, making it a virtual *hapax legomenon*. The gloss, “in perpetuity,” is the right concept, but not the best translation. Instead, it ought to be translated “finally handed over.” The root *לִמַּח* carries the connotation of “silence” or “put an end to.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, the seller’s claim is “silenced” or “ended.”<sup>95</sup> The term has been found in Akkadian contracts from Ugarit where it establishes that the transaction is permanent and irrevocable.<sup>96</sup> The syntax of verse 30, where the term is used again, matches the typical Akkadian syntax exactly, thus indicating that *לְעֹלָמְךָ* is an ancient

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<sup>92</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2185.

<sup>93</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 201. Wright argues that their status as sojourners is not an infringement of rights, but a granting of rights because it put each Israelite in a relationship of “protected dependency.”

<sup>94</sup> HALOT, s.v. “לִמַּח.”

<sup>95</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2184.

<sup>96</sup> The ANE parallel to *לְעֹלָמְךָ* was originally found by Rabinowitz. See Jaob J. Rabinowitz, “Biblical Parallel to a Legal Formula from Ugarit,” *VT* 8, no. 1 (January 1958): 95. This ANE parallel can be read in Ignace J. Gelb, Michael P. Streck, and University of Chicago, eds., *Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1956), 16:94. A thorough discussion and summary of the evidence can be found in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2184. See Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: Va-Yikra*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 174.



legal term.<sup>97</sup> In these types of transactions, the land was sold at full price, which then qualified it for *לִצְמַחֲתָהּ*. Any land not sold at full price was subject to the *deror* (release) in a *misharum* proclamation. Leviticus 25:23 is clarifying that a “sale of redemption” is not *לִצְמַחֲתָהּ*, or “not finally handed over.” The use of this term provides an important insight into the practice of redemption and general prices. It is likely that the rights of field usage were sold below fair market value.<sup>98</sup> While this probable practice diminished the benefit to the impoverished seller, it served as an incentive to the buyer.

Yahweh’s dual ownership of the land and the nation sets the stage for the command in Leviticus 25:24, “And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.” The practice of redemption is enforced by the Jubilee. If Israelites do not allow redemption or are unable to redeem land (and later, each other), then the Jubilee ensures this happens. Redemption was necessary in order to protect the system of egalitarian land tenure that operated in Israel. The practice of redemption ensured that the social and economic fabric of Israel remained stable. It did this by keeping the land within each clan (economic protection) and keeping the lowest order of family units, the father’s house, together (social protection).

A brief survey of the terms involving redemption is necessary in order to understand the various redemption laws in Leviticus 25:25ff. The verb *לָצַח* carries a range from “recover” to “reclaim” to “buy back” to “redeem.”<sup>99</sup> The gloss, “act as a kinsman,” specifically applies within the context of Leviticus 25.<sup>100</sup> Within Leviticus 25, the noun form, *לִצְמַחֲתָהּ*, can describe the right of redemption (here in verse 24), the price of

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<sup>97</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2184. See also Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 284n8, for further discussion of this term’s usage in the extant ANE texts.

<sup>98</sup> See also Raymond Westbrook, *Property and the Family in Biblical Law* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 110.

<sup>99</sup> HALOT, s.v. “*לָצַח*.”

<sup>100</sup> BDB, s.v. “*לָצַח*.” When paired with *דָּם*, it means “avenger of blood” (*דָּם לָצַח*).

redemption (25:26, 51, 52), and the time in which redemption can happen (25:29b). The practice of redemption typically involved a purchase of what was taken through the payment of a redemption price by a human mediator.<sup>101</sup> The obligation of redemption began with the closest of kin and extended outward into the extended family, broadly staying within the confines of the clan. The *ḥāṣ* was responsible to provide financial assistance to an impoverished family member, receive restitution money on behalf of a dead relative (Num 5:8), serve as the avenger of blood in the case of wrongful death (Num 35:12-19), and assist family members in lawsuits (Job 19:25; Prov 23:11; Jer 50:34). This practice is exemplified in Boaz's redemption of Ruth and Naomi in Ruth 4 and in Jeremiah's purchase of Hanamel's field in Jeremiah 32:7-12.<sup>102</sup>

Theologically, the idea of redemption carries with it the memory of the Exodus redemption. The Lord purchased Israel in the Exodus (e.g., Exod 6:6; Deut 7:8; 9:26) and so now demands that they likewise redeem each other and each other's property. The intimate connection between the Exodus redemption and Israel's own practice of redemption is captured well by R. L. Hubbard, Jr.:

Theologically, the divine mandate of redemption (vv. 23-24) implements on Israelite soil the redemption won by Yahweh in Egypt (vv. 42, 55), lest Israel produce its own cruel Pharaohs and impoverished slaves. To deny redemption is to infringe on Yahweh's rights (*i.e.* to enslave people belonging to him) and, in effect, to annul the gains of the Exodus. Here divine grace safeguards Israel's freedom and social equality, and promotes Israel's ideal of family unity.<sup>103</sup>

The theological backdrop of the Exodus obligates Israelites to take on the role of Yahweh

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<sup>101</sup> See Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, Colin Duriez, Douglas Penney, and Daniel G Reid, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 698; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2187. See also chap. 2 of this dissertation, pp. 15-20, for the practice of redemption in the ANE.

<sup>102</sup> Boaz's redemption of Ruth is complicated, as it appears to conflate the laws for redeeming fields with the law of levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10). Despite these difficulties, both Boaz and his son Obed are called *ḥāṣ*, in addition to the anonymous redeemer who waives his rights (e.g., Ruth 2:20; 3:12; 4:14), showing a concrete example of how laws of redemption were practiced and were part-and-parcel of Israel's life. A fantastic discussion of the practice of redemption in the book of Ruth can be found in Block. Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth*, NAC, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 707-24.

<sup>103</sup> R. L. Hubbard, Jr., "Redemption," in *Alexander Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 717.

as **לְאִלָּן**. In fact, redemption was a way of life for Israel, with all kinds of things, situations, and people's standings in need of redemption.<sup>104</sup> This summarized Israel's "central ethical ideal" with Yahweh's redemption of Israel playing itself out in Yahweh's demand that Israelite masters generously supply departing slaves (Deut 15:13-15), provide food for the poor through gleaning rights (Deut 24:19-22), and treat the underprivileged with justice (Deut 24:17-18).<sup>105</sup> The redemptive trajectory of Israel's life began with Yahweh's redemption of them and climaxed at the Jubilee, where the entire nation once again experienced redemption. The legislation of Leviticus 25:23ff. obligates Israelites to effect this redemption before the Jubilee if they are able to do so. Verse 23 demands that they redeem the land. Verses 48-52 demand that Israelites also redeem each other if they are sold to a foreigner as a slave. Israel mimics Yahweh's redemption by redeeming one another and preventing the oppressive conditions of Egypt from happening within the land and society of Israel. Through mimicking Yahweh's redemption, Israel was encouraged to remember the Exodus and to remember Yahweh's great mercy on their behalf. The Exodus created Israel and then continued to define and inform the way they lived their lives from generation to generation.

### **Leviticus 25:25–54: The Three Stages of Destitution**

The final portion of Leviticus 25 develops and elaborates on the laws of redemption. The text is arranged topically with each subunit being earmarked by the repeated **כִּי־יָמוּךְ אֶת־יָדְךָ** (vv. 25, 35, 39). Each subunit descends into a further stage of destitution on the part of the impoverished Israelite and gives direction on how the situation is to be redeemed and who is responsible to do so. The first stage deals with the

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<sup>104</sup> "Redemption" in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 698. For examples, see sons (Gen 22:13); slaves (Exod 21:8; Lev 19:20); animals, houses, tithes (Lev 27:13-20, 26-27, 31; 1 Sam 4:45); Israelites from an oath (1 Sam 4:45).

<sup>105</sup> Hubbard, "Redemption," 717.

partial loss of land. The second stage deals with the loss of independence and presumably all land. The third stage deals with the loss of freedom.<sup>106</sup>

**Stage 1: Partial loss of land.** The first stage (vv. 25–34) assumes an Israelite must sell part of his land and calls on his nearest family members to redeem the land if they are able. The text reads:

If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. If a man has no one to redeem it and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, let him calculate the years since he sold it and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and then return to his property. But if he does not have sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee. In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property. (Lev 25:25-28)

If a man's nearest family members are not able to redeem his lost piece of land, then the man may redeem it at will when he gains sufficient means. If the man never gains sufficient means, then the land will be released to him at the Jubilee. The translation of the protasis, כִּי־יִמְוֶה אֶחָיו, is made somewhat difficult by the root מוּד. Milgrom's wooden translation captures the generally accepted meaning: "When your brother (Israelite) becomes impoverished."<sup>107</sup> The root is only found in Leviticus 25:25, 35, 39, 47, and 27:8, making it difficult to ascertain an exact meaning.<sup>108</sup> Two possible cognate roots are cited in the lexicons to help inform the meaning of this word. The choice is between מוּד, "to become poor/impoverished," or מוּד, "to grow weak."<sup>109</sup> The LXX translates it with

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<sup>106</sup> The categories of land, independence, and freedom are taken from Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 97-99. These categories adequately clarify the situation and are difficult to improve upon.

<sup>107</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2146. So also Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 535, "so impoverished." Hartley, *Leviticus*, 418; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 95; and Wenham, *Leviticus*, 314, along with the ESV, NIV, and NASB all read "becomes poor," presumably following the KJV's rendering of "be waxen poor." The CSB reads "If your brother becomes destitute." Levine offers a more enigmatic but conceptually accurate translation: "if your kinsman is in straits." Levine, *Leviticus*, 175.

<sup>108</sup> HALOT, s.v. "מוּד," "Become impoverished"; BDB, s.v. "מוּד," "be low, depressed, grow poor."

<sup>109</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2193, and Levine, *Leviticus*, 175, for outlines of the debate and bibliography.

the present middle subjunctive of πένομαι, “to be poor, have need of” and the Targum Onkelos similarly uses יתמסכן, “to become poor.”<sup>110</sup> There is not enough evidence to settle the debate, but the alignment of the ancient witnesses in the LXX and Targums paired with the similarity of the two possible cognate roots allow for the meaning to remain clear. The subject is someone who lost means sufficient to support himself, whether that is financial or other. This evidence leads to the conclusion that the ESV’s “becomes poor” is an adequate translation of מוֹדֵד.

Because of the impoverished situation, the Israelite “sells part of his property.” The verb used here, מָכַר, carries the idea of “to lease.” The Israelite sells what cannot be sold; his possession is by lot from the Lord. The מִן preposition on the noun gives it a partitive force, “a part of his property” [מִמְצֻתָּו].<sup>111</sup> The preposition is essential to understanding this first stage of property. The *pater familias* needs money to survive or to plant crops, forcing him to sell part of his key asset, his land, to raise the necessary funds. It is likely that the property was sold below market price and the funds would be used to purchase seed for sowing, although the funds could be used to cover a number of debts or needs including a fine, feed for animals, purchase food for his family, or other anomalies.<sup>112</sup> This was the case in Nehemiah’s day:

There were also those who said, “We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards, and our houses to get grain because of the famine. And there were those who said, “We have borrowed money for the king’s tax on our fields and our vineyards. Now our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children are as their children. Yet we are forcing our sons and our daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but it is not in our power to help it, for other men have our fields and our vineyards. (Neh 5:3-5).

The post-exilic Judean community were selling their fields and children in order to get grain and pay taxes. The end of verse 5 presumes that children are sold only after fields

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<sup>110</sup> LSJ, s.v. “πένομαι.”

<sup>111</sup> See Ronald J. Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd rev. and exp., ed. John C. Beckham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §324; so also, Hartley, *Leviticus*, 427.

<sup>112</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2193; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 324, 328.

and vineyards have been sold. This is also the order followed in Genesis 46:13–26 by the Egyptians. They first spent all their money, then sold their livestock, then their land and persons.<sup>113</sup> While the Egyptians sold land and persons together, the Judeans under Nehemiah appeared to reserve their children as the absolute last resort. Leviticus 25 does not deal with the sale of dependents, thus leaving the question of when dependents would have been sold obscure. In this case, the legislation is not concerned with the circumstances which require the partial sale of land. It is concerned with the simple fact that an Israelite *pater familias* sells part of the land. The legislation, however, is concerned with the community’s response to the situation. It is important to notice the use of the term אָחִיךָ, “your brother” or “your kinsman,” which is also used in Deuteronomy 15:12ff. The practice of redemption and Jubilee is limited to Israelites. Yet, by referring to the *pater familias* as brother, Moses obliges the entire nation to consider the destitute Israelite as a member of their family, which obliges every Israelite to help. אָחִיךָ is repeated in Leviticus 25:35, 36, 39, 45, 47, and 48 in order to keep this national obligation front and center.

How was the nation to fulfill their redemption obligation? Verses 26–28 offer three solutions for redemption: (1) a near relative redeems the property from the original purchaser; (2) the seller himself redeems the property once means are regained; (3) the Jubilee redeems it (i.e. Yahweh redeems it). The immediate obligation of redemption belongs to the הַקָּרֵב אֵלָיו, “closest relative.” הַקָּרֵב has a superlative force, which informs the rendering “closest” or “nearest.”<sup>114</sup> The “nearest relative” was likely determined by

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<sup>113</sup> If Genesis 46 explains a parallel state of affairs, it is possible that the buyer purchased a percentage of the usufruct from the Israelite *pater familias*, as did Joseph/Pharaoh in Genesis 46, in which a one-fifth of the harvest belonged to Pharaoh as a usage tax. However, this is unlikely as such a practice might be viewed as charging interest, which is explicitly forbidden in Lev 25:36-37 and for which Nehemiah reprimands the nobles and priests in Neh 5:10-11. The ANE parallels also argue against this as the entire usufruct was typically purchased.

<sup>114</sup> So also Hartley, *Leviticus*, 427. The adjective קָרֵב simply means “nearest” but can function as a noun meaning “relative.” For the superlative force, see Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, §93, p. 39. See Num 27:11 and Lev 21:2 for similar usage.

the order of inheritance laid out in Numbers 27:9-11 and Leviticus 25:49. The order began with the brothers of the *pater familias* and then extended to cousins and more distant relatives. The point is that a blood relative redeemed the land. This kept the land within the family and it also was practical as these blood relatives likely lived near or perhaps even next to the land, making it easy for them to work the land that they had purchased. The obligation of *הקרב* also indicates that the buyer was probably not a part of the family. It is possible that they are not even an Israelite. Such a possibility is exactly why the obligation fell to a *הקרב*. The loss of land to an outsider was a dire circumstance, as it allowed the outsider to encroach onto or near the family's property. Verse 26 mentions a second option. The original seller, the *pater familias*, retains the option to redeem it if ever he gains the means to do so. The text literally reads, "then his hand reaches," meaning conceptually, "if he gains the ability or power" or "the means at hand."<sup>115</sup> One can think of an unexpected inheritance as a means of gaining the necessary funds. This is perhaps the most likely reason, although a strong harvest, income from outside employment, or other channels of income can be imagined.

Verse 28 explains the method for calculating the redemption price: "the years since he sold it." This confirms that it was the usufruct of the land, not the property itself, that was purchased, as Leviticus 25:16 makes clear. The redemption price was determined by the purchase price minus the value of the years that the field's usufruct was used.<sup>116</sup> A visual formula might look like this:

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<sup>115</sup> This common Hebrew expression indicates personal ability, means, or power. See Lev 5:11; 14:22, 30, 31; 25:26, 47, 49; 27:8; Ezek 46:7. See chap. 3 of this dissertation for a discussion of this phrase in Deut 15:2. See also Levine, *Leviticus*, 175.

<sup>116</sup> *אֶת־הַעֲדָרָה* carries the sense of "the surplus," although "balance" is a good idiomatic translation. See HALOT, s.v. "עֲדָרָה." See Exod 16:23; 26:12, 13; Num 3:46, 48-49. Lev 27:16 may give an indication of the purchase price: "If a man dedicates to the Lord part of the land that is his possession, then the valuation shall be in proportion to its seed. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver." Fried and Freedman argue in Milgrom's work that fifty shekels of silver paid for an area that can produce fifty homers of barley. Jeremiah's payment of seventeen shekels of silver to Hanamel in Jeremiah 32 seems to put support this kind of price range, although there are no records supporting this claim. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2262.

(PP) Purchase Price – (YU) Years of Usufruct = (RP) Redemption Price

PP – YU = RP

The redeemer purchased the remaining years of usufruct. If a blood relative or the *pater familias* was unable to redeem the land, then it would be released in the year of Jubilee and the *pater familias* would return to his property. In effect, Yahweh steps in as redeemer at the Jubilee.<sup>117</sup> The idea that the Lord is acting as redeemer is perhaps indicated by the allusions to the Exodus in Leviticus 25:28. יָצָא reads literally, “then it shall go out,” echoing the Exodus redemption. In fact, verses 38, 42, and 55 use this exact verb to describe Yahweh’s redemption of Israel from Egypt.<sup>118</sup> The allusion to the Exodus is reinforced by the use of the noun פְּרִיָּה (“severity”), throughout Leviticus 25 (vv. 43, 46, 53), which was used to describe the severity of their situation in Egypt before the Exodus (cf. Exod 1:13).<sup>119</sup> Mark Rooker eloquently describes how the drama of the Jubilee reenacted the drama of the Exodus for a freed Israelite: “The redemption of the Israelite slave from his slavery becomes a reenactment of the Exodus event on a smaller scale.”<sup>120</sup> Even when it is just a piece of land that is released, Israelites were to understand that such a gift was from the Lord and merely a continuation of the nation’s original redemption from Egypt.

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<sup>117</sup> Rooker, *Leviticus*, 307. See Exod 6:6; 15:3, 13 uses the verb יָצָא to describe the Exodus.

<sup>118</sup> The verb יָצָא is difficult to read without thinking of the Exodus. It is often used in stock descriptions of the Exodus (e.g., Num 1:1; 11:20; 22:5; 33:1; Deut 1:27; 4:45, 46; 9:7; 11:10; 16:3; 20:1; Jos 2:10; 5:4; 1 Kgs 6:1; 2 Chr 5:10; Jer 7:25; Hag 2:5) and is used regularly in the descriptive accounts of the Exodus itself (Exod 9:29; 12:41; 13:3, 8; 23:15; 34:18). While it is also used as a technical term for slave release (e.g., Exod 21:2, 5ff.) and the root is used in abundantly throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to describe general coming’s and going’s, the Exodus was such a pivotal moment in Israel’s history that יָצָא in the context of any type of slavery can no more be separated from the memory of the Exodus than “freedom” or “liberty” can be separated from patriotic remembrances of the revolution in the United States.

<sup>119</sup> The noun פְּרִיָּה is used nearly exclusively in the description of Israel’s time in Egypt and in the Jubilee legislation. Its only other occurrence is in Ezek 34:4.

<sup>120</sup> Rooker, *Leviticus*, 310.



The drama is further described with the verb “return.” “Return to his property” (repeated in 25:27 and 25:28) echoes the language of 25:10, which lays out the immediate result of the Jubilee’s proclamation. As stated previously, the goal of the Jubilee and redemption laws is the maintenance of Israel’s system of egalitarian land tenure. Specifically, the regular release provided by the redemption and Jubilee laws ensures that the covenant promise of a “land flowing with milk and honey” is secure for all generations (Exod 3:8; 13:5; Num 16:14; Deut 6:3; 11:9; 31:20). This economic and social system requires that families stay together and the land stays with those families. The land and the people are inseparable and the promise is irrevocable. When the promise and the social fabric is threatened, the immediate family is obliged (along with the clan and all of Israel) to remedy the threat.

**Exception 1: Urban dwellings.** Leviticus 25:29-31 deal with an exception to the Jubilee and redemption laws, which are urban dwellings. This exception is then followed by an exception to the exception: village dwellings.<sup>121</sup> The text reads:

If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a year of its sale. For a full year he shall have the right of redemption. If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer, throughout his generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. But the

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<sup>121</sup> It is common to point out that these verses do not employ the formula, “if a man becomes poor,” and so breaks the structure. Scholars use these verses to argue for several redactional layers to Lev 25. An example is Gerstenberger, who holds to a post-exilic composition for Lev 25 and argues that the exception for urban houses granted to the “urban power elite . . . preferential status.” Gerstenberger, *Leviticus*, 397. Martin Noth argues similarly, though he dates vv. 29-31 to the monarchy: “We come further down in time, however, with the side-by-side mention of dwelling in walled cities and dwelling in unwalled “villages” (vv. 29-31), which supports the idea that Israel also possessed houses in walled cities. As these walled cities surely mean in the first place the ancient Canaanite cities of the land, this must imply an already complete assimilation between the Canaanite and Israelite way of life, hardly to be put earlier than the early days of the kings” (Martin Noth, *Leviticus*, The Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 185). General arguments against critical theories of Lev 25 and arguments in favor its unity are at the end of this chapter. The fact that the repeated structural element, “if a man becomes poor,” is absent actually point to the text’s original unity. The fact that this structural clause is missing indicates that destitution played no role and the sale of a home was merely a business transaction. See Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2198. Further, it is unlikely that a later update would so obviously intrude into the text without using the structural clause: “If your brother becomes poor” clause. Instead, the formula is purposefully not used to indicate that this is not a conditional situation which applies to the Jubilee and redemption laws. Finally, while Noth’s conclusions are incorrect, it is true that the Canaanites lived within walled cities. The assumption that walled cities exists points toward an ancient date for Leviticus 25, not a late one.

houses of the villages that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. (Lev 25:29-31)

These verses show the realistic and practical orientation of the Jubilee and redemption laws. It is unlikely that such questions would have been addressed if the Jubilee and redemption laws were utopian, post-exilic, or meant only for a one-time occurrence.<sup>122</sup> In other words, these laws point to the Jubilee being an original part of the law that is aimed toward a pre-monarchic Israelite society.<sup>123</sup> Verses 29-30 limit the redemption of a “house in a walled city” to one year. After that, the sale is final and the seller’s claim is “ended” (צִמָּה). The unstated reason is that the urban dwelling is not part of an Israelite’s patrimonial land. The house is not כֶּתֶר like his land. This reinforces the stated purpose of the Jubilee: to protect Israel’s system of egalitarian land tenure. Since the sale of a house does not affect that system, it is not subject to the laws of redemption or Jubilee after a year has passed.

Verse 31 deals with the case of village homes without a wall. These can be redeemed at any point and are subject to the Jubilee release. The reason is that these homes are tied to land. Most Israelites lived in small villages or cities alongside their clans. A small village likely contained several compounds in which several nuclear families lived together under the authority of a single patriarch. In some cases, their back walls together formed an outer protective wall, but walled cities were more typical of the Canaanites than the Israelites.<sup>124</sup> Within each compound, each father’s house may have had several small homes within which individual families lived. The fields would be located near the village but not necessarily directly adjacent to the family compound. As

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<sup>122</sup> So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 97; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247; contra North’s viewpoint that the Jubilee was only slated as a one-time occurrence. North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 212ff.

<sup>123</sup> This argument is in support of Mosaic authorship. Leviticus 25 assumes Israel has settled in the land already.

<sup>124</sup> J. R. Porter, *Leviticus*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary, New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 202, cited in Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 97.

a result, the house was tied to the land and so neither could be sold permanently. One could not be lost—house or field—without risk of losing the other. For this reason, houses within unwallled villages could not be sold permanently and were subject to the Jubilee.

**Exception 2: Levites' homes and fields.** The Levites are an exception to the exception of verses 29-31. Levites could redeem one another's homes if they were sold.<sup>125</sup> The text reads:

As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites may redeem at any time the houses in the cities they possess. And if one of the Levites exercises his right of redemption, then the house that was sold in a city they possess shall be released in the jubilee. For the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession [בְּיָדָם] among the people of Israel. But the fields of pastureland belonging to their cities may not be sold, for that is their possession forever. (Lev 25:32-34)

The reason that Levites' homes were redeemable is because these homes were their בְּיָדָם. If Levites lost their home, it is unlikely that they would have found another place to live. They would have literally become unbounded from Israel. Further, verse 34 dictates that their pasturelands cannot be sold. This is because they had no land to farm (Num 35:2-3; Deut 10:9; 12:12; 14:27; 18:1; Josh 14:4). They were only given forty-eight cities with the accompanying pastureland plus the six cities of asylum (Num 35:1-18; Deut 19:2-9). Levite houses along with Levite pastureland were viewed as “surrogate” בְּיָדָם since they were not given a territory.<sup>126</sup> It is most likely that the Levites would have used this as grazing grounds to care for their herds instead of farming it, which would have been too time consuming and would have distracted them from their primary roles as priests.<sup>127</sup> As a result, the Levites' pasture had a status unlike any other land or field in ancient Israel. It

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<sup>125</sup> The Vulgate inserts a “not” into the first part of v. 33 so that it reads, “If one of the Levites does not redeem.” This reading is not needed as the verse makes sense on its own. If a Levite sells his property and another Levite redeems, it still returns to the original owner in the Jubilee. So also Wenham, *Leviticus*, 321.

<sup>126</sup> Levine, *Leviticus*, 177.

<sup>127</sup> Contra Levine, *Leviticus*, 177.

permanently belonged to the Levites and could not be sold.<sup>128</sup> The pastureland, מִגְרֵשׁ, was called a “forever possession” (אֲחֻזַּת עוֹלָם), giving it a qualification that was unique to it alone.

**Stage 2: The loss of independence.** The second stage of poverty imagines an Israelite who cannot provide for himself. The text reads:

If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.” (Lev 25:35-38)

This second stage of poverty begins with the formulaic protasis וְכִי־יִמְוֶה אָחִיךָ. The impoverished Israelite brother requires interest-free charitable loans in order to sustain himself and his family. The absence of a redeemer in this section is conspicuous, indicating that this brother can no longer rely on the sale of his land or the support from his extended family or clan. The singular pronouns in verse 35-37 are ambiguous. The general principle in verse 24 uses a plural verb: “You shall allow [תִּתְּנוּ] a redemption of the land” while the formulaic protasis uses a singular pronoun to qualify, אָחִיךָ (“your brother”). Some scholars argue that the audience of Leviticus is solely the heads of households. This is partially based on the argument that the commands given in Leviticus 19 and elsewhere could only be carried out by a *pater familias*.<sup>129</sup> However, “all the people” were present at Sinai (Exod 19:17), “all Israel” was present for Moses second

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<sup>128</sup> Of course, no pastureland in Israel could be sold. This was viewed as community land and was not to be used as arable land.

<sup>129</sup> Bergsma writes, “Collateral evidence for this position is to be found in the rest of the Holiness Code, much of which seems to be addressed to the free male landed Israelite *pater familias*. He owns land and works it (19:9–10), hires laborers (19:13), acts as judge for other kinsman (19:15–18), has a daughter (19:29), and a beard (19:27). The “you” of 25:35–46 by implication has an ancestral possession and the means sufficient to support or hire his impoverished “kinsman.” “Your kinsman” of 25:25–55 seems quite clearly to be the sociological equal of the “you”—i.e. a landed Israelite *pater familias* (as the term אָחִיךָ implies)—who through impoverishment has lost all the resources that the “you” enjoys. . . . It follows that the impoverished Israelite with which Lev 25 is concerned is not a landless one whose enslavement does not threaten familial possession of the ancestral inheritance, but the head of the family who has title to the land of his fathers.” Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 100.

giving of the law in the Jordan valley (Deut 1:1), and at the septennial reading of the law, where the law was to be read to “all Israel” (Deut 31:9–13). It seems best to view the audience of Leviticus as “all Israel” and to conclude that the “you” in verses 35–37 represents all males in Israel.

The specific circumstances envisaged by verse 35 are ambiguous. The meaning of the phrase *וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ* (“and his hand totters with you,” my translation) is not clear despite general agreement among modern translations. The LXX renders it as “and becomes weak/powerless with respect to hands among you” (καὶ ἀδυνατήσῃ ταῖς χερσὶν παρὰ σοί). Modern translations consistently read this as an idiom for economic weakness: “cannot maintain himself” (ESV), “cannot sustain himself” (CSB), “his means with regard to you falter” (NASB), “fallen in decay with thee” (KJV), “unable to support himself among you” (NIV). Indeed, HALOT defines *נִמְצָה* as “to be shaky, to be in economic difficulties.”<sup>130</sup> The poor brother has inadequate means to support himself. He is unable to stand up his own economic means and so needs support. This reading of *וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ* is supported by a similar idiom that describes the opposite situation in verse 26, “his hand overtakes.”<sup>131</sup> It is significant to note that the preposition with pronoun, *עִיךָ*, is absent in the first stage but present here. Milgrom argues that *עִיךָ* should be translated “under the authority of.”<sup>132</sup> While Milgrom is correct that “with you” can carry the sense of “under the authority of,” context can supply this trajectory and the translation should remain “with you.” This sense certainly strengthens in the third stage (Lev 25:47), but

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<sup>130</sup> HALOT, s.v. “*נִמְצָה*.” The *qal* is often translated along the lines of “to sway, slip, stumble”: “the earth gives way” (Ps 46:3); “has not let our feet *slip*” (Ps 66:9); “my foot slips” (Ps 94:18); “be moved” (Ps 121:3); “stumbling to the slaughter” (Pr 24:11).

<sup>131</sup> V. 26 uses a similar idiom, but in the positive sense, to describe an Israelite who gains sufficient financial means to redeem his property: “his hand reaches [*וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ*] and finds sufficient means of his redemption [*וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ*].” See also Lev 25:28 and 25:47 for similar examples in this passage. The second clause, *וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ*, defines the first, *וְיָדְךָ נִמְצָה עִיךָ*, thus indicating that *hand* is idiomatic for “power, means.” HALOT, s.v. “*יָד*.” See Deut 32:36; Dan 12:7; Jos 8:20; Isa 45:9 for similar usage.

<sup>132</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2204.

even then there is not compelling evidence to translate  $\text{עִמָּךְ}$  as “under the authority of.”<sup>133</sup> Even in the third stage, it is not clear if the impoverished Israelite is under his host’s authority. Milgrom’s interpretation is influenced further by his translation of the word  $\text{וְהִחֲזִיקְתָּ בּוֹ}$ , which he translates “seize him.”<sup>134</sup> As Bergsma argues, though, this does not fit with the command to treat an impoverished Israelite “as a stranger and sojourner” (Lev 25:35). It is exactly such an action that the redemption laws are trying to prevent.

Verses 36–37 forbid the charging of any interest at any point.<sup>135</sup> There are three terms used for interest:  $\text{נִשְׁךְ}$  (“interest, a bite”),  $\text{תְּרִבִּית}$  (“profit, increase, usury”), and  $\text{מְרִבִּית}$  (“interest, surcharge”).<sup>136</sup> The exact meaning of these three terms and their relationship to each other is not certain. Loewenstamm argues that  $\text{מְרִבִּית}$  refers to interest on foodstuff while  $\text{תְּרִבִּית}$  refers to interest on money. Lipinski argues that both refer to interest taken at the end of the loan while  $\text{נִשְׁךְ}$  refers to accrued interest.<sup>137</sup> Lipinski’s argument is compatible with Loewenstamm, as the language could have developed into generic synonyms over time.<sup>138</sup> Whatever the exact meaning of these terms, it seems that  $\text{מְרִבִּית}$  and  $\text{תְּרִבִּית}$  are virtual synonyms. It is likely that all three forms were included to

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<sup>133</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2204–5, for the full discussion and Speiser’s evidence. Other scholars who agree with Milgrom’s translation include Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 542, and Bergsma, *Jubilee*, 98. However, the majority of English translations, except the NRSV, translate it as “with you,” “among you,” or similarly.

<sup>134</sup> Even though both BDB and HALOT define the *hiphil* of  $\text{חָזַק}$  followed by  $\text{בּ}$  as “seize” with an impressive list of examples, both dictionaries define the example in Lev 25:35 as “sustain” or “support,” allowing the context to overrule the traditional rendering. In favor of “support” is the fact that the *hiphil* of  $\text{חָזַק}$  followed by  $\text{לְ}$  clearly means “support” (e.g., Ezek 16:49; 30:25). See BDB, s.v., “*Hiphil* 3.  $\text{חָזַק}$  II”; HALOT, s.v. “*Hiphil*  $\text{חָזַק}$  I.”

<sup>135</sup> This is consistent with other legislation (Exod 22:24; Deut 23:20–21). The prophets condemn Israel for charging interest to one another (Ezek 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12).

<sup>136</sup> HALOT, s.v. “ $\text{מְרִבִּית}$ ”; s.v. “ $\text{נִשְׁךְ}$ .”

<sup>137</sup> See Edward Lipinski, “Nešek and Tarbit in the Light of Epigraphic Evidence,” *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 10 (1979): 133–41.

<sup>138</sup> For a full overview of the discussion and relevant literature, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2208–10.

clarify that no type of interest, fee, or penalty could be charged to a poor Israelite. Wealthy Israelites were explicitly forbidden from taking advantage of their impoverished neighbors in any way whatsoever.

The situation described in Leviticus 25:35 is between independence and complete dependence. Scholars debate the extent of the dependency described here.<sup>139</sup> The most likely situation is that the debtor retains part of his land and uses its crop to pay back the interest-free loans. The command against interest and profit (verse 36–37) likely imagines an agricultural loan to buy seed to plant crops.<sup>140</sup> This gives warrant to the view that the Israelite still has ownership of part of his land in stage 2.<sup>141</sup> In this case, the Israelite would have worked his remaining land and used some of his crop to pay the loan back, free of interest.<sup>142</sup> There is also the practical consideration that interest-free loans would likely not provide enough to fully support a family and that a creditor likely would not provide a loan unless the Israelite had a way to pay him back.<sup>143</sup> Finally, the use of חָיָה in verse 35 points to the Israelite maintaining residence on his farm. Some commentators, including the LXX, interpret וְחָיָה אִתָּךְ עִמָּךְ to mean that the debtor lives with the creditor. This argument is strengthened by the hendiadys “stranger and sojourner” (גֵּר וְתוֹשֵׁב) since a sojourner owned no land. However, חָיָה is never used this way and more naturally means “have life” or “remain alive.” If Moses meant to describe the poor Israelite taking up residence with another Israelite, he would have likely used

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<sup>139</sup> For full discussion, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2207-9; Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 542-43; Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 327-28.

<sup>140</sup> So also Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 328; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 322; Norbert Lohfink, “The Kingdom of God and the Economy in the Bible,” *Communio* 13 (1986): 323; Chiri, *Debt-Slavery*, 328n1.

<sup>141</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 328.

<sup>142</sup> It is also possible that the impoverished Israelite worked the land he leased and gave a share of the crop as part of the lease’s terms, as did the Egyptians in Gen 47:24, who paid one-fifth of their harvest to Pharaoh.

<sup>143</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 328n6.

יָשַׁב (“to sit, remain, dwell”).

Milgrom agrees that the Israelite dwells on his land but believes he has sold all of his land. This is probable. Given such a dire situation, it is surprising that debt-slaves are not mentioned at this point in Leviticus 25. Nevertheless, we know that the Judeans under Nehemiah sold their dependents in order to survive (see Neh 5:5). It is not clear whether the preference would be to lose land first or lose dependents first. Given that land could not be released until the Jubilee while dependents would be released after six years of service (Deut 15:12-18), it seems logical that dependents would be sold to cover a debt before land was. Nevertheless, it is also possible, but seems less likely, that the land has been sold in its entirety and the Israelite must support himself via merchant trades. However one interprets the various terms in verses 35-38, it is clear that the Israelite who is dependent on interest-free loans is in a dire situation and the community is called upon to prop him up and is explicitly forbidden to profit from their support.

Verse 38 introduces a new motivation: the Exodus redemption. It says: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.” This is in keeping with Sabbath commandment, which is likewise motivated by the Exodus in Deuteronomy 5:12-15. This is the only place where the formula is paired with the land promise formula. This pairing recalls the fuller statement of God’s ownership of the land in verses 23-24 while anticipating the claim of 25:42, “They are my servants.” The entire laws of redemption are predicated upon God’s ownership of both the land and the people. Yet, the Exodus does not simply provide motivation to Israelites to care for one another. As mentioned earlier, the Jubilee recalls and reenacts the Exodus. As a result, Israelites are called upon by God to not just redeem fields and persons or provide interest free loans, but in the performance of these actions they are called to participate in the Exodus redemption and ensure the benefits of Yahweh’s redemption are secure for every Israelite generation.

**Stage 3a: The loss of freedom.** The final stage deals with an entire loss of



freedom. The poor Israelite has no choice but to fall on the mercy of another, offering to serve him in order to survive. The first case is self-sale to another Israelite (vv. 39-43). Below, self-sale to a foreigner will be examined (vv. 47-55, “stage 3b”). The text of verses 39-43 read:

If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. 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. For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God.”

Verse 41 makes clear that the poor Israelite’s family, “he and his children,” entered into the service of another Israelite together. Once again, a redeemer is not mentioned in this first case of the third stage because if there were a redeemer who could help, he would have been redeemed in the first stage when a partial piece of land was sold. This third stage of poverty describes a family whose members are at their last resort and have no options or anything to sell but themselves. The familiar clause that begins verse 39, “If your brother becomes poor,” reminds Israelites that the nation as a whole shares the responsibility and duty to help the weakened brother.

The nature of this sale is quite different from the one described in Deuteronomy 15:12. The *niphal* verb נָמַכַּר is also used in Deuteronomy 15:12 regarding the sale of an Israelite to another Israelite. In that case, it was argued in chapter 3 that the verb should be rendered passively: “is sold.” Nevertheless, the *niphal* verb here in Leviticus 25:39 should be rendered reflexively: “sells himself.”<sup>144</sup> Chirichigno cites the following three contextual reasons for why the verb should be translated reflexively. First, “he and his children” in verse 41 indicates yet again that the head of the household, the *pater familias*, is the subject of the verb. Second, the reason for sale is the inability of the family to provide for themselves, whether that is because of debt, failed harvest, or

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<sup>144</sup> So also Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 332; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 100. Contra Levine, *Leviticus*, 179; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2147.

other unforeseen circumstances. The focus is on the head of the household, who it is presumed has lost his land and cannot find work anywhere else. The result is that this is a case of self-sale, but not into debt-slavery. This leads to the third contextual clue supporting the reflexive translation, “sells himself.” The nature of the man’s work is limited to the type of work that a שָׂכִיר (“hired worker”) would do.

This final point is the essential difference between Deuteronomy 15:12ff. and Leviticus 25:39ff. Deuteronomy 15:12 describes the sale of a dependent into debt-slavery to cover a defaulted debt. Leviticus 25:39ff. describes the lease (i.e., self-sale) of an Israelite household to work for another Israelite household. Interestingly, the text is not clear on where the impoverished Israelite lives. Given that debt-slaves lived with their masters and Leviticus 22:10 mentions that the “hired worker” could not eat from the priests table, it is safe to assume that the family would go live with the new master. The language of verse 39, “he and his sons *with him*” (emphasis mine) points this direction, as does the language of return and release that is throughout Leviticus 25:10. Jacob’s sojourn with Laban (Gen 29–31) provides the closest parallel. If Jacob’s tenure with Laban is considered normative, then it implies that a hired worker lived in his master’s house. Despite these evidences, the text leaves open the possibility that the family remains in their home and journeys to the home or fields of the new master on a daily or regular basis.<sup>145</sup>

Just as the redemption laws limit the sale of land to its production capacity, so these laws also limit the sale of a family head to his production capacity. The impoverished Israelite would serve under terms similar to that of a hired worker. A hired worker would agree to certain tasks for a certain hours a day for a certain period of

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<sup>145</sup> These questions point to a fruitful line of inquiry regarding hired workers in the ANE. Where did they live? What were they paid? What were the typical terms agreed upon between the hired laborer and the one hiring? Answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this work.

time.<sup>146</sup> Unlike a debt-slave, the hired worker had rights. Isaiah 26:14 compares three years of waiting to the years of a hired worker: “But now the LORD has spoken, saying, ‘In three years, like the years of a hired worker, the glory of Moab will be brought into contempt, in spite of all his great multitude, and those who remain will be very few and feeble.’”<sup>147</sup> Isaiah appears to view “the years of a hired worker” as equivalent to “three years.” If so, this means that the long-term situation described in Leviticus 25:39ff. is an exceptional case, as the term may last up to forty-nine years. Deuteronomy 24:14 forbids oppressing the hired worker: “You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your brothers or one of the sojourners who are in your land within your towns.” Leviticus 19:13 urges the Israelite to pay the שכיר his wages the same day that he works: “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.” Malachi 3:5 threatens punishment to “those who oppress the hired worker in his wages.” Both Leviticus 19:13 and Malachi 3:5 insist on the workers’ rights to his wage. The fact that the impoverished Israelite is to be treated as a “hired worker” who it is presumed has certain rights indicates that the situation of Leviticus 25:39ff. is quite different from the situation of debt-slavery described in Deuteronomy 15:12-18.

Verse 40 explains that the term of service ends at the Jubilee. It is this limitation that gets to the very heart of the Jubilee. When the forty-ninth year came along, land and people were both released. Both must be released together for the release to mean anything. The land and people are inextricably tied together. The verbs of verse 41

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<sup>146</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 332. Chirichigno argues that Deut 15:12 and Exod 21:2 attach the term שכיר to distinguish between the service of a dependent debt-slave sold to pay back a debt and the free sale of an Israelite *pater familias*. Chirichigno’s explanation is the best explanation of why this term is used in these two contexts and why it is not used in Lev 25:39. Contra Wright, who argues that the term שכיר refers to a landless class of immigrants living in Israel. C. J. H. Wright, “What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel? Old Testament Sabbatical Institutions for the Land, Debts and Slaves, Part II,” *EQ* 56, no. 4 (October 1984): 196.

<sup>147</sup> For contractual rights of a hired worker in the ANE, see parallels in Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 333.

hearken back to what has come before. וַיֵּצֵא (“then he shall go out,” v. 41) once again recalls the Exodus along with the release of the first stage (vv. 26, 28, 30-31, 33) and the release granted by the Jubilee proclamation (Lev 25:10).

Verse 10

וְשָׁבְתָם אִישׁ אֶל-אֶחָיו

וְאִישׁ אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ תָּשׁוּבוּ

Verse 41

וְאֶל-אֲחֵיוֹת אֲבֹתָיו יָשׁוּב

וְשָׁב אֶל-מִשְׁפַּחְתּוֹ

The “possession of his fathers” is new to verse 41, yet is not without significance. A family’s אֶחָיו is the place where the family burial plots were. When a family was separated from their land, they were separated from their lineage in addition to their means of survival. This is why Abraham purchased the field of Ephron the Hittite (Gen 23:9). This is also one of the motivations for Boaz’s redemption of Elimelech’s field and Ruth together: “Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day” (Ruth 4:10). Further, by recalling that this is the family plot of land passed on through generations, it reminds Israel that these plots are to be preserved for those families for generations to come. The main point of the Jubilee is revisited in 41. Together, these laws ensure that no family permanently loses access to their permanent אֶחָיו and so preserve the socioeconomic fabric of Israel and maintain the system of land tenure originally setup within the Joshua generation. A generation may lose the rights to their land, but the subsequent generations were not consigned to poverty.<sup>148</sup>

Verse 43 tacks on an important addendum. The Israelite master is forbidden

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<sup>148</sup> Chirichigno explains,

The main point of the debt-slave law in Leviticus 25 is spelled out in verse 41, that the “patrimonial land should never be sold permanently, but rather that it should be returned to the original owner (or family) during the year of the Jubilee (i.e. *Bodenrecht*). The theological motivations for this stipulation in vv. 42–43, like those that occur in Deut. 15:12-18, were meant to persuade Israelites to treat with compassion their fellow countrymen who had lost their land. (Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 353)

from ruling over the poor Israelite ruthlessly. This is perhaps another indication that the impoverished Israelite likely lived with the new master. The noun פָּרָה indicates “harshness” or “severity.”<sup>149</sup> The noun only occurs in two other contexts: Ezekiel 34:4 and Exodus 1:13-14. Ezekiel 34:4 condemns Israel for treating the weak, sick, and oppressed with severity. Exodus 1:13-14 reports that Israel’s taskmasters in Egypt ruled over them with severity. The use of the noun פָּרָה recalls Israel’s former Egyptian taskmasters, a connection strengthened by the mention of the Exodus in the same verse. Israelite masters were not to act like their former Egyptian masters. They were not to wring every drop of sweat and every minute of work that they could from their impoverished brother. All Israelites were servants of Yahweh, and so they did not have absolute rights over one another as they did foreign slaves.

**Excursus: Foreign slaves.** Verses 44–46 forbid Israelites to enslave one another. Nevertheless, they are permitted to hold other nations or ethnicities as slaves, whether they are from neighboring lands or are from the “strangers and sojourners” who live among them. The text reads:

As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly. (Lev 25:44-46)

As has been discussed at length in chapter 2 and chapter 3, these verses are a notorious crux for understanding slavery in ancient Israel. If Israelites were forbidden to enslave one another, why do Exodus 21:1-6 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18 allow Israelites to serve as slaves? It has been argued at length in chapter 3 that these two texts—Exodus 21 and

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<sup>149</sup> BDB, s.v. “פָּרָה.”

Deuteronomy 15—limit debt-slavery, not chattel slavery.<sup>150</sup> Leviticus 25:44-46 forbids Israelites from holding other Israelites as chattel slaves altogether. Other texts deal directly with chattel slavery, although direct treatment of chattel slavery is limited in Israel's law (e.g., Exodus 21:20–21, 26–27). Leviticus 25:44–46 specifically allows for foreign chattel slaves who are held as an inheritable possession (אֲחֵרֵי לְעֹלָם) and specifically forbids Israelites from enslaving other Israelites as chattel slaves or treating Israelites with severity. Leviticus 25:44-46 does not forbid Israelites from holding other Israelites as debt-slaves, who serve for limited terms of six years. In fact, it is this provision against Israelite chattel slavery that informs the actual terms discussed in Leviticus 25:39-43. An impoverished Israelite *pater familias* may not be a chattel slave or a debt slave. The impoverished Israelite serves, along with his sons and his family, as a hired worker. Once again, by forbidding Israelites from enslaving one another, Moses reminds Israel that they have a covenant obligation to help and support one another and not take advantage of one another's ill fortune.

**Stage 3b: The loss of freedom and society.** This second section of stage three is given the longest treatment and receives the most urgent pleas to the Israelite community to help. It is not a fourth stage *per se* since the economic circumstances are the same in Leviticus 25:39-43. Verse 47 describes a situation in which an Israelite *pater familias* sells himself to a non-Israelite: “If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger's clan,” (Lev 25:47). In this absolute worst-case scenario, the impoverished Israelite is forced to sell himself to a landed נָכְרִי or תּוֹשֵׁב. Israel failed to drive all the Canaanites from the land, which meant that many still lived among them, even in their own villages and clans (e.g., Josh 23:6-8; Jud 3:5; 1 Kgs

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<sup>150</sup> See chap. 2 of this dissertation, section on “Debt-slavery in Ancient Israel”; chap. 3 of this dissertation, section on “The Sabbath Year.”

9:20). The continued residence of the Canaanites alongside the Israelites is perhaps most poignantly captured in David's brilliant battle against the Jebusites in Jerusalem (2 Sam 5:6–10). While the above three situations are deemed acceptable, the self-sale of an Israelite to a foreigner in the land is deemed unacceptable.

For the first time since Leviticus 25:25–28, the laws of redemption show up once again. Verses 48–49 explain that an Israelite involved in a self-sale to a foreigner may be redeemed after the sale: “48 then after he is sold he may be redeemed. One of his brothers may redeem him, 49 or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him. Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself.” This is similar to the first stage of redemption provisions. Like the piece of land that is sold, a redeemer or the seller himself carries the right of redemption at any point. Yet, the scope of who can redeem is expanded and specifically listed. As noted above, the redeemer is not mentioned in stage two because he would have handled the situation in stage one if he were able. The redeemer shows up again here because the situation has reached a new level of urgency.<sup>151</sup> An Israelite cannot live in the household of a foreigner. The list appears to follow the order of inheritance, moving from one kinsman to the next in line to serve as *pater familias*. The obligation begins with the man's “minimal and proper lineage”: brothers are first called upon, then the call extends to his uncle, who was likely his father's brother.<sup>152</sup> If his closet of kin cannot redeem him, then the call extends to the מִשְׁפָּחָה, his “proper and maximal lineage.”<sup>153</sup> The fact that the man's father is not listed points to the fact that the poor Israelite is the *pater familias*. By listing out the specific line of descent, these verses make a wider and more urgent appeal for redemption so that the impoverished Israelite can subsist in the household of a fellow Israelite, where he

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<sup>151</sup> Bergsma makes the novel argument that the “you” of vv. 35-38 and 39-43 in stages 2 and 3 are the redeemer from stage 1.

<sup>152</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 340.

<sup>153</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 340.

would be treated better than under a foreigner. Separation from the community of Israel is not permitted, and other nations living in Israel's midst are subject to the terms of redemption and Jubilee laws.

Like stage one, the method of calculating the redemption cost is described in verses 50-52:

He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years. The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired worker. If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price. If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee, he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service.

As is consistent with what has been argued above, it appears that he receives payment based on the wages that a hired worker would receive on a *per annum* basis.<sup>154</sup> Just as the redemption price of the land is calculated by the years of usufruct until the Jubilee, so the redemption price of an Israelite is calculated by his capacity for work year-to-year until the Jubilee. The redemption price is thus a refund to the buyer for the years of labor he will not receive.<sup>155</sup> Although it is not made explicit and is not entirely clear, this seems to indicate that the buyer would pay the poor Israelite the entirety of his wages up front for the years he was expected to serve.<sup>156</sup> If this is the case, the sum of the money would be quite large. Despite such a hardship for the redeemer, the text views it as a necessity and presumes that it is doable and practical. The text has shown a practical concern throughout. The excurses regarding the fallow year (vv. 18-22), urban houses (vv. 29-34), and chattel slaves (vv. 44-46) demonstrate the practicality of these redemption laws. While the length can equal up to forty-nine years, many would not have served that long, as their service may have begun well after the previous Jubilee. Yet, this length of service demonstrates that Leviticus imagines a different kind of debt-slavery from that imagined

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<sup>154</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 341.

<sup>155</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 103.

<sup>156</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 341.



in Deuteronomy and Exodus. This is yet another example that demonstrates how the Jubilee preserved Israel's system of land tenure and was the linchpin of Israel's system of social justice. Without the Jubilee, impoverished Israelites would have no recourse in dire situations but to leave Israel or submit themselves to chattel slavery. They would be forced into a situation akin to their situation in Egypt. The Jubilee guaranteed they had options.

The final verses of Leviticus 25 repeat what has been said in stage 1. If a redeemer cannot redeem the *pater familias* and his family from the house of the foreigner, then they are to be released at the Jubilee: "And if he is not redeemed by these means, then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee. For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God"" (Lev 25:55).

Once again, the reality of Israel's redemption by Yahweh in the past Exodus controls the way in which they are redeemed in the present land. The Jubilee shows that Yahweh's redemption continues working on their behalf. In fact, it is Yahweh himself, although the text does not say as much it implies this truth, who is acting on their behalf. He is ruling over his servants through his law to ensure they participate in a society where they will be free from oppression and free to eat the food of their labor. Without the Jubilee, redemption would not be practical in the third stage and easily circumvented in the case of the first two stages of poverty. Without the Jubilee, redeemers likely could not afford to redeem land or persons as the price would just be too expensive. Further, there is no incentive to release land or persons without the Jubilee. The Jubilee was the governor or regulator on the entire socioeconomic system. With Yahweh's own redemption of all Israel and his ownership of the land, the Jubilee and redemption laws guarantee the generational stability of every Israelite family.

### **Family Economics versus Pharaonic Economics**

The law is embedded within the story of Israel. Israel's story in Egypt provides

context to the law that helps highlight the purpose of the law, especially a law like that of Jubilee. The Jubilee's reenactment of the Exodus has already been shown via the repetition of the verbs יָצָא and שָׁב throughout the text along with the themes of release, conquest, and redemption. Yet, Jonathan Burnside has suggested that this drama is a direct and intentional contrast to Israel's experience in Egypt and Egypt's style of economics. In other words, the Jubilee serves a pedagogical function. Israel practiced family economics where families were tied to the land whereas Egypt's economic system kept the holding of land in the hands of Pharaoh.

Burnside cites the Wilbour Papyrus as evidence that most, if not all, of Egyptian land was crown controlled.<sup>157</sup> Many sections within the papyrus are introduced by the formulaic clause: “*Mine*-Land of Pharaoh under the authority of [X].”<sup>158</sup> This understanding continued into the New Kingdom, where it was presumed that Pharaoh owned the land and could take over possession of it at any time. Burnside explains: “ultimately . . . all the land . . . was in possession of the king [i.e. Pharaoh], who might theoretically remove it at any time.”<sup>159</sup> The result is that there was a “clash between two different economic systems and two different ideologies regarding land tenure.”<sup>160</sup> The Egyptian ideology meant that wealth centered in the monarchy: “In practical terms, [Pharaoh's ownership] meant the wealth of the land flowed upward, away from the small farmers, serfs, and slaves who composed the overwhelming majority of the population, to the large landowners, the nobility, the great temples, and the crown.”<sup>161</sup> Pharaoh's

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<sup>157</sup> The Wilbour Papyrus dates to Middle Kingdom Egypt (ca. 2134–1786 BC) and records a survey of land allocation throughout Egypt. See Alan H. Gardner, *The Wilbour Papyrus*, vol. 3. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1948).

<sup>158</sup> Cited from Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 209.

<sup>159</sup> Jasnow, *Middle Kingdom*, 330, quoted in Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 209.

<sup>160</sup> Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 209.

<sup>161</sup> Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 68, in Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 209.

economic system guaranteed that land moved up the ladder toward Pharaoh while Israel's economic system guaranteed that land stayed down the ladder, with the people. As a result, Egyptians had no sense of belonging to their piece of land like Israelites did.

The Jubilee reminds Israel that Pharaoh is the paradigm of the "estate eater" while Yahweh is the paradigm of the estate giver. Israel experienced Yahweh's generous estate giving via the law at Sinai, in the conquest of the land, and every generation in the Jubilee. In fact, Israel even experienced this contrast personally while in Egypt. While Egyptians lost their land, Jacob and his sons receive an *ḥṣṣ* in the land of Goshen (Gen 47:11). Strikingly, it is in the middle of the famine while Egyptians are losing their land to the crown that Jacob and his household settle in Goshen. By pairing Jacob's receipt of *ḥṣṣ* in Egypt (Gen 47:1-12) with the Egyptian people's loss of their land (Gen 47:13-26), Moses intentionally contrasts the way of Pharaoh with the way of Yahweh. When Leviticus 25 recalls the Exodus, it implicitly calls into question Pharaoh's practice of land-eating and celebrates Yahweh's practice of land-giving.

The drama of the Sabbath-year and Jubilee also forced Israel to live through the famine of Egypt once a generation. Joseph and his family along with the Egyptians experienced seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine (Gen 41:53). As pointed out by Calum Carmichael, every Israelite would also experience seven years of famine throughout their lifetime through the repeated fallows of the Sabbath-year.<sup>162</sup> He further argues that since the sixth year of every Sabbath cycle is a year of abundance, Israel would experience seven years of plenty as well. While the parallel is not exact, the formula is the same: seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. In this way, every Jubilee cycle fully commemorates and parallels Israel's deliverance in Egypt.

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<sup>162</sup> This is assuming that an average lifespan would include a full Jubilee cycle. Calum M. Carmichael, "The Sabbatical/Jubilee cycle and the Seven-Year Famine in Egypt," *Biblica* 80 (1998): 228. I first encountered this argument in Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 210.

## Other Pentateuch Texts Related to the Jubilee

The Jubilee is mentioned in three other texts in the Pentateuch. The first mention is in Leviticus 27, which deals with the redemption of property that has been consecrated willingly to the Lord. The second is a set of texts that deal with the laws of inheritance in a special case situation regarding Zelophodad's daughters (Numbers 27 and 36). The following is a brief glance at these texts to show how they relate to the Jubilee.

### Leviticus 27:14-24

Leviticus 25–27 forms a discrete unit within the text of Leviticus. The three chapters are joined by structural, thematic, and logical connections.<sup>163</sup> This cohesion is indicated by the repeated reminder that these commandments are given by the Lord through Moses (Lev 25:1; 26:46; 27:34). Leviticus 25 and 27 also form a chiasm with Leviticus 26 at the center. This is most clearly seen in the way that the increasing levels of poverty listed in Leviticus 25:25-55 are reversed by Leviticus 27:2-24. According to Leviticus 25, the impoverished Israelite first loses his land (vv. 25-28), then his house (vv. 29-34), then his independence through self-sale (vv. 39-55).<sup>164</sup> The redemption of things vowed to the Lord in Leviticus 27 begins with consecrated persons (vv. 2–8), then houses (vv. 14-15), then land (vv. 16-24).<sup>165</sup> In addition to the structural matching, there is also thematic relation between Leviticus 25 and 27 through the repetition of key terms

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<sup>163</sup> The following observations have been noted by Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 109; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2383; Christopher J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land, and Property in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 149-51; Norman C. Habel, "Land as Sabbath Bound: An Agrarian Ideology," in *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 97-114. Thematic links between Lev 25 and 26 include a focus on Sabbaths along with the Sabbatical Year (Lev 26:2, 34-35, 43), focus on agricultural production (Lev 26:3-4, 6-9), the blessing of the Lord over harvests (Lev 26:5, 10), and the significance of the number seven (Lev 26:21, 24, 27).

<sup>164</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 109.

<sup>165</sup> As Bergsma points out, the chiasm is not perfect as it does not match conceptually between the redemption of animals (Lev 27:9-12) and the second stage of dependency (Lev 25:35-38). Despite this, it appears that the structure of Lev 27 is meant to match that of Lev 25. Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 109.

in Leviticus 27: “Jubilee” (six times, vv. 17, 18 [2x], 21, 23, 24), “his possession” (twice, vv. 16, 21), “to redeem” (seven times, vv. 13, 19, 20, 27, 28, 31, 33), “to be/become poor” (v. 8), “to return” (twice, vv. 18-24). As pointed out by Bergsma, there is also a logical connection in that the Sabbath and Jubilee Years are obligatory with failure to observe resulting in curses and loss of land (26:34–35) while vows are by nature voluntary and thus stand outside of the covenant curses.<sup>166</sup>

The specific mention of the Jubilee falls in Leviticus 27:14-24, which deals with the redemption of dedicated houses and land. Verses 14-15 do not mention the Jubilee, yet establish the principle that a dedicated house or field is appraised and valued by the priest. Redemption of that field or house is set at 120% its original value. Verses 16-19 virtually repeat verses 14-15 yet add that the priest’s valuation will be based on the cost to seed the field year-by-year until the next Jubilee.

If a man dedicates to the LORD part of the land that is his possession, then the valuation shall be in proportion to its seed. A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. If he dedicates his field from the year of jubilee, the valuation shall stand, but if he dedicates his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall calculate the price according to the years that remain until the year of jubilee, and a deduction shall be made from the valuation. (Lev 27:16-18)

The procedure for establishing the price of the field is remarkably identical to the procedure described in the sale of land in Leviticus 25:15-16. Interestingly, Leviticus 27 sets the value of the field at fifty shekels for a homer of barley seed (a homer is about six bushels or 220 liters).<sup>167</sup> Verses 19-21 provide motivation against crossing the sanctuary by selling a field that has been previously consecrated. If such an attempt is made, the family’s title to the land is revoked and it permanently belongs to the priesthood. Verses 22–24 deal with another special case whereby a man consecrates a field he has purchased. In this case, Moses clarifies that the field will revert to its original owner in

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<sup>166</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 109-10. The laws for firstlings (vv. 26-27) and tithes (vv. 30-33) are mandatory. They should be viewed as exceptions that prove the rule.

<sup>167</sup> See footnote to Lev 27:16 in the ESV.

the Jubilee, as would be expected.

How does Leviticus 27 contribute to our understanding of the Jubilee? While it does not add insight into the provisions of redemption, it does support the contention throughout this chapter that the land was inalienable. Further, Leviticus 27 shows that the Jubilee laws were at least meant to be practiced and perhaps indicates that they were indeed practiced. Finally, Leviticus 27 offers a powerful argument against the popular position that Leviticus 25 is the invention of post-exilic priests attempting to make a land grab.<sup>168</sup> Why would priests write laws that allowed for land to be redeemed once it was ceded to the control of the priests?

### **The Daughters of Zelophedad**

Numbers 27 and 36 deal with two related questions regarding the inheritance of a deceased man who has no sons. In Numbers 27:1-11, the daughters of Zelophedad are given the inheritance of their father even though there are no sons. The question in 27:4 reveals Israel's attitude regarding inheritance of the land: "Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." When Moses inquires of the Lord, the Lord replies: "7 The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers and transfer the inheritance of their father to them." Numbers 27:8 states that a man's inheritance transfers to his daughters if no sons are present. Then, verses 10-11 provide a detailed pecking order for inheritance: brothers, then father's brothers, then nearest kinsman of his clan.

Numbers 27 provides the opportunity for two important observations. The first concerns the laws of redemption. Verses 10-11 perhaps give insight into the stages of destitution. It seems that brothers and father's brothers are called upon to redeem a partial

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<sup>168</sup> See for example Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 26-27.

sale of land. Then, if the situation worsens and the members of the household end up unable to support themselves and sell themselves to a foreigner, then the nearest kinsman along with the entire clan is obliged to redeem them. The second observation is that there is a corporate concern that the land stay with the clan. The laws of inheritance have similar objectives to the Jubilee: to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure. There is a real sense in which the land belongs to the clan.

That the laws of inheritance are another defensive mechanism against the clan losing its land is confirmed in Numbers 36, where the question of who Zelophedad's daughters will marry is taken up. The "clan of the people of Gilead" come before Moses (Num 36:1) to protest that Zelophedad's daughters should marry within the clan in order that the land stay within the tribe. They complain in Numbers 36:3-4:

But if they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the people of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry. So it will be taken away from the lot of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the people of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry, and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers. (Num 36:3-4)

Based on the complaint, one would expect that the daughters be required to marry within the tribe. However, the Lord commands in 36:6-7 that they marry within their clan. This mention of the Jubilee is important as it emphasizes the thesis of this chapter: that the Jubilee's objective was the maintenance of Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure. Land and people, or perhaps more appropriately, land and family belong together. This mention of the Jubilee in Numbers 36 is also another evidence that the Jubilee was well-known in ancient Israel and was not viewed as utopian by the heads of the clan of Gilead.

### **Was the Jubilee Ever Practiced?**

This question has been and remains heavily debated. There is no evidence that the Jews ever obeyed the provisions of the Jubilee in whole or in part. A brief survey of passages in the Old Testament that either mention the Jubilee, potentially align with its release, or allude to it will show that Israel was aware of the Jubilee. Nevertheless, it is

likely that they never instituted it, although a silent record is not proof that it never occurred. Despite the Jubilee year remaining an ideal that was likely never realized, it does not mean that it was impractical or could not have been implemented.<sup>169</sup> The similar ANE *misharum* edicts of release substantiate the realism of the Jubilee. The practical provisions regarding the fallow year, urban houses, Levitical possessions, and ownership of foreign slaves likewise point to its realism.<sup>170</sup> It is also possible that the Jubilee was implemented, yet never recorded. The Rabbis argue that the Jubilee was suspended after Samaria's fall and the first exile.<sup>171</sup> Despite silence as regards the Jubilee, the laws of redemption were certainly practiced. Jeremiah participated in the redemption of his cousin's field (Jer 32:6-12); Boaz took over the right of redemption for Naomi, Ruth, and Elimelech's field (Ruth 4:6). Further, Nehemiah made the people of Judah promise to obey the fallow year (Neh 10:32) and Zedekiah decreed for the release of debt slaves in Jeremiah 34, showing that the Sabbath year was at least partially kept.

**Jeremiah 32 and 34.** While most scholars argue that the Jubilee was never practiced, Lisbeth Fried and David Freedman argue that the release of Jeremiah 34:8-9 was a Jubilee.<sup>172</sup> The pillar of their argument is to date Jeremiah's redemption of Hanamel's field with Zedekiah's release proclamation such that both occurred on the same year. Fried and Freedman argue that both Jeremiah's purchase and Zedekiah's

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<sup>169</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus*, 318.

<sup>170</sup> So also Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247. Milgrom cites the example of the kingdom of Tonga as an example that the Jubilee's laws are realistic. In Tonga, males receive a plot of land from the crown and retain it as an inheritance as long as they pay taxes. These plots are also limited to a lease to another buyer of no more than ninety-nine years. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247.

<sup>171</sup> *Sipra* Behar 2:3; Babylonian Talmud *'Araḳin* 32b; Yerushalmi *Shebi'it* 10:3, cited in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2247.

<sup>172</sup> Lisbeth Fried and David N. Freedman, "Was the Jubilee Year Observed in Preexilic Judah?" in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2257-70.



emancipation occurred in 588/587 BC.<sup>173</sup> They argue that the onset of the Jubilee created a critical situation in which Jeremiah had to redeem his land from Hanamel. As a result of this supposed Jubilee's near onset, Jeremiah sought to go to Anathoth to participate in a legal allotment of fields, but was arrested (Jeremiah 37:12-13). Jeremiah was detained, which then precipitated Hanamel risking his life to enter besieged Jerusalem to settle the matter.

While the proposal that Jeremiah 32 and 34 happened on a Jubilee is creative, it is not compelling for several reasons. First, it is unlikely that Jeremiah would have paid any money for a field that would have reverted to him cost-free in the Jubilee. Second, Fried and Freedman argue that the field originally belonged to Jeremiah, but the text does not necessitate this conclusion. Instead, it seems that the field belonged to Hanamel and Jeremiah was the nearest redeemer. Third, Anathoth was a Levitical town and Jeremiah's family were priests, which is why the word "field" (חֵטָף, Jer 23:8, 9) is used and not "possession" (חֵטָף) or "inheritance" (נַחֲלָה). The Levites received pastureland that was inalienable (Lev 25:34) and it seems that Levitical pastureland was what Jeremiah redeemed. Fourth, the attempt to identify which years were Sabbatical or Jubilee years is fraught with difficulty and a speculative enterprise that results in a myriad of viewpoints.<sup>174</sup> Taken together, the proposal that Jeremiah's redemption of Hanamel's field and Zedekiah's decree of release occurred on or near a Jubilee year does not stand up to scrutiny.<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, these two episodes do point to the practicality, knowledge, and early provenance of the Jubilee.

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<sup>173</sup> The Jubilee would overlap a civil year as it operated on the liturgical or harvest-oriented calendar that began in the fall during the month of Tishri.

<sup>174</sup> See Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 161n33, for bibliography. Common views argue for 590–589 BC; 588–587 BC; or 587–586 BC.

<sup>175</sup> They also argue that Hezekiah's two-year fallow, Isaiah 61's proclamation of liberty, and Nehemiah's release of slaves fell on Jubilee years. These proposals are dependent on the date of Zedekiah's release, which is not clear.

Jeremiah's purchase of Hanamel's field is one of two passages in the entire Old Testament that gives a picture of how the laws of redemption were carried out (see also Ruth 4). Jeremiah's careful counting out of the cost along with the fact that the transaction was made in public and sealed in two documents show us just how serious the purchase of land was in Israel. Further, Jeremiah's act became a sign that the Lord will return Israel to their land, thus constituting a prophetic act of trust in the Lord. If the laws of redemption were obeyed with such detail, then Jeremiah's purchase indicates knowledge of Leviticus 25 in Jeremiah's context, supports the fact that Leviticus 25 predated Jeremiah, and points to the practicality of the Jubilee. As was pointed out above, without the Jubilee, the practice of redemption would be useless. Jeremiah's redemption of Hanamel's field legitimates the historicity of the Jubilee, even if was never instituted.

Jeremiah 34 further legitimates the Jubilee's early date and practicality. However, Zedekiah's proclamation blends the imperatives of Deuteronomy 15 with those of Leviticus 25 and the proclamation thus fulfills the spirit of the Sabbath year and Jubilee laws together without actually fulfilling either in detail. The relevant text reads:

The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people in Jerusalem to make a proclamation of liberty to them, that everyone should set free his Hebrew slaves, male and female, so that no one should enslave a Jew, his brother. And they obeyed, all the officials and all the people who had entered into the covenant that everyone would set free his slave, male or female, so that they would not be enslaved again. They obeyed and set them free. But afterward they turned around and took back the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves. (Jer 34:8-11)

Subtle differences abound. While Exodus 21:1-12 and Deuteronomy 15:12-18 provide for a release at any time after six years of service, Zedekiah's release is universal and simultaneous and not based on the slave's start date of service.<sup>176</sup> Second, the text of Jeremiah 34:8-22 has multiple allusions to Deuteronomy 15:12-18, resulting in direct

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<sup>176</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 161.

literary dependency.<sup>177</sup> The sheer volume of these allusions shows that Zedekiah's release is quite akin to the Sabbath year release of Deuteronomy 15:12-18.

In addition to verbal dependency on Deuteronomy 15, Jeremiah 34 also has direct allusions to Leviticus 25 that are significant. The most obvious is the use of לקרא להם דרור in Jeremiah 34:8, 15, and 17. This phrase only occurs in Leviticus 25:10; Isaiah 61:1, and Ezekiel 46:17 (דרור only). The allusion to Leviticus 25:10 is unmistakable. In addition, the phrase לבלתי עבדכם ביהודי אחיהו איש (לא-תעבד בו עבדת עבד) picks up the blanket prohibitions against slavery in Leviticus 25:39 and the fuller blanket prohibition in Leviticus 25:46 (ובאחיהם בני-ישראל איש באחיו לא-תתדה בו בפרך).<sup>178</sup> Since Leviticus 25:39–46 is a section, which describes an Israelite's self-sale to another Israelite followed by a prohibition against slavery, Jeremiah 34:9 is effectively summarizing this section, even though Jeremiah 34:9 replaces the original "sons of Israel" (Lev 25:46) with "Judaean" because of the immediate context. This is an important observation as it points to the purpose of Zedekiah's emancipation, which was to eradicate slavery altogether in Judea.<sup>179</sup> In addition, Jeremiah 34:11 reports that the officials and the people reversed the emancipation afterwards. The text uses the verb שוב twice to describe them turning the slaves around and returning them to slavery: "But afterward they turned around [וַיָּשׁוּבוּ] and took back [וַיָּשְׁבוּ] the male and female slaves they had set free, and brought them into subjection as slaves." The importance of the verb שוב in describing the movement of the

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<sup>177</sup> For example, the phrase תשלחנו חפשי from Deuteronomy 15:12 is repeated, although with different verbal forms, in Jeremiah 34:9, 10, 14, and 16. This phrase is paired with מעמד in Jeremiah 34:14, which alludes directly to Deuteronomy 15:12, 13, and 18. The Hebrew slaves of Jeremiah 34:9, 14, 17 are referred to as אָח in 34:9, 14, and 17, imitating its use in Deuteronomy 15:12. The enslavement is described in Jeremiah 34:14 as אֲשֶׁר-יִמְכַּר לָהּ, which is nearly identical to Deuteronomy 15:12's כִּי-יִמְכַּר לָהּ. Further, מִקֵּץ שְׁבַע שָׁנִים is identical in Deuteronomy 15:1 and Jeremiah 34:14. So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 163, and Nahum M. Sarna, "Zedekiah's Emancipation of Slaves and the Sabbatical Year," in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Harry A Hoffner, Alter Orient Und Altes Testament (Kevelaer, Germany: Butzon & Bercker, 1973), 143-49.

<sup>178</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 165.

<sup>179</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 165.

Jubilee has already been discussed (i.e. Lev 25:10). The wordplay allows Jeremiah to highlight the return of the officials and people to their shameful enslavement of other Israelites. The Lord responds, repeating the wordplay three times in verses 15-17 and turning the meaning of “proclaim liberty” against them:

You recently repented [וַתֵּשְׁבוּ] and did what was right in my eyes by proclaiming liberty [לְקַרְא דְּרוּר], each to his neighbor, and you made a covenant before me in the house that is called by my name, but then you turned around [וַתֵּשְׁבוּ] and profaned my name [תִּחַלְלוּ אֶת־שְׁמִי] when each of you took back his male and female slaves, whom you had set free according to their desire, and you brought them into subjection to be your slaves. Therefore, thus says the LORD: You have not obeyed me by proclaiming liberty [לְקַרְא דְּרוּר], every one to his brother and to his neighbor; behold, I proclaim to you liberty [קְרָא לָכֶם דְּרוּר] to the sword [אֶל־הַחֶרֶב], to pestilence [אֶל־הַדָּבָר], and to famine, declares the LORD. I will make you a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth.

Justice against the officials and the people is communicated via the wordplay with both *שוב* and *לקרא דרוור*. They have reaped God’s judgment by sowing injustice. The language of “profaning my name” is also used regularly in Leviticus (Lev 18:21; 19:12; 20:3; 21:6; 22:2, 32), indicating that they have profaned the covenant itself.<sup>180</sup> Even the pattern of punishments—sword, pestilence, famine—mirrors the order from Leviticus 26:25–26:<sup>181</sup>

And I will bring a *sword* [חֶרֶב] upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant. And if you gather within your cities, I will send *pestilence* [דָּבָר] among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. When I *break your supply of bread* [famine], ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven and shall dole out your bread again by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied

While amnesty is decreed by Zedekiah in Jeremiah 34, the practical outcome is more in keeping with the Sabbath-year release than it is with the Jubilee, especially since the release is specifically for debt-slaves. A land release is not granted nor is fallow observed during Zekekiah’s release. Jeremiah 34:8–17 does use the formal word of release in the Jubilee, *דרור*, but it does not cite Leviticus 25 and instead cites Deuteronomy 15:12 and Exodus 21:2 as the laws that are broken.

Did Zedekiah decree a Jubilee? As stated above, despite the litany of

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<sup>180</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 167.

<sup>181</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 168.

connections between Leviticus 25 and Jeremiah 34, Zedekiah's decree is more in keeping with a Sabbath-year release than a Jubilee. Nevertheless, Jeremiah's verbal dependency on Deuteronomy 15 and wordplay with שׁוֹב and דְּרוֹר sets up Yahweh's judgment and provides an implicit critique against Zedekiah, the officials, and the people. The appropriate response would have been to execute a full release of debts, persons, and land as the Sabbath-year release and Jubilee release together call for. Because the leaders reverse the jubilee-decree of Zedekiah, the Lord will act against them with an "un-Jubilee" as well.<sup>182</sup> Jeremiah's extensive use of Leviticus 25 is important evidence for both pre-exilic composition of Leviticus 25 and for its inherent unity.

**2 Kings 19:29.** Fried and Freedman also point to 2 Kings 19:29 and Nehemiah 5:11 as other possible examples of historical actions that may have been informed by the onset of a Jubilee year.<sup>183</sup> During Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, Isaiah delivers a promise of salvation to Hezekiah that is confirmed by the sign of a two-year fallow: "And this shall be the sign for you: this year eat what grows of itself, and in the second year what springs of the same. Then in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit" (2 Kgs 19:29). The promise is that Israel will experience restoration similar to the fruitfulness that follows the two-year fallow. This verse is identical in Isaiah 37:30 except שֶׁחַיִּים "what springs" is replaced with the synonym שְׂחָיִים ("what springs"). More interesting is the use of the word שְׂפִיחַ ("second growth"), which is only

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<sup>182</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 169.

<sup>183</sup> Lee W. Casperson has also suggested that the Temple dedication in 1 Kgs 6–9 occurred on the tenth Jubilee after the Exodus. While there is good reason to believe the Temple was dedicated exactly 500 years after the Exodus, it is unlikely that this is a Jubilee year. His argument is dependent on the eschatological motif inherent in both the Jubilee and the Temple and the Jubilee being every fifty years, which has been previously argued against. Casperson also notes that the temple projects under Josiah, Hezekiah, Joash, and Zerubbabel occurred on dates that were multiples of 49 years, leading to the suggestion that the Temple projects may have coincided with Jubilee years. While intriguing, the argument is not compelling as we do not have an accurate way of figuring out what years should have been Jubilee years and the text gives no hint that these were Jubilee years in any of their accounts. Another difficulty with his argument is the fact that Jubilees were to be counted from the entrance of the land, not the Exodus (Lev 25:2). See Lee W. Casperson, "Sabbatical, Jubilee, and the Temple of Solomon," *VT* 53 (2003): 283–96.

used in these two verses and Leviticus 25:5 and 11. Most commentators ignore or understate the significance of the connection, instead arguing that the two years of “fallow” land is a result of agricultural devastation from the siege.<sup>184</sup> Bergsma takes issue with this position, arguing that the biblical narrative does not report a lengthy siege but instead one that breaks up immediately (2 Kgs 19:36-37). A short siege would not disrupt the agricultural cycle for two years. Bergsma, along with Fried and Freedman, argues instead that the sign of covenant fidelity is the command to observe the Sabbath and Jubilee years: “Hezekiah and Judah with him are commanded to eat the after-growth of the fields for two years—the sabbatical and jubilee—before resuming agricultural activity. The performance of this sign of covenant fidelity will be both a harbinger and a catalyst for the renewal of Judah.”<sup>185</sup> This argument is, in part, based on Cardellini’s suggestion that 590–589 BC is a Sabbath year. While Bergsma’s argument is intriguing, it is overly optimistic and not compelling. As discussed above, determining the year of a Sabbath or Jubilee year is notoriously difficult. The use of שְׁחֵיִשׁ is interesting, but without other connections to Leviticus 25, this seems like an incidental reference. In other words, שְׁחֵיִשׁ is a specialized word that happens to fit the context of Leviticus 25 and 2 Kings 19. Finally, the largest hurdle to the argument is the fact that nowhere is Hezekiah commanded to “observe the Sabbath year” or to “observe the Jubilee.” Bergsma himself admits that his proposal is “admittedly speculative.”<sup>186</sup> While the traditional interpretation that the land must recover for two years from the siege has its own difficulties, it seems like this traditional understanding that two harvest years are disrupted by the siege is on the right track.

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<sup>184</sup> Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, NAC, vol. 8 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 370; D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1993), 283; Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 204.

<sup>185</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 156.

<sup>186</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 156.

**Nehemiah's release.** Freed and Freedman also date Nehemiah's release to a Jubilee year. The same issues with their dating of Zedekiah's release and Isaiah's two-year fallow are present here as well. Nevertheless, Nehemiah 5:1-13 has received an enormous amount of scholarly attention because of its similarity to the Sabbath year and Jubilee year releases. The context of Nehemiah 5 is a food shortage, resulting in the inhabitants of Jerusalem bickering over who should receive an allotment of grain. Some complain that they have many children, others that they have mortgaged their land to get grain, and others that they have procured loans against their fields in order to pay the king's tax (Neh 5:1-4). This latter group are also selling their sons and daughters into debt-slavery and their fields are in the control of other men (Neh 5:5). Worse still, the nobles are exacting interest from Israelites and profiting from the debt-slave trade. As a result, Nehemiah demands that they lend to the needy Israelites without interest, return interest they have taken, and return fields and lands that have been seized: "Moreover, I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us abandon this exacting of interest. Return to them this very day their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the percentage of money,<sup>187</sup> grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." In other words, Nehemiah compels the leaders to end the seizure of fields and houses and the collection of interest, which is similar to Leviticus 25:36 and Deuteronomy 15:7-8. However, if the debts are forgiven, then the debt-slaves would likewise be released since they would have functioned as pledges for the debts that Nehemiah commands be forgiven. Despite this not making reference to the Jubilee or Sabbath year laws, Nehemiah does enact a release that is similar to the Jubilee and Sabbath releases. The reason that Nehemiah does not cite Leviticus 25 or Deuteronomy

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<sup>187</sup> "Percentage of money" is a difficult phrase to translate with many arguing that מֵאָה (hundred, interest) should be emended to מִשְׁעָבָה based on Deut 24:10: "When you make your neighbor a loan [מִשְׁעָבָה] of any sort, you shall not go into his house to collect his pledge." Whether they are releasing loans or interest does not affect the overall interpretation of what is happening. Nehemiah is ending debt-slavery and encouraging generosity by forbidding the charging of interest and forbidding the seizure of other possessions, whether fields, vineyards, olive orchards, or homes.

15 is because these laws do not apply to his situation.<sup>188</sup> It is true that they seek to remedy the same problem, but for whatever reason, Nehemiah does not cite them. We can only presume it is because a Sabbath year or Jubilee year was not near.<sup>189</sup> The absence of a Jubilee reference has been recognized by numerous scholars and led to the argument that Leviticus 25 must post-date Nehemiah. This is an argument from silence and is not compelling, especially given the arguments for Leviticus 25's pre-exilic composition.<sup>190</sup>

**Seventy years of exile.** Three later texts explain the years of the exile in light of the Sabbath years: Jeremiah 25:12; 29:11; and 2 Chronicles 36:21. These texts interpret the length of the exile in light of the curse in Leviticus 26:34-35: "Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it." When Israel is about to be exiled, Jeremiah 25:11-12 declares that the length of their exile will be seventy years: "This whole land shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste." Jeremiah 29:10 promises to return Israel to their land after the seventy years elapses: "For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place." Importantly, 2 Chronicles 36:21 cites Leviticus 26:34, specifically mentions Jeremiah's prophecy, and explains that the

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<sup>188</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 206; Niels P. Lemche, "The Manumission of Slaves—The Fallow Year—The Sabbatical Year—The Jubel Year," *VT* 26 (1976): 54.

<sup>189</sup> In Neh 10:32, the community promise to practice the Sabbath Year fallow, thus showing both Nehemiah and the community at least had general knowledge of the Sabbath Year provisions.

<sup>190</sup> See for example Yairah Amit, "The Jubilee Law—An Attempt at Instituting Social Justice," in *Justice and Righteousness*, ed. Benjamin Uffenheimer, H. G. Reventlow, and Y. Hoffman, JSOTSS 137 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992): 57-58.



number seventy is derived from the number of missed Sabbaths:

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 fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

The use of the number seventy by the prophet Daniel will be reviewed in chapter five. For the purposes of this chapter, this string of texts confirms that the Jubilee was likely never practiced. In other words, the fact that the land had to enjoy its Sabbaths for seventy years provides indirect support that the Jubilee likely was never practiced. While these texts do not explicitly mention the Jubilee, it must be remembered that the Jubilee was a Sabbath year. If the Sabbath years were not observed, then this means that the Jubilee years were not observed either. As pointed out by Bergsma, the Chronicles interpretation of Jeremiah 25:11 and 29:10 means that Israel failed to observe the Sabbath year for a period of 490 years, which amounts to ten missed Jubilees.<sup>191</sup> It is striking that the total period of the monarchy can be dated to around 490 years.<sup>192</sup> In other words, the Chronicler has provided indirect support that indeed 490 years of Sabbaths and Jubilees were missed and thus the word of the Lord in Leviticus 26:34–35 is fulfilled and the land is allowed to complete its required rest.

## Summary

Was the Jubilee ever practiced? Evidence from the Old Testament indicates that it likely never was practiced. Some scholars attempt to date certain passages to a Jubilee year, including Isaiah's two-year fallow prophesy, Zedekiah's release, Jeremiah's purchase of Hanamel's field, and Nehemiah's release. Yet, the evidence is speculative at

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<sup>191</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 210.

<sup>192</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 210n18. In fact, the data of Chronicles gives about 457 years for the kings since Saul. . . . If Saul's reign was included, the figure would be closer to 490. However, the Chronicler does not give chronological data for Saul. If the 42-year figure (Acts 13:21) for Saul's reign was already traditional in the Chronicler's day, the total period of the monarchy would be 499 years.

best. Further, the Chronicler's interpretation of the exile's length as a direct fulfillment of Leviticus 26:34–35 is a strong statement against the Jubilee having ever been observed before the exile. Although the Sabbath year was observed with strict adherence in the Second Temple period, the Rabbis universally agree that the Jubilee was never kept after the building of the Second Temple.<sup>193</sup> In summary, there is no evidence that the Jubilee was ever practiced, despite abundant evidence in the prophets that Israel was aware of it. While this does not prove it was never kept, it is a strong indication that, at minimum, it was severely neglected.

### **Was the Jubilee a Utopian Ideal?**

Because the Jubilee was never observed, many critical scholars argue that the Jubilee was a utopian ideal invented in the post-exilic era. A full-length treatment of the Jubilee would be remiss without addressing these common but erroneous views of the Jubilee. The thesis of this dissertation argues that the Jubilee was a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure. There are other theories proposed as to the purpose of the Jubilee, all of which date the composition of the Jubilee to a time later than Moses, with the majority of critical scholars dating the composition of the Jubilee to the exile or after. Therefore, the general lines of their arguments need to be addressed and critiqued. The following will survey the main viewpoints then provide positive arguments for the Jubilee's early composition within the time of Moses and Israel's settlement period.

Literature on the subject is vast as Leviticus 25 has served as a proof-text for the dating of the so-called H or Holiness code of Leviticus 17–26 within the now defunct

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<sup>193</sup> For overview of rabbinic views on the Jubilee's observance, see B. Z. Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles during the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *HUCA* 44 (1973): 153–196, esp. 153–54.

Wellhausen critical theory for the composition of the Pentateuch.<sup>194</sup> In this theory, the post-exilic priestly writer of the Holiness code (Leviticus 17–26) revised the earlier priestly source (P) found in Leviticus 1–16 and added the Holiness Code to it. The major debate centers around just how old the H material actually is. The arguments are complex and filled with conjecture, resulting in a myriad of proposals for the composition, date, and original setting for the Jubilee in every time period of Israelite history attested in the Old Testament. The following will summarize the major arguments for each time period and then provide a defense of Leviticus 25's composition by Moses in the pre-settlement period of Israelite history while providing a brief critique of alternate viewpoints.<sup>195</sup> It is prudent to begin with the post-exilic arguments for Leviticus 25's composition given their prominence in nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship and then to continue in reverse through ancient Israel's history. While there are a myriad of theories, there is strong reason to distrust the post-exilic setting and to trust the strong textual and historical warrant to assume a (pre-) settlement context.

### **The Old Argument for a Post-Exilic Setting**

The majority of critical scholars follow the Wellhausen program of the Pentateuch's development and thus date the composition and setting of Leviticus 25 to

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<sup>194</sup> Engaging these questions in any meaningful way are beyond the scope of this present work. See Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, Meridian Library, M16 (New York: Meridian Books, 1957). Development of the theory across the twentieth century and general critique can be found in T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002), 3-81.

<sup>195</sup> The strategy of this section is to provide a high-level survey of arguments against an early settlement setting and then critique them by providing positive arguments for an early settlement setting. Direct interaction with scholars will be limited as the goal of this dissertation is to build a coherent theology of the Jubilee, not to deconstruct the arguments of critical scholarship. The hope is that this section will demonstrate that an early settlement viewpoint has strong warrant and justification within the text and the pre-monarchic context of ancient Israel.

the exile or post-exile.<sup>196</sup> The general argument assumes that Leviticus 25 developed after Deuteronomy 15, which is dated by critical scholars to the time of Josiah.<sup>197</sup> Since Deuteronomy is dated to Josiah, Leviticus must be some time after Josiah. Given the assumption that Leviticus 25 is late, scholars look for evidence of Jubilee themes or language in exilic and post-exilic literature. As a result, the similar themes and problems facing Nehemiah in Nehemiah 5:1-13 cause scholars to argue that the author or compiler of Leviticus 25 must have been a contemporary of Nehemiah. Others look to Ezekiel, arguing that similar terminology between Leviticus 25 and Ezekiel 40–48, especially Ezekiel 46:16-18, point to a common point of authorship by priests in the exile who are often referred to as the “school of Ezekiel.” Since Leviticus 25 revises Deuteronomy 15, critical scholars assume the two systems are mutually incompatible. Debts and slaves are either released every seven years or every forty-nine years.<sup>198</sup> As a result of these arguments, Leviticus 25 is assumed to be late.<sup>199</sup> Typical within this position is that the Jubilee law was also utopian. In other words, the Jubilee and redemption laws were

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<sup>196</sup> Key examples include Gnuse, “Jubilee Legislation in Leviticus,” 43-48; Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 277-86; de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 175-77; Porter, Leviticus, 196-98; R. Westbrook, “Jubilee Laws,” *Israel Law Review* 6 (1971): 209-26, esp. 224-26.

<sup>197</sup> It is important to note that, according to the Wellhausen theory, Leviticus itself is composed of several strata, primarily the priestly legislation (P) of Lev 1–16 dated to after the exile and the Holiness Code (H) of Lev 17–26, which is dated before the exile.

<sup>198</sup> Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 283.

<sup>199</sup> Stephen Kaufman exemplifies the argument for a post-exilic origin to the Jubilee: “The speculation in Leviticus 26 connecting the exile with failure to observe the sabbatical year are evidence enough that the text of Leviticus is late and that the law of Leviticus was never observed in pre-exilic Judah.” Kaufman, “A Reconstruction of the Social Welfare Systems,” 283. Wellhausen writes with similar assumptions, labeling the Jubilee an “artificial institution” devised by the priests. Further, Wellhausen argues assumes Lev 25 is late because Jeremiah appeared ignorant of it: “The year of jubilee, certainly derived from the Sabbath year, is of still later origin. Jeremiah (xxx. 14) has not the faintest idea that the emancipation of the slaves must according to ‘law’ take place in the fiftieth year.” Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 119. Similar is also Westbrook, who argues that the Jubilee’s universal and cyclical releases made it “academic and theoretical”: “Loss of the means of security would lead to a drying-up of credit before the Jubilee or to conditions being inserted into contracts to make the debt fall due after the Jubilee year. If the law were really effective the size of loans available would decrease as the Jubilee approached and the value of security available accordingly shrank.” Westbrook, *Property and Family in the Biblical Law*, 160-61.

intended to teach theological reality about land ownership, not to provide actual civic legislation.<sup>200</sup>

Those who argue for a utopian viewpoint often contend that the Jubilee served the needs of the post-exilic community. Fager, following a litany of scholarship, explains that the invention of the Jubilee provided a theological basis for the people to regain their lands after the exile.<sup>201</sup> In critique, it should be noted that the Jubilee is not reported in the post-exilic or Second Temple period either. Ben Wacholder shows that the Sabbath year was kept from the post-exilic period to the fifth century A.D.<sup>202</sup> If the Jubilee was designed as a preventative to another or exile or as a means of establishing land rights, then why was its inaugural observance not reported, especially because the Second Temple community was tedious in the observation of Sabbath laws? The post-exilic viewpoint seems to raise more questions than it answers, and as will be shown below, ignores evidence for an early date of composition before or during Israel's settlement.

### **The New Argument for a Post-Exilic Setting**

A recent innovation to the post-exilic argument has arisen in the past few decades. Scholars now argue that the Jubilee was not an attempt to improve or revise Deuteronomy 15 but was instead a ploy by priests to grab land when they returned from the exile.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 97; De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 75-77; Lemche, "Manumission of Slaves," 46; Porter, *Leviticus*, 197-98; Robert Karl Gnuse, *You Shall Not Steal: Community and Property in the Biblical Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 40-45; Westbrook, "Jubilee Laws," 222-23.

<sup>201</sup> Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee*, 97.

<sup>202</sup> Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles," 154.

<sup>203</sup> This position exemplified in Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee*, 26-27. See also Lohfink, "The Kingdom of God," 222. Levine argues similarly, "The priestly leaders of the repatriated Judean community formulated a theory to legitimize their situation." Levine, *Leviticus*, 273-74. Levine bases his argument off the similar contexts between Neh 5 and Lev 25 in addition to late language in Lev 25. See also Norman K. Gottwald, "The Biblical Jubilee: In Whose Interests?" in *The Jubilee*

This position has received compelling critique from both Milgrom and Bergsma. Milgrom argues against this priestly land grab does not fit the reported post-exilic history. His reasons against include: (1) the priests did not gain undisputed leadership; (2) Israelite's holdings were unevenly distributed and restoration of previous lands would make the farmers too vulnerable; (3) the slow economic recovery of Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah would have made strict enforcement of the Jubilee impractical; (4) the Jubilee did not provide a way to settle disputes over land which would have certainly developed between the returnees and the Israelites who remained in the land through the exile.<sup>204</sup> Once again, Milgrom has shown that this new theory raises more questions than they answer and create more difficulties than they resolve.<sup>205</sup>

### **The Argument for Early Monarchy Setting**

Since critical scholarship allows for the development of the priestly literature apart from the Deuteronomistic history, there is room within the broad critical theory of the Pentateuch's development to date the composition and setting of Leviticus 25 to the early monarchy. The most thorough example is found in Jacob Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus 23–27, which perhaps offers the most in-depth exegesis of Leviticus 25 anywhere.<sup>206</sup> Milgrom argues that the extant parallel releases in the ANE are sufficient

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*Challenge: Utopia or Possibility?*, ed. Hans Ucko (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 37. Interestingly, North later conceded that this new line of argument had merit, although he does not go so far as to say the argument is compelling. R. North, *The Biblical Jubilee . . . After Fifty Years*, AnBib 145 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2000), 114.

<sup>204</sup> Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2242.

<sup>205</sup> Perhaps the most devastating critique of this new post-exilic theory is offered by Milgrom. Milgrom argues that a fifty-year wait before land restoration would have offered little incentive to the returnees: "What comfort would the jubilee law have brought to indentured Israelites knowing that they would have to wait as long as fifty years before they would be restored to their lands?". Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2242.

<sup>206</sup> See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2241–45. Other scholars who hold to a monarchic setting include Japhet, "The Relationship between the Legal Corpora in the Pentateuch," 77–79; Hans Everhard von Waldow, "Social Responsibility and Social Structure in Early Israel," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 182–204.

evidence to date the Jubilee before the exile.<sup>207</sup> Milgrom dates the composition to the first half of the eighth century, even though he grants that the concept may be older. He bases this argument on the tension that developed between poor peasant farmers and the growing urban economy, fueled by increased merchant trade and the common practice of royal land confiscation. To Milgrom, the critique of the eighth-century prophets against social injustices is evidence of this tension.<sup>208</sup> Therefore, Milgrom follows Neufeld's supposition that the Jubilee was a "priestly response to the prophetic accusations" that aimed to provide economic relief and prevent the development of an urban economic trade.<sup>209</sup> Milgrom is correct to note that parallel ANE edicts as evidence for the Jubilee's earlier date. He is also correct to see the laws of redemption and Jubilee as part of what informs the eighth-century prophetic critique. However, this does not mean that the laws were composed to fit the critique or to oppose royal intrusion into land rights.

### **The Argument for a Pre-Monarchy Setting**

Even though Wellhausen's program reigned through the twentieth century, there were early dissenters. R. North and William Albright argued in 1954 that the

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Milgrom's in-depth interaction with relevant ANE parallels is exemplary, which appears to urge him toward the early monarchy setting. His supposition that the critique of the eighth century prophets gave rise to the development of the Jubilee limits him, unfortunately, from dating it earlier.

<sup>207</sup> "These parallels in the ancient Near East contemporary with or prior to Israel's settlement on its land tip the scales in favor of a pre-exilic and, probably, pre-monarchic date for the inception of the jubilee concept, a time when family membership and land ownership had [a central place in the community]." Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2242.

<sup>208</sup> For similar views to Milgrom's, see Andrew J. Dearman, *Property Rights in the Eighth-Century Prophets: The Conflict and Its Background*. Dissertation Series / Society of Biblical Literature, No. 106 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

<sup>209</sup> Milgrom's program is not just influenced by the monarchy's context. Milgrom opposes the traditional view that the Priestly writer (P) edited H, the Holiness Code. Instead, he argues that P precedes H and that H edited P material. As a result, Milgrom dates H to the eighth century. See also Eduard Neufeld, "Socio-Economic Background of *Yōbēl* and *Šemiṭā*," *RSO* 33 (1958): 118.

Jubilee was a one-time event during the settlement period.<sup>210</sup> Among those who adopt an early view of the Jubilee's composition, North is unique in his viewpoint that the Jubilee was designed as a one-time release. Unless he were willing to concede that the entire program of Leviticus (sacrifices, feasts, unclean and clean codes, sabbaths, etc.) is academic theorizing, his argument is not compelling. The natural reading of Leviticus 25 is that the Jubilee is cyclical, as argued above. In fact, the discussion of the cases of impoverishment seem unnecessary if the Jubilee was meant to be a one-time only event. Instead, Moses could have just argued that that interest-free loans be given freely. Such a request would not be too large of an imposition on an upstart community.

The list of scholars who propose an early view is substantive with a spectrum of viewpoints from evangelical to critical being represented. For those who offer significant contributions to our understanding of the Jubilee, supporters of an early date include North, Wright, Bergsma, and Chirichigno.<sup>211</sup> Lighter contributions come from Alt, Blosser, Burnside, Finkelstein, Hartley, Lewy, Rooker, Van Selms, Van der Ploeg, Wacholder, Weinfeld, and Wenham.<sup>212</sup> For Chirichigno, the ancient provenance of *דָּוָר* and its cognate *andurarum* proves a pre-monarchic composition for Leviticus 25: "[The institution of Jubilee] belongs to the Pre-Monarchic period...[based upon] the use of the

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<sup>210</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 207-208; 212ff.; William F. Albright, review of North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, *Bib* 37 (1956): 488-90.

<sup>211</sup> North, *Sociology of the Biblical Jubilee*, 207-12; Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, 58-59; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 56-79, and Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 312-21, 357.

<sup>212</sup> Albrecht Alt, "The Origins of Israelite Law," in *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989): 80-132, 128-29; Donald W. Blosser, "Jesus and the Jubilee (Luke 4:16-30): The Year of Jubilee and Its Significance in the Gospel of Luke" (PhD diss., St. Andrew's University, 1979), 22, 46; Burnside, *God, Justice, and Society*, 205; J. J. Finkelstein, "Ammišaduqa's Edict and the Babylonian 'Law Codes,'" *JCS* 15 (1961): 101-4; J. J. Finkelstein, "Some New *Misharum* Material and its Implications," *AS* 16 (1965): 240-43; Hartley, *Leviticus*, xlii, 427-28; Julius Lewy, "The Biblical Institution of *Derôr* in the Light of Akkadian Documents," *EI* 5 (1958): 29-31; Rooker, *Leviticus*, 23-39; J. van der Ploeg, "Studies in Hebrew Law," *CBQ* 13 (1951): 169; Moshe Weinfeld, "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee in the Pentateuchal Laws and their Ancient Near Eastern Background," in *Law in the Bible and Its Environment*, ed. T. Veijola (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 59-61; Wenham, *Leviticus*, 11-12, 317.



term *andurārum* in the *mēšarum* edicts and in various legal documents during the OB period, both of which employ this term for specific cases of release (of slaves and land).”<sup>213</sup> Some scholars grant that later adjustments and redactions may have taken place, based on the argument that Leviticus 25 exhibits two to three different layers of editing, especially regarding the restrictions on urban dwellings<sup>214</sup>

### **Main Arguments for Early Composition of Leviticus 25**

The following will provide an overview of arguments and evidence for the traditional view that Moses wrote Leviticus 25 in the pre-settlement time period of Israel’s history. The arguments are a mix of linguistic, structural, and contextual arguments. Together, they paint a definitive and compelling picture of the Jubilee and redemption laws early composition and setting.

**General argument for Mosaic authorship.** Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is affirmed by the Pentateuch itself and assumed by many Old Testament writers and New Testament writers. Every book of the Pentateuch except Genesis directly attributes authorship to Moses (e.g., Exod 24:4; 39:29; Lev 1:1; Num 4:1; Deut 1:1; 33:1). The Book of Leviticus repeats the formula “The LORD spoke to Moses” thirty-

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<sup>213</sup> Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery*, 317. A full discussion and overview of the relevant ANE laws was presented in chap. 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>214</sup> With regard to the history of revisions in Leviticus 25, the typical argument follows Noth’s three-strata viewpoint. This viewpoint argues that Leviticus 25 evidences three strata that can be separated by their distinctive style: impersonal laws (vv. 26-34, 42, 48-54), laws in the second person (vv. 3-5, 6-7, 8-9, 15a, 17, 25, 35-37, 49-50, 43-44a, 46b, 47, 53b), and legal or parenetic material in the second person plural (vv. 2a, 9b-13, 14b, 17a, 17b-24, 38, 44b, 45). Noth argues that the main Jubilee legislation likely reaches back to the settlement period but thinks it was finished in the exile. Hartley sees two primary strata, yet still argues for a settlement context for Jubilee based on three general arguments: (1) the proliferation of ancient terms within the legislation; (2) the fact that numerous texts within the Old Testament allude to or cite the Jubilee and thus take it for granted (ex. Lev 27:16-25; Num 36:4; Jer 34:8-22); (3) the numerous historical examples of general releases of land, persons, and debts extant throughout second-millennium ANE. See Hartley, *Leviticus*, 425-429; Noth, *Leviticus*, 184-85.

eight times, claiming divine inspiration more than any other book in the entire Bible.<sup>215</sup> The post-exilic community assumed Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (1 Chr 15:15; 22:13; 2 Chr 23:18; Ezra 3:2; Neh 1:7; Mal 4:4) as did the New Testament writers (e.g., Matt 8:4; Mark 12:26; Luke 16:31; John 1:18; Acts 3:22; 28:33; Rom 10:5). In John 5:46–47, Jesus rebukes his critics with a shared assumption that Moses wrote the Pentateuch: “For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”<sup>216</sup> Further, the striking similarity between Moses’ law code and other Babylonian law codes, i.e., those of Hammurabi (19<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century BC) and those of Eshunna (c. 1930 BC), provides support that a law code like Moses’ could have existed before and during Israel’s settlement period.

**Unity of Leviticus.** It is widely recognized that Leviticus falls within a wider narrative context wherein Israel remains at Sinai from Exodus 19:1 until Numbers 10:10. This narrative is punctuated with divine speeches given to Moses that were then reported to Israel. In Leviticus alone, there are 34 separate speeches. As shown above, the structure of Leviticus matches its goal: Israel’s meeting with God. Leviticus 26–27 provides exhortation to obedience and ends with practical advice on freewill offerings, which are not subject to the covenant curses. Interestingly the end of the first major section (Lev 1–16) ends with the Day of Atonement while the end of the second major section (Lev 17–25) ends with the Jubilee, which happens on the Day of Atonement. Form conveys meaning. This kind of intentional structuring cannot have been incidental and points toward Leviticus’ inner unity.

**ANE parallels.** The existence of freedom proclamations throughout the ANE

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<sup>215</sup> Rooker, *Leviticus*, 39.

<sup>216</sup> Rooker, *Leviticus*, 39.

provides significant support for an early composition date for Leviticus 25. Critical theory assumes that a complex cult like that described in Leviticus as a whole could not have developed at an early stage of Israel. Yet, this assumption ignores the evidence from the ANE. The Laws of Eshunna and Hammurabi are but two examples of numerous law codes in the ANE that legislate similar matters, use similar language, and even employ similar stylistic devices. As regards the Jubilee specifically, it is worth noting once again that freedom proclamations which released land, debt, and slaves are well attested. Most significantly, Mesopotamian *misharum* and *andurarum* edicts are quite similar to the Jubilee.<sup>217</sup>

**Early tribal Israel.** One of the more compelling arguments in favor of a settlement context for Leviticus 25 is how well it coheres with the context of early tribal Israel. First, the forty-nine year cycle of the Jubilee points to a tribal context. This cycle means that the average loss of land or freedom would have been twenty-five years, leaving the *pater familias* an older man when he regained his freedom and land. Further, the laws of redemption ensure that control of the land and the family stays within the nation Israel with special emphasis on the family's clan. The Jubilee's ideal is that an impoverished family's own clan care for them and their land.

The concern to keep a family near or on their land reflects the context of the settlement period. The best example is the case of Zelophehad's daughters, where they are required to marry within the clan (Num 36:6) in order to keep the land within the clan

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<sup>217</sup> The use of several terms considered ancient in the text of Leviticus 25 also support a pre-exilic composition date for Leviticus 25. Multiple words that are attested in other literature that is older than Israel's settlement in the land. The most prominent is יִבְלֵ, which only occurs in the Pentateuch and Joshua. When Leviticus 25:10 commands, "It will be a jubilee for you," it assumes the reader's knowledge of what the word means as it provides no explanation. As Bergsma points out, even if Leviticus 25 were dated to the exile, the assumption that the word is known makes its origin at least pre-exilic. It is much more likely that the term is ancient as is the legislation. The term פָּרָה ("harshness, severity") also appears ancient and is quite obscure. More convincing is the use of the verb מִיָּד ("to sink, become low") and the specialized word לְעֹלָם, "in perpetuity." Both of these terms are unique to Leviticus 25 and have attested parallels in thirteenth-century Ugaritic literature.

as well. Israelites largely practiced endogamy, marriage within the clan, so as to maintain family relationships and to keep the land neatly within the lines of inheritance.<sup>218</sup> There are several safety nets employed by Leviticus 25 to keep the land and people within their clan, including interest-free loans and redemption, which most critical scholars cite as early while maintaining that the Jubilee was a later insertion.<sup>219</sup> Is it not more coherent to argue that the Jubilee is early as well since it had the same goal as these other defensive measures?

The clan's responsibility to one another is well attested in early Israel. The practice of redemption by Boaz in Ruth 4, which is unquestionably in the settlement period, served the purposes of keeping the land within the family: "[Redeem the land] in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance" (Ruth 4:5b). The clan's other responsibilities point to this reality as well. The *ḥayy*, brother of the *pater familias*, was responsible to host the family's sacrificial meal in his brother's absence (1 Sam 10:13-16), direct family burials (Leviticus 10:4; Amos 6:10), and act as redeemer (Lev 25:49). The clan as a whole had a responsibility to one another, as attested in the redemption legislation, levirate marriage (Deut 25:5-10), responsibility for avenging blood (Num 35), and in Leviticus 20:5, which holds the clan responsible to put to death anyone who sacrifices children to Molech. Finally, Numbers 27:8-11 makes clear that the outer limit for inheritance was the *ḥayy*. The whole of this evidence points to the idea that a clan was a protective association of families. It is this protective association, so prominent in settlement Israel, that is called upon to preempt the Jubilee via the means of redemption and in a worse-case scenario, host and support another clan member who is impoverished until the Jubilee. On the whole, the sheer volume of laws aimed at preserving the clan structure reflects an agricultural society that matches the early settlement years of Israel's

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<sup>218</sup> Daniel Block, "Marriage and Family in Ancient Israel," in *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World*, ed. Ken M. Campbell, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 37.

<sup>219</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 63. A recent example is in North, *The Biblical Jubilee*, 114.

history. The simple agrarian conditions presumed by Leviticus 25 likewise support an early view of its composition.<sup>220</sup> The Jubilee matches and fits into these defensive measures and most coheres with a settlement context where protecting land and family was at a premium.

**Summary for early composition.** In conclusion, the traditional view that Moses wrote the text is supported by the intentional structure of Leviticus, the use of ancient terms throughout Leviticus 25, the existence of parallel legislation in the ANE, and how well the Jubilee legislation fits the tribal and agricultural context of early settlement Israel. The allusions and apparent knowledge of the Jubilee attested by all of the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel) likewise points to its pre-exilic origin. While some may dispute that it was never practiced, this does not help the post-exilic argument either as it still was not implemented after the exile. The weight of evidence and the simpler reading is for an early date for the Jubilee. Since the evidence is toward an early date for the Jubilee, then this evidence gives warrant to the overall thesis of this work, that the Jubilee is ancient law aimed to keep families together on their land.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a detailed exegesis of Leviticus 25, provided a survey of other Old Testament passages relevant to the Jubilee, reviewed data for the

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<sup>220</sup> Houses in walled cities are considered exceptional (Lev 25:29–35) and it is assumed that families live near their land as they are expected to go out to the field and eat directly from it during the fallow year (Lev 25:6, 12). Walled cities certainly were not exceptional by the time of the exile and it would not have been practical for a family residing in an urban center to visit their field daily for sustenance. The existence of the Gezer calendar (late tenth century during Solomon's reign), which earmarks the major agricultural activities of the calendar year, points to the agricultural-based society. The archaeological record supports a clan-structured and agricultural society in early Israel, as evidenced by the prominence of small homes often huddled together with quarters for livestock. Numerous pits for storing wheat and other material are prominent in the late Bronze Age layers, likewise pointing to agricultural activities. Van der Toorn has noted the surprising absence of pottery shards or other objects located from elsewhere, a phenomenon that points to small communities who lived together and stayed together their entire lives. Karen van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Changes in the Forms of Religious Life*, Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East 7 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1996), 190, first seen in Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 67.

Jubilee's observance in Israel's history, and provided a defense for Moses' composition of Leviticus 25 and a date for the origin of the Jubilee to pre-settlement Israel. The chapter began by looking at the structure and setting of Leviticus. There it was argued that Leviticus' primary concern is Israel's life in the presence of Yahweh. The Jubilee formed an important function within this larger goal, ensuring that every Israelite was free to experience the blessings of God's presence on their land. Through this experience, the Jubilee along with Israel's entire spectrum of Sabbaths reminded Israel of the rest that God enjoyed at the creation and the harmony mankind enjoyed in its relationship with both God and the land.

An in-depth look at the structure of Leviticus 25 demonstrated three key characteristics of the Jubilee: the Jubilee is a Sabbath for the land and the people, the Jubilee provided for the redemption of land, and the Jubilee provided for the redemption of persons. By looking at the language of the Jubilee, it was argued that the Jubilee found its focus in the twin actions of release and return. By releasing both land and persons every forty-nine years, the Jubilee preserved Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure. It was also demonstrated that the Jubilee has important connections with Israel's spiritual redemption, as the Jubilee was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement. The pairing of Israel's spiritual release with their physical release reinforced the reality that God redeemed Israel from both physical slavery and spiritual slavery. The sound of the Jubilee, effected by the blasting of horns throughout the land, also reinforced the reality of God's redemption by reminding them of their reception of the law at Sinai. Finally, it was argued that the Jubilee set into motion a drama that purposefully reenacted Israel's release from slavery and redemption by Yahweh in the Exodus. By rehearsing both the Exodus and the Sinai narratives, the Jubilee was designed to allow every generation of Israel to experience the Exodus redemption all over again.

After looking at the general principle of God's ownership of both land and people which undergirded the Jubilee, this chapter surveyed the three stages of destitution

imagined in Leviticus 25:23–55. There it was argued that the first stage involved the partial loss of an Israelite's land, which was subject to redemption by the seller, his near-kinsmen, or by Yahweh at the Jubilee. The second stage imagined a loss of independence, in which the impoverished Israelite was no longer able to support himself and was dependent on interest-free loans. No redeemer is exhorted to help in this stage, assuming that if a redeemer were able to help, they would have done so during the first stage. The third stage in Leviticus 25:39-55 imagines the loss of freedom by which an impoverished Israelite sells himself to another Israelite to serve as a hired worker. Unlike the seven-year term of dependent debt-slaves in Deuteronomy 15:12-18, a head of household must work up to forty-nine years. In this case, the Israelite is to work as a hired worker for his brother Israelite until the Jubilee, when he and his family will be released and return to their property. The final section of Leviticus 25 deals with the case of self-sale to a foreigner. Verses 47-55 extend the plea for redemption from the nearest-kinsmen to the entire nation. An Israelite must not be allowed to sell himself to a foreigner.

Other texts related to the Jubilee were then surveyed, demonstrating that the aim of the Jubilee was to preserve Israel's system of egalitarian land tenure. From there, this chapter looked at texts in 2 Kings 19, Isaiah 37, Jeremiah 32, 34, and Nehemiah 5 to see if they were perhaps informed by the Jubilee. It appears that Israel never observed the Jubilee, as evidenced by the seventy-year exile, which 2 Chronicles 36:21 interpreted as the land being allowed to enjoy the Sabbaths (and Jubilees) that Israel had denied it. The chapter ends with a defense for an early date of composition of Leviticus 25. The setting imagined by Leviticus 25 best fits the early settlement period of Israel and a number of other texts either cite or allude to the Jubilee, pointing to its early date. In addition, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch including Leviticus 25 has wide support from the Pentateuch itself, the New Testament, Jesus, and church tradition.

This chapter has shown that the Jubilee was the capstone of Israel's system of social justice and that it was intended to preserve, on a cyclical and generational basis, Israel's kinship structure and egalitarian system of land tenure. It was also shown that the Jubilee remembered the Sabbath rest of creation, reenacted the Exodus redemption, celebrated God's giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and shaped and informed the meaning of spiritual forgiveness in ancient Israel.



## CHAPTER 5

### THE ESCHATOLOGICAL JUBILEE

The intent of this chapter is to show that the Jubilee became a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah. The prophets use the biblical Jubilee as a key motif in order to amplify the prophetic expectation of the new or second exodus. As a motif, the twin concepts of release and return are applied by the prophets to the expected messianic eschatological redemption that was to be accomplished through Israel's second exodus from Babylon. This chapter will survey key passages in Isaiah, Ezekiel, 2 Chronicles, and Daniel to show how various prophets interpreted the exile as direct punishment for failure to observe the land's Sabbaths and used the Jubilee as a type to predict the glorious restoration that God would accomplish in the redemption of the second exodus. The Jubilee proved a fitting type as its twin concepts of release and return fit the hopes of the exiles and the promise of the prophets. The use of the Jubilee as a type, is not surprising given that the Jubilee itself reenacted the Exodus redemption. It is, in fact, a redemption like the first Exodus that the prophets prophesy, making the Jubilee and its intermixed redemption laws/imagery a fitting analogy and type. As such, this chapter will argue that the Jubilee became much more than an ancient law. The prophets picked it up and employed it as a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah.

#### **A Brief Word on Typology**

The word "type" is a biblical word (see Rom 5:14) and category. On one level, its meaning is in keeping with normal usage. There is a consistency or way in which God usually acts. In other words, there is a pattern or type to his actions. The key signifiers of

a type are historical correspondence and escalation.<sup>1</sup> By historical correspondence, there is to be a similarity or matching between real people, events, or institutions. This chapter argues that the Jubilee as an institution was the archetype of Jesus' jubilee-like ministry. As the Jubilee provided release and restoration in the physical sphere on a day of great spiritual significance, so Jesus enacts a greater Jubilee that provides release and restoration that is both spiritual in the hearts of mankind and will be physical through the release of mankind and the land from the curse and the restoration of the harmony that once existed in Eden between God, mankind, and the land. There is correspondence between the release, return, and restoration. Yet, Jesus' Jubilee, which fulfills the type, is an escalation by several degrees since it applies to spiritual and physical release and its scope involves the the whole earth and all of mankind.

### **The Eschatological Jubilee in Isaiah**

The first prophet to employ the Jubilee as a type is Isaiah. Isaiah prophesied during the crises of the eighth-century, yet his soaring prophecies of doom against the nations and his captivating prophecies of Israel's restoration alongside the nations telescope through the exile, return from exile, and onto the end of the ages. Given the fact that much of his prophecy (Isaiah 40–66) deals with the impending exile and restoration of Israel, it is perhaps not surprising that he employs both Jubilee and redemption metaphors to speak about the release and return of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 77. Grant Osborne explains this correspondence well: "The early Christians (like the Jews) saw all of salvation history (God working out his plan of salvation in human history) as a single continuous event. Therefore events in the past are linked to those in the present, so that God's mighty deeds like the exodus or the return from exile foreshadow the experiences of God's present community, the church. This does not see a direct prophetic link but rather a correspondence in history, in which the current experience relives the past." Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 328. A full treatment of typology can be found in Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981).

## The Structure and Meaning of Isaiah

According to William Dumbrell, the division of the book into three major sections (chaps. 1–39, 40–55, 56–66) has been widely accepted in biblical scholarship since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> It is the view of the present author that Isaiah was the author of the entire book.<sup>3</sup> While each major section has its individual emphases, there is a logical development from Isaiah 1–39 to Isaiah 40–55 to Isaiah 56–66. B. S. Childs argued that Isaiah 40–55 interprets chapters 40–55 and 56–66 likewise interprets and elaborates on 40–55.<sup>4</sup> The sections revolve around the nagging question of whether God is going to redeem Israel and cure their sin or not. Will the ancient promises he made to Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David hold true? In this way, Isaiah covers the course of redemptive history, from his call in 740 B.C. to the end of history itself. Chapters 1–39 largely deal with the Assyrian and emerging Babylonian threat, while chapters 40–55 brings comfort to the exiles via the hope of the Servant’s ministry. Will God’s promises hold true for Israel or does the exile spell the end? This is the question answered by chapters 40–55, showing how Isaiah 40–55 is a logical extension of 1–39.<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 1–39 puts hope in a Davidic King while 40–55 puts hope in Yahweh’s Servant, who brings hope and comfort to the exiles in Babylon.

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<sup>2</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 107. The first to argue for and recognize this division is Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892).

<sup>3</sup> For arguments for Isa 40–66 having an eighth century date, see J. Barton Payne, “Eighth Century Israelitish Background of Isaiah 40–66, Parts I,” *WTJ* 29 (1967): 179-90; J. Barton Payne, “Eighth Century Israelitish Background of Isaiah 40–66, Parts II,” *WTJ* 30 (1968), 50-58; J. Barton Payne, “Eighth Century Israelitish Background of Isaiah 40–66, Part III,” *WTJ* 30 (1968), 185-203. For general arguments supporting Isaiah as author, an eighth-century date, and the book’s unity, see arguments and bibliography in J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 23-30; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 17-28; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Jan Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Brevard. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 325-34.

<sup>5</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 8.

Isaiah 56–66 postpones this hoped for restoration because the returning remnant persists in idolatry.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 56–66 thus joins the hope for a new David (Isa 1–39) with the hope for an atoning Servant (Isa 40–55) together, culminating in the deliverance by a spirit-filled individual (i.e., Servant) in Isaiah 61:1— that results in the transformation of Israel (Isa 61:4–62:12), the nations (Isa 66:18–23), and even creation itself (Isa 65:17–25).<sup>7</sup> Isaiah 56–66 then explains to those who have returned from exile how the manifestation of God’s glory in Zion will bring about a world transformation, even though sin persists among those dwelling in Jerusalem. Despite the fact that Isaiah’s later sections apply prophetically to later contexts in Israel’s history, the stated context is Isaiah’s ministry under the reigns of the Judean Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isa 1:1). The promises and long-range prophecies of Isaiah 40–66 compel Isaiah’s Judean audience to live faithfully, have hope in the future, and to see how the Assyrian threat and impending Babylonian exile are just a small part of a bigger story headed toward a glorious future.

### **Isaiah 27:13**

Isaiah 27 pictures God’s final defeat of evil after the exile, resulting in the death of the archetypal dragon, the flourishing of Yahweh’s vineyard, the purification of Israel, and the deliverance of Israel. At the end of Isaiah 27, a great horn is blown that

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<sup>6</sup> Despite the immediate context being eighth-century Judeans, the affinities with the post-exilic community cannot be ignored. Isaiah’s description of the community anticipates the condemnations of Malachi for Israel’s spiritual apathy and ritual hypocrisy, the widespread social injustice reported by Neh 5, and the devastating critique of Israelite’s marriage to idolaters in Ezra 9–10.

<sup>7</sup> For other treatments on the overall theology of Isaiah, see also James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 211; Robin L. Routledge, “Is There a Narrative Substructure Underlying the Book of Isaiah?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 55, no. 2 (2004): 203; John Oswalt, “Isaiah 60–62: The Glory of the Lord,” in *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 152–61. Oswalt argues that servanthood is the central theme of the book. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 54–60. Yet, Oswalt also argues that Yahweh’s holiness is a driving theme, which is not too dissimilar from arguing that God’s glory is the center of Isaiah’s theology. After all, it is God’s glory which manifests his holiness. Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 31–45. In fact, Oswalt argues that the last chapters of Isaiah “speak of Israel as the repository of God’s glory, to which all the nations come (e.g., 56:1–8; 60:1–3, 13–14; 66:18–23). The reminiscence of the thought of 2:1–5 is such that it can hardly be accidental: the symphony is ending as it began. A trusting, redeemed servant Israel becomes the messenger with clean lips through whom the world can find its Savior.” See Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 11.

beckons God's people from their lands of exile back to the promised city of God, just as the Jubilee horn would have called Israelites back to their promised land. The correspondence between the horns, release, and return set up the Jubilee as a type that anticipates the shape of the second exodus, which is tantamount to Israel's restoration and the fulfillment of all of God's promises.

**The content of Isaiah 24–27.** Isaiah 24–27 is primarily eschatological in orientation and serves as a fitting conclusion to Isaiah 13–23.<sup>8</sup> While Isaiah 13–23 deals with nations that are on the eighth-century world scene, especially Babylon who is growing in strength under Assyria's weakening power, Isaiah 24–27 telescopes forward to the cosmic future when Yahweh will defeat the city of man and establish the city of God.<sup>9</sup> Chapters 24–25 focus on the ruin of the city of man with a note of resurrection at the end (25:8) while chapters 26–27 provide a mirror image of the salvation of the city of God. The city remains nameless, thus allowing it to represent the entire world. In other words, "the city of man" is not a particular geographic location but a metaphor for the hostile world. Chapter 24 depicts the overthrow of the city. Chapter 25 laments the city of man's overthrow. 25:6-12 is at the heart of the chapters and the middle of the chiasm that forms the whole unit of chapters 24–27, which depicts the Lord hosting a great banquet on Mount Zion for "all peoples" (25:6) and for "his people" (25:8).<sup>10</sup> It is through resurrection (25:8) that the Lord will remove the covering of all peoples (25:7) and the reproach on his people (25:8). Chapter 24 already hinted at a harvest from the nations. While verses 1-12 describe the nameless city's destruction (i.e., the judgment of the

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<sup>8</sup> For the intimate relationship between Isa 13–23 and 24–27, see Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 194-97.

<sup>9</sup> See Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 440

<sup>10</sup> Motyer argues that Isa 25:6-12 forms the center of a chiasm in chaps. 24–27. The chiasm is fitting as 25:6-12 pulls together hope for the city of man and hope for the city of God, i.e., hope for the nations and hope for Israel. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 195,

nations), 25:13 holds out hope that gleanings remain. These gleanings then “sing for joy” (25:14), “give glory” (25:15), and sing “from the ends of the earth ... songs of praise, of glory to the Righteous One” (25:16).

The salvation through judgment of the nations depicted in 25:1-16 is mirrored by the salvation through judgment of Israel in 27:1-13. The Lord finally puts evil to death (Isa 27:1) by slaying the great embodiment of evil, the fleeing Leviathan. Then, the Lord turns to care for his vineyard, which will envelop the whole world and make it fruitful (27:2-6). 27:7-9 argues that the exile will atone for Israel’s sin and argues that the nations’ judgment has been harsher than Israel’s judgment (27:7-8). The result of Israel’s exile and atonement is Israel’s rejection of idolatry (25:9). Then, verses 10-11 depict the overthrow of the world city. It is through Yahweh’s cosmic judgment that Israel’s cosmic promises will come true. Verses 12-13 then turn to the “day,” presumably the day of the Lord, when the Lord will harvest the people’s one-by-one (27:12) and then call them home with the sound of the great Jubilee trumpet (27:13).

**The meaning of Isaiah 27:13.** Isaiah 27:12-13 pictures the final return of Israel through two images: harvest and Jubilee. Verse 12 depicts the Lord harvesting the remnant within the boundaries of the Promised Land, from “the River to the Brook of Egypt” (e.g., Exod 23:31; Josh 1:4; Ps 72:8). Verse 13 then pictures a great trumpet calling Israel home from their various nations of exile: “And in that day a great trumpet [יִתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר הַהוּא] will be blown, and those who were lost in the land of Assyria and those who were driven out to the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain at Jerusalem.” This trumpet is the same kind of trumpet as the one blown at Mount Sinai and blown to announce the Jubilee (Exod 19:13, 16; 25:9). In Leviticus 25:9, the trumpet is the “loud trumpet” or the “shouting trumpet” (וְהַעֲבִירָהּ שׁוֹפָר תְּרוּעָה). It is likely called the “great trumpet” in 25:13 to contrast with the “great and strong sword” of Yahweh’s judgment in 27:1. It is as if the Lord simultaneously slays the dragon with his great sword and calls his remnant home to the city of God with the great trumpet. The

fact that atonement is secured in this great act of judgment-salvation (27:9) lends credence to this being an allusion to the Jubilee, which likewise happened on the Day of Atonement. However, the thematic links are even more compelling. As Israelite's were to be granted liberty and freed to return home every forty-ninth year, so all Israelites are once again granted liberty and freed to return home from the nations on the great and last year.<sup>11</sup> Motyer argues that “exiled” (הַגָּלוּת) should be translated “straying” (e.g., Deut 22:1) so as to strike a balance with verse 12. In this reading, it is not exiled Israelites who are called home but the harassed people of God.<sup>12</sup> Given that they are called from the land of Egypt and Assyria, 27:13 strikes a parallel note to 19:24-25, where the nations Assyria and Egypt are blessed equally alongside Israel. The twin concepts of the Jubilee, release and return, are echoed in this text with Yahweh pictured as the one inaugurating a jubilee-like day of redemption and restoration.<sup>13</sup>

### **Isaiah 40–66**

Isaiah 40–66 makes use of both redemption metaphors and Jubilee allusions to give hope to Israelites that their exile will not be final. By the use of these metaphors and allusions, Isaiah explains the exile as a period of debt-slavery from which Yahweh redeems them and returns them to their land. Since the second exodus itself is often telescoped out to the idea of cosmic restoration on the great Day of the Lord, so also the Jubilee metaphor is developed into a type of the coming restoration of Israel on the great Day of the Lord.

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<sup>11</sup> Support for the Jubilee allusion in Isa 27:13 can be found in Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 199; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 225; Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem, note on Isa 27:13 in *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). Intriguingly, Bergsma, does not even mention Isa 27:13. See John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 190-203.

<sup>12</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 225-26.

<sup>13</sup> This picture of Yahweh as a divine warrior blowing the Jubilee trumpet is also picked up in Zech 9:14 and Ps 74:5. In Joel 2:1 and 2:15 a trumpet is blown to announce the day of the Lord. These texts perhaps echo the Jubilee but are not direct allusions as is argued here in Isa 27:13.

**Redemption in Isaiah 40–66.** The root  $\text{לָצַד}$  occurs twenty-two times in Isaiah 40–66 with the Lord bearing the title of “Redeemer” thirteen times.<sup>14</sup> Bergsma points out that the Lord only carries this title six others times in the Old Testament, signifying that “the Lord as Redeemer” is an intentional and major metaphor in Isaiah 40–66.<sup>15</sup> Three separate passages extend the metaphor of redemption to its logical counterpart, redemption from debt-slavery: Isaiah 48:20; 50:1; and 52:3-6. In Isaiah 48:20, the idea of the Lord as redeemer is conflated with him as master: “Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, ‘The LORD has redeemed his servant Jacob!’” The notes of joy and proclamation echo the reality of the Jubilee, which is later conflated with “favor” in Isaiah 61:1-3, although it is not enough to grant an intentional allusion. Isaiah 50:1 and Isaiah 52:3-6 does not extend the metaphor as 49:7-9 does, but nonetheless pictures Israel’s exile as a transaction in which they were sold into debt-slavery. Isaiah 50:1 mixes metaphors, simultaneously describing Israel’s exile as a divorce and a selling into debt-slavery: “Thus says the Lord ‘Where is your mother’s certificate of divorce, with which I sent her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was sent away.” Isaiah 52:3 applies the metaphor to the nature of their redemption, making the argument that Babylon will not be paid for Israel’s release: “For thus says the LORD: ‘You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money.’” Isaiah 50:1 and 52:3 equates Israel’s sin with a debt that needed repayment. All three of these passages liken Israel’s exile to debt-slavery and liken Israel’s release from exile to the practice of redemption. This trajectory gives warrant to the further extension of the redemption metaphor to

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<sup>14</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 192. Isa 41:14, 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4, 9, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 192. E.g., Gen 48:16; Job 19:25; Pss 19:14; 78:35; 103:4; Prov 23:11; Jer 50:34. Other metaphors describing Israel’s relationship with God are common in Isaiah 40–66 as well, such as creator, husband, and master. See Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 193.



include Jubilee themes in later chapters of Isaiah.

**The Jubilee in Isaiah 40–66.** Three passages extend the redemption-from-slavery metaphor to its logical end by including Jubilee themes as well: Isaiah 49:7–9; 58:1–14; and 63:1–3. All three of these passages liken Israel’s return from slavery as a second exodus that is initiated by a Jubilee. Isaiah 49:7–9 and 58:1–14 applies the twin themes of the Jubilee, release and return, to both land and persons, as is also done in Leviticus 25:8–12.

**Isaiah 49:7-9.** The redemption imagery from Isaiah 48–52 turns in Isaiah 49:7–9 into a fuller metaphor that intertwines both redemption and Jubilee imagery. Isaiah 49:7–9 falls on the tail end of the second servant song, which is 49:1-6.<sup>16</sup> In this song, the servant is revealed to be named Israel (49:3) and is commissioned to gather Israel. Then, the Servant’s work of gathering Israel is juxtaposed next to the act of bringing salvation to the nations: “He says: ‘It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth’” (49:6). Bringing back Israel is considered a light task, so the servant’s task is extended to

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<sup>16</sup> The other Servant Songs are in 42:1-4; 50:4-9; 52:13–53:12. The identity of the servant is hotly debated and has been since ancient times, as made apparent by the Ethiopian eunuch’s questioning of his identity to Philip in Acts 8:32-34. At times, corporate Israel is referred to as Yahweh’s servant (Isa 41:8; 44:1; 49:3), while the Servant Songs generally refer to the Servant as an individual. See J. Daniel Hayes, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 128. I follow the views presented by John D. Barry; namely, that the servant is likely corporate Israel in 42:1-4 then is likely an individual in 49:1-6, 50:4-9, and 52:13–53:12. See John D. Barry, *The Resurrected Servant in Isaiah* (Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2010), 27-79, especially see the chart on p. 28. There is also a helpful discussion of the servant imagery’s development in William Sanford Lasor, David Allan Hubbard, Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 309-12. Further, the fact that the New Testament identifies Jesus as the Servant, at least of Isaiah 52–53, makes it difficult to argue that the last three Servant Songs picture a corporate Israel. For example, Matt 12:17-21 quotes Isa 42:1-4 as fulfilled in Jesus; Jesus is often referred to as “the Servant” (Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27-28, 29-30); Philip identifies Jesus as the servant of Isa 52–53 in Acts 8:32-33; and Luke 22:37 cites Isa 53:12 to explain why Jesus died alongside thieves.

the nations.<sup>17</sup>

Isaiah 49:7-13 confirms the servant's mission is successful.<sup>18</sup> Verses 7-9 paints a picture of the servant's world-wide effectiveness with Jubilee colors:

Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, the servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves; because of the LORD, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you." Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I have answered you; in a day of salvation I have helped you; I will keep you and give you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages, saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Appear." They shall feed along the ways; on all bare heights shall be their pasture.

The Lord is called "Redeemer" in verse 7, then his acts as a Redeemer via the Servant's ministry are described in verses 8-9. Significantly, the Servant's actions take on a Jubilee-shape that gives a fuller expression to the Lord's character as Israel's redeemer. First, the Servant's action is described as a "time of favor," language which is used in Isaiah 61:1, another Servant text which makes a clear allusion to the Jubilee (see below). Second, the end of verse 8 imagines the Servant apportioning the desolate land-inheritance back to the families of Israel. In this sense, the Lord is preparing the land for its rightful occupants to return to it. The resonance with the Jubilee, which releases land back to its owners (Lev 25:10, 13, 23) cannot be missed. Third, the Servant's actions turn from the land in verse 8 to the people themselves in verse 9, where they are pictured as being released from prison and darkness. The imperative for "Come out" is from the root *צָוֹר*, which jointly echoes the drama of the exodus and the Jubilee. Fifth, the picture of Israel eating along the "ways" and finding "pasture" in the "bare heights" likewise echoes other imagery in Isaiah that describes the path of the second exodus (Isa 19:23; 40:2; 49:11). Just as Isaiah 52:11-12 precedes the Servant Song with a prediction of the new

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<sup>17</sup> It is hard to imagine the Servant being Isaiah or corporate Israel here as corporate Israel/Isaiah would be pictured as delivering itself/himself. The images of calling, birth, and the Servant speaking himself all point to the fact that the Servant is likely an individual in 49:1-6.

<sup>18</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 389.

exodus,<sup>19</sup> so the Servant Song in Isaiah 49:1-6 is followed by a prediction of the second exodus. Isaiah 49:7-9 pictures the Servant as an enactor of a Jubilee and describes the second exodus with jubilee motifs.<sup>20</sup> Isaiah is reading the Jubilee typologically and applying the Jubilee's drama of release and return to the release and return of Israel from Babylonian exile by the Servant via the second exodus.

**Isaiah 58:1-14.** Resonances with both Leviticus 25 and Luke 4:18-19 indicate that the Lord's call to Israel to return to proper Sabbath observance—doing justice—in Isaiah 58 is shaped by the Jubilee. Chapters 56–58 are often understood as a unit given that they form an *inclusio* regarding Sabbath observance (56:1-8; 58:13-14).<sup>21</sup> Chapter 58 rebukes Israel's false piety because it lacks a concern for social justice (58:2-7). In 58:1, Isaiah is commanded to declare Israel's transgression loudly, as if his voice were a “trumpet.” Isaiah's voice becomes an anti-Jubilee trumpet that condemns Israel's anti-Jubilee practices. Isaiah 58:2 reports that Israel “delights to draw near to God” and Israel retorts in 58:3a, “Why have we fasted? ... Why have we humbled ourselves?” Israel condemns Yahweh for not noticing their piety. Yet, Yahweh tells them in 58:3b, “Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers.” The note of oppression resonates with Leviticus 25:43, where Israelite masters are commanded to not “rule over” other Israelites “ruthlessly.” Yahweh explains in Isaiah 58:4 that they are likewise given to violence, which explains why Yahweh does not hear their voice.

Then, 58:5-6 contrasts two types of fasting, a contrast which condemns false

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<sup>19</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 208.

<sup>20</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 192.

<sup>21</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 461. The theme of Sabbath likewise ends the book (66:18-24), thus causing a Sabbath storyline to develop in Isa 56–66 whereby Israel is called to true Sabbath observance (Isa 56:1-8), critiqued for false Sabbath observance (Isa 58:1-14), and then true Sabbath observance is once again extended to include the nations (Isa 66:18-24).

piety and celebrates jubilee-like social justice:

Is such the fast that I choose, a day for a person to humble himself? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?

The self-sacrifice that Yahweh requires is not abstaining from food and sitting in ritual mourning. The Lord wants a self-sacrifice that pursues justice on behalf of the oppressed. The poetry seems to cover all manner of wrong social structures, whether it is injustice (wickedness), inhumanity (yoke) or inequality (oppressed).<sup>22</sup> Letting the oppressed go free echoes Deuteronomy 15 with the use of the word *הִפְשִׁיחַ* (cf. Deut 15:12, 18).

Yahweh's rhetorical question, "Is such the fast that I choose," also recalls the Day of Atonement, which is the only commanded fast in the entire law (Lev 23:26-32).<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the Day of Atonement is when the Jubilee was proclaimed. The appropriate fast is one that connects the reality of spiritual liberation (i.e., the Day of Atonement) with the reality of physical liberation (i.e., the Jubilee). Likewise, "a day acceptable [*רִצּוֹן*] to the Lord" reminds one of "the year of the Lord's favor [*רִצּוֹן*]" in Isaiah 61:2. In other words, the acceptable Day of Atonement is intimately connected with the acceptable year of Jubilee. The social justice envisioned by the Jubilee is thus a logical extension of the Day of Atonement. This linking between spiritual release and physical release is already present in the juxtaposition of "loose the bonds of wickedness" and "break every yoke" in verse 6. The Sabbath year and Jubilee year's concern that Israelites care for their own "brother" is also picked up in Isaiah 58:7, where Yahweh argues that caring for one's brother is the proper kind of fast and Sabbath: "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover

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<sup>22</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 481.

<sup>23</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 195. Bergsma notes that this connection was originally noted by Thomas D. Hanks, *God So Loved the Third World: The Biblical Vocabulary of Oppression*, trans. James C. Dekker (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), 99-102. Both Bergsma and Hanks cite all the connections mentioned here and agree that there is an explicit Jubilee background in Isa 58.

him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh [וּמִבְּשָׁרְךָ]?” The objectives of a fast day are a just society in which the oppressed are set free, the poor are cared for, and one’s own kin is served.<sup>24</sup> 58:8-12 then describes the immense blessings that will follow Israel if they execute justice on behalf of the poor, needy, and prisoner. 58:11 says, “you shall be like a watered garden,” perhaps evoking the thematically similar promises of blessing in Leviticus 25:18-19 and Leviticus 26:3-13, which promises agricultural abundance and regular rain if Israel keeps the Sabbaths (i.e. Lev 26:2).

A final link confirming the Sabbath spectrum and Jubilee background of Isaiah 58 is Jesus’ conflation of Isaiah 58:6 and Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19. Since Isaiah 61:1-2 makes a clear Jubilee allusion, Jesus’ conflation is evidence that he himself saw these two passages as describing the same thing: the great day of the Lord would bring about a time of social restoration like the Jubilee was destined to bring about in historical Israel. As already noted, the redemption, Sabbath year, and Jubilee year images are quite intermixed in Isaiah 58. The Sabbath motif of the chapters is punctuated by sabbath-year images like “free” [חֲפֵצִים] and Jubilee images, such as trumpet, favorable day, focus on one’s kin, and the promise of agricultural blessing. Isaiah employs imagery from the entire Sabbath spectrum, looking to the entire humanitarian and economic aspects of the Sabbath spectrum as a principle. Israel keeps Sabbath when it fights against injustice and fights for the poor and needy. When the day of the Lord comes, he will ensure that his redemption is guaranteed by every Israelite having a similar commitment to their brethren.

**Isaiah 61:1-3.** As argued, Isaiah 61:1-3 is part of a wider structure that puts it at the very thematic and structural center of Isaiah 56–66. The two frames immediately around Isaiah 61:1–3 deal with the glory of restored Zion (60:1–22; 61:4; 62:12). The next frames develop the idea of Yahweh as divine warrior (59:15–21; 63:1–6). The result is a sense that the Servant of Isaiah 61:1–3 is the Divine Warrior who will bring about the

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<sup>24</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 481.

restoration of Zion. 61:1a begins with the Servant stating his royal office and his mission: “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, ...” “Anointed” and “sent” are in parallel, indicating that his mission is connected to his royal office. The fact that this is the Servant speaking again is confirmed by the other references to the Servant’s anointing in 42:1 and 48:16.<sup>25</sup> Could it be that the anointed Servant of Isaiah 61:1 is also the anointed Branch of Isaiah 11:1? It seems so since Jesus, who is the new David (i.e., the Branch, cf. Rom 1:3), considers himself to be this very Servant and considers his mission to be the same as this Servant in Isaiah 63:1 (see Luke 4:18-19). This is further supported by the fact that anointing is typically associated with kingship.<sup>26</sup> The mission of this Davidic Servant is not only to tell of the advent of God’s grace that enables the restoration of Zion, but to also be that grace to Israel so that they will become “oaks of righteousness” (Isa 61:3).<sup>27</sup>

Immediately after announcing his anointing, the Servant summarizes his mission as one that will “bring good news to the poor”<sup>28</sup> and will “bind up the brokenhearted.” Then, he describes the specifics of his ministry with seven infinitives. The first three make a direct allusion to the Jubilee:

to proclaim liberty to the captives [לְקַרְא לְשִׁבּוּיִם דְּרוּר] and the opening of the prison to those who are bound [לְאַסְוִירִים פְּקַח־קוּת].<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 200; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 498; contra Childs, who says “nowhere does speaker call himself ‘servant.’” Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 439. This is true but at this point the herald (cf. Isa 52:7, 13-15) and the Servant (Isa 53) are presumed to be one and the same and now Isaiah is just expanding and clarifying the role of the Servant.

<sup>26</sup> E.g., 1 Sam 9:16; 2 Sam 2:7; 19:10; 1 Kgs 1:34; 2 Kgs 9:3.

<sup>27</sup> Oswalt, “Isaiah 60–62,” 158.

<sup>28</sup> The poor (עֲנָוִים) are anyone who is in trouble for any reason. It can include financial distress, oppression, frailty, etc. See Ps 25:16-21 for a context that broadens the meaning of this word.

<sup>29</sup> The translation is somewhat difficult here. Perhaps “and to the bound release;” First, the LXX translates לְאַסְוִירִים as “blind” (τυφλοῖς), although the text is stable and לְאַסְוִירִים is sensible. The LXX

to proclaim the year of the LORD'S favor, [לְקַרְא שְׁנַת־רְצוֹן לַיהוָה]  
and the day of vengeance of our God. [יּוֹם נָקָם לַאֲלֹהֵינוּ]

The use of לְקַרְא ... דְּרוֹר is a direct allusion to Leviticus 25:10.<sup>30</sup> The captives (שְׁבוּיִים) are the nation of Israel in Babylon awaiting redemption from their national debt-slavery. The next line pictures the Israelites being released from prison itself. Then, this Jubilee proclamation is likened to the “year of the Lord’s favor.” Even though the word “favor” (רְצוֹן) is absent from Leviticus 25, this seems a quite fitting description of the Jubilee, which was to be an enigmatic year in which every generation experienced the Lord’s favor again. Then, the next clause goes on to describe this favored Jubilee year as “the day of vengeance.” The juxtaposition of salvation and vengeance in Isaiah is no surprise and it appropriately fits the idea of Yahweh as the kinsman-redeemer who aids the poor, releases kinsman from foreign slavery, and avenges blood. More significantly is the fact that “day” and “year” are parallel. This shows that the term “year” refers to the new age, which will begin on the day of Yahweh. The new age will be characterized by the Lord’s favor, by a jubilee-shaped ethic in which all of Israel enjoys freedom from sin, slavery, and the curse. In keeping with this freedom, Isaiah 63:3 pictures the coming age as one marked by comfort, praise, and righteousness. Verses 4-7 then picture the ruins of Jerusalem being rebuilt, the nations living alongside the Israelites, and Israelites returning to their priestly function of mediating God’s glory to the nations. What brought about this glorious age of joy? The Messiah’s proclamation of Jubilee.

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might have been influenced by Isa 42:7, which uses similar imagery: “To open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.” Second, פָּקַח־קוֹחַ is generally well-attested in the manuscripts yet appears to be a case of dittography for פָּקַח, “open” (cf. Isa 42:7). C contra Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 561, who argues that this is a noun in reduplicated form.

<sup>30</sup> So also Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 500; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 201; Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 565n19. It might be argued that the allusion is to Jer 34:8. However, given Isaiah’s penchant for coloring both the Day of the Lord and the Servant’s mission with Jubilee images, the allusion to Lev 25:10 is more likely and more compelling.

## **Isaiah's Contribution to the Eschatological Jubilee**

Given Isaiah's linking of the trumpet with the great day of the Lord, it is likely that the use of the trumpet to announce Jesus' second coming in Matthew 24:31, 1 Corinthians 15:52, and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is likewise to be read as announcing a Jubilee. This is strengthened by the fact that Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-3 in Luke 4:16-21 and announces that he is the fulfillment of these promises. Isaiah 48:20, 50:1, and 52:3-6 all picture Israel's return from exile as a redemption by Yahweh from debt-slavery. Isaiah 49:7-9 pictures the Servant releasing Israelites from the prison of debt-slavery and subsequently apportioning land back to Israelite families. The parallel with the Jubilee's release and return motif cannot be missed. Isaiah 58:1-14 makes extensive use of Jubilee imagery to note that an appropriate fast on Israel's part is to grant physical release as a celebration of the spiritual release that has been given to all Israel. Isaiah 58 is more concerned with the ethical connotations of the Jubilee, but given that Isaiah 56-66 is thoroughly forward-looking and eschatological, it is not a stretch to see why Jubilee images are wedded into an eschatologically-loaded passage. The Jubilee, by its very nature, looked forward to the time when Yahweh would release all mankind from the curse and return them to their right relationship with the earth. Isaiah 61:1-3 confirms this eschatological interpretation as it equates the day of Yahweh with a Jubilee proclamation. By Isaiah 61:1-3, Isaiah shapes the Jubilee into a type of God's coming restoration of Israel that will happen via a new and second exodus and will result in the ingathering of the nations.

### **The Eschatological Jubilee in 2 Chronicles**

The significance of 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 has already been treated in chapter four.<sup>31</sup> There it was pointed out that the Chronicler paired Jeremiah's prediction of a seventy-year exile (Jer 25:11; 29:10) with the Lord's promise that the land would enjoy

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<sup>31</sup> See chap. 4 of this dissertation, section "Was the Jubilee Ever Practiced?"



its Sabbaths if Israel failed to observe (Lev 26:34-35). It was also observed in this section of chapter four that 499 years had elapsed from the time of Saul to the exile, meaning that the seventy-year length of the exile is a direct fulfillment of Leviticus 26:34-35. Given this data, it seems that the Chronicler views Cyrus' decree as a kind of jubilee-like decree whereby Israel is called to return to their land. William Johnstone adds credence to this suggestion given the way that the Chronicler structures his genealogies. Johnstone argues that Chronicles presents the exiled generation as the fiftieth since Adam.<sup>32</sup>

Johnstone's suggestion is intriguing, especially when Cyrus' edict is considered in light of other ANE decrees of release in which captive peoples were frequently released and allowed to return to their land. While Cyrus' decree is not an eschatological Jubilee, his release of Israel corresponds to the overall Jubilee type and can be viewed as an installment in a series of Jubilee types that foreshadow the great eschatological Jubilee.

### **The Eschatological Jubilee in Ezekiel**

The prophet and priest Ezekiel is a contemporary of both Jeremiah and Daniel who was exiled in 597 BC. His book is one of the most enigmatic books in the canon, both structurally and thematically.<sup>33</sup> The first twenty-four chapters begin with Ezekiel's

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<sup>32</sup> Johnstone argues, "The chronology with which the Chronicler is working makes the exilic generation the 50th since Adam: there are ten generations from Adam to Noah (1 Ch. 1:1-4); ten from Shem to Abraham (1 Ch. 1:17-27); fifteen from Abraham to Solomon; and fifteen from Rehoboam to Josiah (2 Ch. 10-35). With the deduction of one, because Abraham features twice in this sequence, the exilic generation of 'seventy years' is thus the fiftieth since the creation of the human race in Adam. It is surely not far-fetched to see in this the Chronicler's adaptation of the regular proclamation of the 50<sup>th</sup> year as a year of jubilee, as legislated for in Leviticus 25. For that chapter occurs precisely before the coda of the 'Holiness Code' promising definitive eschatological Return to the land to the people who have worked off reparation for their guilt of defrauding God. . . . Recurrent historical jubilees have in the Chronicler's adaptation become the model for the definitive restoration of Israel in the jubilee of the end-time which will have, as in the reign of the perfect king, Solomon, implications of peace for the whole human race." William Johnstone, *2 Chronicles 10-36, Guilt and Atonement*, JSOTSS 254 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 253-54, 274-76 cited in Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 211. See also William Johnstone, "Hope of Jubilee: The Last Word in the Hebrew Bible," *EQ* 72 (2000): 311.

<sup>33</sup> The present work assumes the unity of the book of Ezekiel and Ezekiel's authorship. For a helpful overview of the book and major issues, see C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: Prophetic Books*, updated ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 275-307. Defending the unity of Ezekiel and the prophet's authorship of the book is beyond the scope of this work. The work of Gustav Hölscher was the

vision of the Lord on his chariot-throne and constitute oracles of doom that will befall Judah when the day of the Lord arrives against them. In chapters 8–11, Ezekiel is transported by visions to heaven to see the idolatry of Jerusalem, its coming punishment, and the departure of Yahweh’s glory from the Temple. The oracles of chapters 1–24, including the vision of chapters 8–11, were fulfilled in 586 B.C. with the destruction of the Temple and the city Jerusalem. Ezekiel’s second major section is comprised of chapters 25–32, which take on an eschatological tone as Ezekiel turns to the fate of the nations on the day of the Lord. Ezekiel’s third section pivots past the fall of Jerusalem to a series of oracles and a vision prophesying Israel’s restoration. Chapters 33–39 pictures Yahweh as a divine shepherd who will accomplish Israel’s restoration, give them a new heart, and judge Israel’s greatest enemies. Then, chapters 40–48 introduce Ezekiel’s vision of the new cosmic Temple that is a symbol of the new nation enjoying a new life in God’s presence. Significantly, this cosmic Temple is largely built in multiples of fifty, making it a built-jubilee.

Ezekiel’s priestly background is significant because his book shows a remarkable knowledge of Leviticus. Ezekiel spends time discussing the sacrificial system, cultic regulations, and matters of purity.<sup>34</sup> Ezekiel’s focus on the Temple is even more thorough. Ezekiel’s priestly background shows itself in the book’s literary affinities

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first to doubt the authenticity of Ezekiel, arguing that only 144 lines out of 1235 belonged to the prophet. Gustav Hölscher, *Hesekiel, der Dichter und das Buch*, BZAW 39 (Giessen: Topelmann, 1924), cited in Lawrence Boadt, “Ezekiel,” in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:715. The 1950s saw a movement to date much of Ezekiel’s material to the exilic situation. Walther Zimmerli’s impressive two-volume commentary began to push back against this trend, seeing the core of the book as Ezekiel’s that was then developed by a school of disciples who were faithful to Ezekiel’s original thought. See Walther Zimmerli’s, *Ezekiel 1: Chapters 1-24*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979). Now, critical scholarship has come full circle, treating Ezekiel’s work as a literary whole and attributing most if not all of the book to the hand of Ezekiel. See Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 22 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983). For arguments for Ezekiel’s unity and support for Ezekiel as author, see Leslie C. Allen, *Ezekiel: 20–48*, WBC, vol. 29 (Dallas: Word, 1990), xxv–xxvii.

<sup>34</sup> Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 151. For an in-depth treatment of how Ezekiel handles the Torah, see Terry J. Betts, *Ezekiel the Priest: A Custodian of Tôrâ*, Studies in Biblical Literature 7 (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

and dependence on Leviticus.<sup>35</sup> All of this points to Ezekiel's priestly background. More importantly, it means that his multiple allusions to the laws of redemption and Jubilee are not surprising.

### **Ezekiel's References to Leviticus 25**

The majority of Ezekiel's references to the Jubilee simply employ the language of Leviticus 25. Ezekiel picks up language from Leviticus 25 in order to fill-in the picture of Israel's apostasy or Yahweh's promised restoration. Because these texts are incidental, their value is minimal for developing an overall theology of the Jubilee. Generally speaking, these texts assume the laws of redemption and Jubilee are known and either suspended or will be operative in the restoration.<sup>36</sup> Throughout these references to Leviticus 25, Ezekiel does not explain or expound on their meaning, which means he presumes his readers have knowledge of the laws of redemption and Jubilee. This presumed knowledge argues for the historicity of the Jubilee and indicates that the limitation on business transactions afforded by Leviticus 25 were followed by some up to and beyond the exile.<sup>37</sup>

The first Jubilee reference comes in Ezekiel 7:12-13, which occurs in the middle of a series of woes predicting disaster for Israel on the day of the Lord. Through a parody of the Jubilee laws, Ezekiel 7:12-13 proclaims that the typical responses involving business transactions are not relevant because of the imminence of judgment:<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The nature of Ezekiel's use of Leviticus has filled many tomes in critical scholarship. For Ezekiel's dependence on Leviticus, see Risa Levitt Kohn, *A New Heart and a New Soul: Ezekiel, the Exile, and the Torah* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002). A specific analysis that demonstrates specific dependence is Milgrom's analysis of Ezekiel's use of Lev 26. See Jacob Milgrom, "Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Shemaryahu Talmon (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 57-62.

<sup>36</sup> I am indebted to Bergsma for this list of Lev 25 echoes or allusions. My analysis and conclusions are similar to his but are my own, unless otherwise cited. Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 181-87.

<sup>37</sup> So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 182.

<sup>38</sup> Block calls these verses a "parody" of the Jubilee laws. See Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of*

The time has come; the day has arrived. Let not the buyer [הקונה] rejoice, nor the seller [המוכר] mourn, for wrath is upon all their multitude. For the seller shall not return to what he has sold [לא ישוב], while they live. For the vision concerns all their multitude; it shall not turn back; and because of his iniquity, none can maintain his life.

The idea of returning to land that has been sold presumes the Jubilee law.

Verse 13a, though, reminds one of Leviticus 25:13: “In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property [תָּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחֻזָּתוֹ].” תָּשְׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחֻזָּתוֹ has replaced אֲחֻזָּתוֹ, which is significant given that מִמָּכָר shows up seven times in Leviticus 25 and only twice elsewhere (Deut 18:8; Neh 13:20).<sup>39</sup> The point is that the day of Yahweh will be so destructive that the economy itself will collapse and all emotions involving business transactions will be futile because the transactions themselves are meaningless (see Ezek 7:19). The Jubilee is canceled.

The second reference comes in a note of hope in Ezekiel 11:15, where Yahweh promises in 11:14-25 to give the exiles a new heart. The note of hope begins with a promise to Ezekiel to save his kindred: “Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen [אֶחָיִךָ אֶחָיִךָ אֲנָשֵׁי גִלְתָּיִךָ], the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Go far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.’” The construct phrase אֲנָשֵׁי גִלְתָּיִךָ is unique to Ezekiel and the use of the noun גִּלְתָּיִךָ is somewhat rare, with nine of its fourteen occurrences in Leviticus 25:24–52. Ezekiel’s reference to “redemption-men” first assumes that the laws of redemption were still in practice and secondly, presumes that they will remain in effect at Israel’s restoration. Thus, just as Jeremiah’s purchase of Hanamel’s field in Jeremiah 32 indicated hope of restoration, so Ezekiel’s use of redemption imagery forms a similar hope that the Lord has not revoked his promise to Israel and Babylon is not the final word for the nation.<sup>40</sup>

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*Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 259.

<sup>39</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 182.

<sup>40</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 183.

The next two references to Leviticus 25 are not as significant. In Ezekiel 18:18, the behavior of the righteous is contrasted with the behavior of the unrighteous. A key example of the righteous man is his refusal to collect interest, which is a restatement of Leviticus 25:36–37: “[If a man is righteous and] does not lend at interest or take any profit [וְלֹא יִקַּח].”<sup>41</sup> The next reference is in Ezekiel 34:4, where Ezekiel rebukes the shepherds of Israel for their crimes against the flock. These crimes include the shepherds ruling over Israel with harshness, which is explicitly forbidden in Leviticus 25:43, 46, and 53: “4 The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them [בְּחִזְקָה רָדִיתֶם אֹתָם וּבְפָרֶךְ].” The joining of רָדָה with פָּרַךְ only occurs here, in Exodus 1:13, and three times in Leviticus 25. In fact, it is difficult to separate the imagery from the scene in Exodus 1:13, meaning that this allusion not only indicts the shepherds for breaking the law of Leviticus 25 but equates them to the Egyptian taskmasters from who the Lord initially redeemed Israel.

While the references in Ezekiel 18 and 34 are only passing references to Leviticus 25, the reference in Ezekiel 46:16–18 is more significant as it updates the Jubilee law in light of the established King in the restoration. The text reads:

Thus says the Lord GOD: If the prince makes a gift to any of his sons as his inheritance [נַחֲלָתוֹ], it shall belong to his sons. It is their property [אֲחֻזָּתָם] by inheritance. But if he makes a gift out of his inheritance [מִנַּחֲלָתוֹ] to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year of liberty [עַד־שְׁנַת הַדְּרֹר]. Then it shall revert [שָׁבַת] to the prince; surely it is his inheritance [נַחֲלָתוֹ]—it shall belong to his sons. The prince shall not take any of the inheritance of the people [מִנַּחֲלַת הָעָם], thrusting them out of their property [לְהוֹנֶתֶם מֵאֲחֻזָּתָם]. He shall give his sons their inheritance out of his own property [מֵאֲחֻזָּתוֹ יִנַּחֵל], so that none of my people shall be scattered from his property [מֵאֲחֻזָּתוֹ]. (Ezek 46:16–18)

Ezekiel 46:16–18 is a direct interpretation of Leviticus 25. The “year of liberty [הַדְּרֹר]” is straight from Leviticus 25:10: “And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year [שָׁנָה], and proclaim liberty [וְיִקְרָאתֶם דְּרֹר].” Leviticus 25:14 and 17 both exhort, “You shall not

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<sup>41</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 183, cites similar phrases in Ezek 18:13, 17; 22:22.

wrong [תונון] one another.” The same *hiphil* verb is used in the description, “thrusting them [הונתם] out of their property” in Ezekiel 46:18. That Ezekiel is referring to Leviticus 25 is without a doubt given the repetition of יָנָה in the *hiphil*.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps surprisingly, Ezekiel 46 assumes that the Jubilee is in force on a cyclical basis and presumes the inalienability of Israelite families’ land. As noted, Ezekiel assumes knowledge of the Jubilee and does not take time to explain when it is enacted or the lapse of time before liberty is proclaimed.

### **The Jubilee Shape of Ezekiel’s Cosmic Temple**

Ezekiel 40:1 dates his new temple vision to “the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year [בִּרְאֵשׁ הַשָּׁנָה], on the tenth day of the month.”<sup>43</sup> In other words, Ezekiel receives the vision at a half-period of the Jubilee.<sup>44</sup> Leviticus 25:9 puts the Jubilee proclamation at the same time of year as Ezekiel’s vision: “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.” “The head of the year” (*my translation*) may refer to the Fall when the agricultural year began, or to the Spring, when the civil year began. If it occurred in the Fall, then Ezekiel received the vision on the Day of Atonement (Lev 23:27).<sup>45</sup> If it is the Spring, the tenth day of the first month is the beginning of the Passover Festival (see Exod 12:3). Block argues that “the beginning of

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<sup>42</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 185-86.

<sup>43</sup> If Ezekiel entered exile in 597 BC, then the year is 572 BC, as confirmed by “in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down” in the latter half of 40:1, or 572 BC, which is fourteen years after 586 BC.

<sup>44</sup> So also Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 188; Jan Van Goudoever, “Ezekiel Sees in Exile a New Temple-City at the Beginning of a Jubel Year,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and their Interrelation*, ed. J. Lust, Journées Bibliques de Louvain 74 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 347-49; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: Chapters 25-48*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 346; Block, *Ezekiel 25-48*, 495, 512.

<sup>45</sup> So Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 189.

the year” is the Spring, given that Exodus 12:3 uses the language of “first month,” Leviticus 23:27 uses the language of “seventh month,” and the cleansing rituals in Ezekiel 45:1–25 presume the first month is in the Spring.<sup>46</sup> The significance cannot be missed. At the halfway point of the exile, Ezekiel begins to look forward to God’s restoration of Israel, which Isaiah 27:13 has already prophesied will be announced with the blast of a trumpet and Isaiah 61:1 has clarified will be carried out through the jubilee-like proclamation and ministry of the Servant-Messiah King. As Isaiah 40–55 likens the exile to corporate debt-slavery, so Ezekiel likens his own exile to a fifty-year Jubilee. The fact that this vision likely came at the Passover signals hope that the nation will once again be formed as it was at the first Passover in Egypt. The vision continues to allude to the Jubilee with the Temple proportions, which are often in multiples of twenty-five or fifty. Bergsma argues that the new Temple is a “built Jubilee.”<sup>47</sup> The following is a list in which the Temple and the city’s dimensions are in multiples of twenty-five or fifty:<sup>48</sup>

1. The Eastern temple gate is twenty-five cubits wide (Ezek 40:13) and fifty cubits deep (40:15). These dimensions are identical in the other gates (Ezek 40:21, 23, 27, 36).
2. The lower portion of the outer courtyards are all measured two times fifty (Ezek 40:19, 25, 29, 33).
3. The total number of steps to the hundred-cubit-square inner forecourt is twenty-five (vv. 26, 31, 49).
4. The façade of the north outer court is a hundred cubits wide and fifty cubits deep, like the gates (Ezek 42:2).
5. The north outer court chambers are fifty cubits deep (Ezek 42:8). The wall that leads to them is fifty cubits long (Ezek 42:7) and the passage alongside them is fifty cubits wide (Ezek 42:9-10). Identical chambers are to the south and east (Ezek 42:10-11).

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<sup>46</sup> Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 513.

<sup>47</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 190; John S. Bergsma, “The Restored Temple as ‘Built Jubilee’ in Ezekiel 40–48,” *Proceedings* 24 (2004): 75-85.

<sup>48</sup> This list is a summary of Bergsma’s observations in Bergsma, “The Restored Temple,” 76-78.

6. The wall surrounding the entire complex is five-hundred cubits long on each side (Ezek 42:15-20), which is a tenfold Jubilee.
7. The individual land allotments are 25,000 cubits, which is five-hundred cubits times fifty, the Jubilee number (42:15-20).
8. The open space surrounding the wall is fifty cubits wide (Ezek 45:2).
9. The wall surrounding the holy city is 4,500 cubits (Ezek 48:16) and then the pastureland surrounding the wall is 250 cubits wide (Ezek 48:17). Since 250 would be counted on each end, the total width of the holy city is 5,000 cubits, or a hundredfold Jubilee.

The repetitive concern for social justice in Ezekiel 44:24; 45:8-12; 46:16-18; 47:21-23 confirms this Jubilee shape of New Israel. As Isaiah 58:1-13 made so evident, true Sabbath-keeping and true Jubilee-keeping will make itself known by the presence of justice and righteousness in the nation.

### **The Eschatological Jubilee in Daniel**

Daniel 9:24 is the last passage that employs Jubilee as a type in order to give a Jubilee shape to the great restoration of Israel. Daniel receives a word from the angel Gabriel near the end of the exile that “seventy weeks” are decreed for the people of Israel. These “weeks” represent periods of seven years. “Seventy weeks” therefore refers to 490 years or ten Jubilees, with the implication that the final Jubilee will be an eschatological Jubilee or great Jubilee in which Israel will return to the Lord and receive the inheritance of all of God’s promises.

### **Meaning, Date, and Structure of Daniel**

The book of Daniel is the last of the major prophets in the canon. In the Hebrew Bible, it is placed in the Writings toward the end (before Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles), which separates it from the literary context of the Latter Prophets. While the other major prophets deal with the reality of the impending or present exile, Daniel zooms out to the wider lens of God’s acts within world history. Daniel does not emphasize sin, impending judgment, and repentance like the pre-exilic prophets. Further, while the other major prophets deal with Israel’s ethical issues, Daniel’s concern for



salvation history is indicated by its genre, apocalyptic. Daniel looks back in his visions but also looks forward to the rise and fall of major empires, the end of history, and the establishing of God's kingdom. Like Esther and Lamentations, Daniel focuses on the difficulty of exile. The book paints a picture of faithfulness in exile, yet exhorts that faithfulness through delivering the faithful and giving a vision of God's rule over the future.<sup>49</sup> The impression which Daniel leaves is that God is in absolute control of history, despite the present evil circumstances. As will be shown below, Daniel 9:24–27 paints the entire plan of salvation history with a jubilee-hued scheme.

The date of Daniel is not without controversy. Conservative scholars date the book to Daniel's lifetime.<sup>50</sup> Daniel goes into exile in 605 BC and lives there until roughly 536 BC (cf. 1:1, 21; 6:28), where he works in both the Babylonian and Persian governments. Jesus treats the book as historic and cites Daniel as the author (Matt 24:4), giving sufficient reason to assume a sixth-century date for Daniel and that its narrative and visions are credible, original to Daniel, and prophetic. Even if Daniel were written by a Maccabean in the second century BC, the use of the Jubilee as a type in Daniel 9:24–27 would still be present.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 332.

<sup>50</sup> For an excellent overview of the main issues and an extensive bibliography, see Stephen R. Miller, *Daniel*, NAC, vol. 18 (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 22–42. Representative of the conservative position include E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949); John F. Walvoord, *Daniel: The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971); James M. Hamilton, *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2014), 35–40; Joyce Baldwin, *Daniel*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1978).

<sup>51</sup> Critical scholarship favors a second century date for Daniel's composition. Critical scholars argue that Daniel's position within the Writings indicates that it was written later as does its apocalyptic genre and its mixed composition in Hebrew and Aramaic (Aramaic 2:4b–7:28; Heb 1:1–2:4a, and 8:1–12:13). For a standard exposition of the critical view which dates Daniel to the second-century Maccabean period (including an extensive review and bibliography of literature on the subject), see Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary, vol. 20 (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2002), 306–14. Further, an *a priori* opposition to prophecy and assumption that prophecies must have been written *vaticinium ex eventu* ("prophecy from the event") causes critical scholars to disregard an early date for Daniel. Instead, because the last historical details match those of the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ca. 175–63 BC), the book is dated to the second-century Maccabean period (e.g., Childs, *Introduction to the*

Daniel's genre is apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is marked by a future-orientation, the use of symbolic language, and a concern with God's sovereignty over the unfolding of history.<sup>52</sup> Despite the often otherworldly feel of apocalyptic Scripture, the text of Daniel is strongly tied to Scripture that preceded it, which Daniel 9 exemplifies. Structurally, Daniel 9 falls in the first-person apocalyptic section (Daniel 7-12). The debates concerning Daniel's structure are beyond the scope of this present work. It is sufficient to note that the present author follows Hamilton in seeing a correspondence between the vision of four kingdoms in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7-9 since both cover the entire scope of world history.<sup>53</sup>

### Daniel's Prayer

Daniel 9 begins with one of the most beautiful prayers of repentance recorded

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*Old Testament*, 611; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 213.).

<sup>52</sup> For more on the nature of apocalyptic literature, see Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of Apocalyptic: A Study of Jewish and Christian Apocalypses from Daniel to the Revelation* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1980).

<sup>53</sup> At first glance, one is struck by the difference between the third-person narrative section (Daniel 1-6) and the first-person apocalyptic section (Daniel 7-12). Because chapter 7 is parallel to chapter 2, the book is easily separated into two major sections based on genre: 1-7 and 8-12. However, this ignores the differing Hebrew and Aramaic sections. Joyce Baldwin has proposed that the Aramaic section (Dan 2:4a-7:28) is structured as a chiasm with chapters 4-5 forming the center, chapters 3/6 forming the secondary level, and chapters 2/7 forming the outer level. See Joyce G. Baldwin, "Daniel, Theology of," in *NIDOTTE*, ed. William A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:502-3. Andrew Steinmann has argued for two chiasms (1-7 and 7-12) that makes chapter 7 a hinge at the center of the book. See Andrew E Steinmann, *Daniel*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2008), 21-25. Hamilton and Goldingay have proposed two separate whole-book chiasms. Goldingay places chapter 6 at the center while Hamilton places chapters 4-5 at the center. Hamilton's chiasm is more compelling because it takes into account the correspondences between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar in chapters 4-5 and the visions of four kingdoms in chapters 2 and 7-9. Both Goldingay and Hamilton rightly see chapters 2 and 9 as parallel chapters since both constitute a vision of the future, although Hamilton's chiasm helpfully brings in the whole of chapters 7-9 so that the four kingdoms are parallel. Others see double chiasmic structures in the book, although they differ in their details. Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 77-83 provides an excellent overview and critique of proposals. Examples include Daniel W. Gooding, "The Literary Structure of the Book of Daniel and Its Implications," *Tyndale Bulletin* 32: 43-80 (1981); 43-80, esp. 52; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 533.

in the entire Bible. In Daniel 9:1-2, the prophet reports that he was reading Jeremiah's prophecy regarding seventy years of exile during the first year of Darius.<sup>54</sup> As discussed in chapter four, Jeremiah 25:11 prophesies that the desolations of Jerusalem would last seventy years. Jeremiah 29:10-14 predicts that Israel's fortunes would be restored at the end of this exile. While Daniel reports "and there was no understanding" (וְאֵין מִבִּין, *my translation*) at the end of the vision of the two beasts in chapter 8, he "understood" (בִּינְתִי) in 9:2. As Daniel looked to Scripture, he observes that Jeremiah predicted seventy years for the exile and concludes that the appointed time of restoration has arrived. In other words, with the ascent of Darius and the defeat of Babylon, Daniel expects the end of the exile to be drawing to a close and Israel's restoration to the land to begin. Daniel was exiled in 605 BC and Cyrus issued his decree in 538/537 BC (cf. Ezra 1:1; 2 Chron 36:20–23). This means that Daniel calculates the passing of sixty-eight years as a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, roughly equivalent to the prophesied 70 years, which Daniel appears to have interpreted as a round approximation.<sup>55</sup>

Jeremiah's prophecy of return was conditional upon Israel's repentance: "Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me

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<sup>54</sup> The identity of the one called Darius is heavily debated, but there is good reason to believe this is alternative name for Cyrus. Others propose that Darius is the general or gubaru who first attacked Babylon. For a discussion of views, see Harold Henry Rowley, *Darius the Mede and the Four World Empires in the Book of Daniel: A Historical Study of Contemporary Theories* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1959), 30-43 and John J. Collins, *Daniel, Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 348; Steinmann, *Daniel*, 293-96; Donald J. Wiseman, "Some Historical Problems in the Book of Daniel," in *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*, ed. D. J. Wiseman (London: Tyndale, 1965), 9-18.

<sup>55</sup> It has been suggested that seventy is simply an approximate number for a lifetime. See Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 123; Tremper Longman III, *Daniel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1999), 222. Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 106-7, argues that seventy years represents a typical human lifespan on the basis of Psalm 90:10 and Isaiah 23:15-17. Psalm 90:10 assigns seventy years to the typical human lifespan and Isaiah 23:15 decrees seventy years until the Lord visits Tyre again. Isa 23:15 refers to these seventy years as "the days of one king." Gerald Wilson provides a helpful explanation of Daniel's logic: "Dan 1.2 assumes that Jehoiakim and the temple vessels were carried into exile in the 'third year of Nebuchadnezzar' or 605 B.C.E. It is suggestive that once this move is made, the interval between Nebuchadnezzar's profanation of the temple and the recitation of the prayer of Dan 9 in the first year of Darius, son of Ahasuerus (538 B.C.E.) is sixty-eight years." See Gerald H. Wilson, "The Prayer of Daniel 9: Reflection on Jeremiah 29," *JSOT* 48 (1990): 91-99, cited in Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 216n39.

and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:12-13). This same condition is expressed in Leviticus 26:39-42:

And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies’ lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them. But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

Deuteronomy 4:29-31 makes the same exact conditional promise:

But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice. For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.

Because Israel’s restoration is conditioned upon repentance, Daniel turns toward Jerusalem and asks God for mercy and offers repentance for Israel’s sins (Dan 9:3–5). In verses 6-12, Daniel cites the waywardness, shame, and disobedience of Israel. As Daniel cites Israel’s sin, he contrasts it with Yahweh’s mercy, forgiveness, and faithfulness, even in judging and exiling Israel as he promised (Dan 9:12). In 9:13-15, Daniel reports that “we have not entreated the favor of the Lord our God” (9:13) and recalls how Yahweh once “brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand” (9:15). Daniel concludes the prayer in 9:16–19 with requests for God to turn away from his wrath, listen to his prayer, and to restore Israel to Jerusalem. He bases his pleas for restoration on Yahweh’s self-interest: “for your own sake” (9:17); on Yahweh’s character: “not ... because of our righteousness, but because of your great mercy” (9:18); and on Yahweh’s reputation: “because your city and your people are called by your name” (9:19).

The prayer continues to verse 19 and has several important allusions to previous Scripture which help reveal Daniel’s strategy. First, Daniel references Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the Temple from 1 Kings 8:47, “We have sinned

and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled” (Dan 9:5). Just as Solomon prayed for God to show mercy on Israel during their future exile (1 Kgs 8:46-53), so now Daniel prays for that very mercy to be granted as the end of the exile nears. Second, Daniel repeats language from Leviticus 26:39-42, demonstrating his knowledge of this text and his understanding that restoration was dependent on Israel’s repentance: “fathers” in Dan 9:6, 16b recalls Lev 26:39b and “confessing” in Dan 9:4, 20 recalls “they shall confess” from Leviticus 26:40ba.<sup>56</sup> Third, the prayer is full of language from Deuteronomy, which allows Daniel to tactfully call Yahweh to remember his covenant. Goldingay reports the following correspondences between Daniel’s prayer and Deuteronomy:

Among Deuteronomistic motifs in the prayer are terms such as *שוב*, *אהב*, *תורה*, *חסד*, and *היום* (‘commitment,’ ‘teaching,’ ‘love,’ ‘[re]turn,’ and ‘today’), the significance attached to Moses, kings, and prophets as scribes, hearers, and preachers of Yahweh’s instruction (i.e., Deuteronomy itself) (vv 6, 8, 10, 11, 13), the phrase ‘as it is written,’ the idea of the curse, the references to Yahweh’s name (vv 18, 19), the actual use of the name, and the stress on shame and scorn (vv 7, 8, 16: *בשח* and *חרפה* do not come in Deuteronomy itself, but for the idea, see, e.g., 22:13–21; 24:10–11; 25:3, 9; 27:16).<sup>57</sup>

Daniel understands that “the seventy years of Babylon” have come to an end, yet also understands that restoration has not come because Israel has not repented as they ought. As a result, Daniel attempts an exemplary prayer of repentance on behalf of the entire nation: “As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this calamity has come upon us; yet we have not entreated the favor of the LORD our God, turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth.” Toward the end of his prayer, Daniel petitions the Lord to deliver them using language from the exodus: “And now, O LORD our God, who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand.” Daniel is looking for Yahweh to bring about the promised new exodus. Israel’s restoration would be like the first exodus, but much greater. Hamilton describes the first exodus as a template for Israel’s restoration after the exile:

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<sup>56</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 217.

<sup>57</sup> Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC, vol. 30 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 234

The exodus from Egypt became the template for the prophesied new act of salvation by which Yahweh would bring his people back from exile. This note is sounded in Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple (1 Kgs 8:42, 51, 53), and the prophets pick up on it and promise that the new salvation will eclipse the old (e.g. Jer 16:14-15, 23:7-8).<sup>58</sup>

Daniel 9:20-23 reports the coming of Gabriel to give Daniel "insight and understanding."

In other words, Gabriel comes to explain when Israel's restoration will happen.

### **Daniel 9:24-27**

Gabriel's message to Daniel comprises a summary statement regarding the decreed seventy weeks in verse 24 with verses 25-27 providing more detail on how the seventy weeks will unfold throughout salvation history. The first phrase of Daniel 9:24 begins with a direct answer to Daniel's implied question in his prayer, "How long?" The angel Gabriel answers: "Seventy weeks are decreed [נְהַתְּךָ שְׁבַע עָשָׂר בָּעֵיִם] about your people and your holy city." (Dan 9:24a). The repetition of both "people" and "city" recalls Daniel's "your city and your people" from 9:19. Gabriel answers that Israel's period of punishment will be extended sevenfold, extending from seventy years to seventy times seven years or 490 years. The "seven" is to be read as a period of seven years. Since "week" is a period of time involving seven-units, modern translations often translate "seventy sevens" as "seventy weeks." The idea of a "week" standing in symbolically for a period of seven years was established in the Jubilee: "You shall count seven weeks of years [שָׁנִים שְׁבַתֹת שָׁבַע], seven times seven years [שָׁבַע שָׁנִים שְׁבַע], so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years" (Lev 25:8).<sup>59</sup> Although Daniel 9:24 literally reads "seventy sevens" and Leviticus 25:9 literally reads "seven sabbaths," the idea is that each Sabbath week or instance of seven refers to the elapsing of seven years. This seven-fold multiplication is not surprising as it is exactly what Leviticus 26:18 promises if Israel does not repent: "And if in spite of [these punishments] you will

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<sup>58</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 108.

<sup>59</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 225-26.

not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins.”<sup>60</sup> This principle is repeated in Leviticus 26:21, 24, and 28. Although the promise of exile follows later in the covenant curses (Lev 26:40-43), it appears that the sevenfold principle is applied to the extension of Israel’s exile in Daniel 9:24.<sup>61</sup>

The significance of the number 490 is increased when it is considered that 490 represents a tenfold Jubilee: forty-nine times ten adds up to 490 years.<sup>62</sup> It has already been shown how Isaiah pictured the onset of Israel’s restoration as a great Jubilee. The new exodus would commence with the sounding of the great Jubilee trumpet (Isa 27:13) and the Messiah’s jubilee-like proclamation of freedom (Isa 61:1-3) would cause Israel to be released from the bondage of exile. Ezekiel linked the rebuilding of Israel’s Temple with the onset of the Jubilee (Ezek 40:1) and imagined the Temple of this great restoration as a cosmic Temple that imbued the whole Temple complex with a Jubilee character. Likewise, the angel Gabriel’s pronouncement in Daniel 9:24 decrees that the restoration will commence at a great tenfold Jubilee.

The seventy years is meant to be interpreted as a symbolic reference to the extension of Israel’s punishment and the future scheme of salvation history. The extension of the exile by sevenfold is theologically informed, not chronologically informed. Ezekiel’s sign act in Ezekiel 4:1-6 likewise uses a theologically informed number that is not literal. The prophet Ezekiel was commanded to symbolize Israel’s punishment by lying on his side for 390 days for Israel and then forty days for Judah (Ezek 4:1-6). Each day represents a year of punishment via the exile, yet Israel was not punished for 430 years.

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<sup>60</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 220; Lucas, *Daniel*, 241.

<sup>61</sup> So also Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 105; Goldingay, *Daniel*, 257.

<sup>62</sup> A number of scholars have linked the number 490 to ten Jubilees. See Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 126; Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 220; Peter J. Gentry, “Daniel’s Seventy Weeks and the New Exodus,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 34; Andrew Shead, “An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 61, no. 1 (April 2002): 27-28.

Instead, the total number of days/years corresponds to Israel's 430 years in Egypt. By comparing Israel's judgment in Babylon to Israel's stay in Egypt, Ezekiel anticipates that Yahweh will deliver Israel in a new exodus just as he delivered them in the exodus from Egypt.<sup>63</sup> Just as the 430 years in Ezekiel 4:5–6 hold symbolic value, so the seventy weeks in Daniel likewise hold symbolic value. As Ezekiel's 430 number is a symbolic number that represents an appointed period of time, so also the seventy weeks in Daniel 9:24 are a symbolic number that represents the passing of an appointed period of time.<sup>64</sup> In addition, both Ezekiel 4:5–6 and Daniel 9:24 signify the appointed period of time by using a literal historical number to make a theological point. As Hamilton helpfully argues, both Ezekiel 4:5–6 and Daniel 9:24 predict that an appointed period of time must pass before the second exodus happens:

In both texts the value of the years is symbolic, not literal. The 430 years of Ezekiel 4:5–6 indicate that just as an appointed amount of time passed before the exodus from Egypt, an appointed period of time will pass before the new exodus fulfillment. Similarly, the seventy weeks of Daniel 9:24–27 indicate that just as liberty was proclaimed in Israel in the year of jubilee, at the ultimate tenfold jubilee the captives will go free, the land inheritance will be enjoyed and clan fellowship renewed.<sup>65</sup>

The theological significance of the seventy weeks is explicated in the rest of verse 24 and verses 25–27. The outcome of the seventy weeks is described with six infinitive phrases in the final half of verse 24: “Seventy weeks are decreed [שְׁבַעִים בָּעֵימָּה] about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place” (Dan 9:24). The first three infinitives of verse 24 indicate that this extended period of time is simultaneously a time of punishment and

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<sup>63</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 124. Hamilton also cites Isa 52:4 and Hos 11:5 as examples that hold the exile in Babylon as parallel to Israel's time in Egypt. Isa 11:16 likewise compares the Babylonian exile with the Egyptian sojourn and compares the Egyptian exodus with the new exodus from Assyria (i.e., Babylon).

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 126.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 126.



restoration: “to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity.”<sup>66</sup> It seems that these things will come to place at the end of 490 years at the onset of the great tenfold Jubilee. The first two infinitives, “to finish the transgression” and “to put an end to sin” may imply that the seventy-week period will be marked by transgression and sin. Israel will require 490 years to finish her rebellion.<sup>67</sup> The third infinitive, “to atone for iniquity,” reminds the reader of the suffering servant’s grief-bearing atonement in which “he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5).<sup>68</sup> As argued above, this suffering servant is the Davidic Messiah who will release the captives through a jubilee-like proclamation of good news. The last three infinitive clauses turn to the positive outcomes of Israel’s sevenfold 490-year discipline.<sup>69</sup> Israel’s restoration will be characterized by the everlasting reign of righteousness because the Davidic Messiah will reign in righteousness (Isa 11:4). The tapestry of prophetic predictions spread across the Scriptures will be sealed, in other words, vindicated. Finally, “to anoint a most holy place” signifies the rebuilding of the Temple and the return of God’s presence. As Ezekiel portrays, this Temple will be cosmic in scope and jubilee-like in its proportion. As John portrays, it will descend from heaven, join to the earth, transform the heavens and the earth, and usher in the glorious reign of God’s kingdom on earth.

While 9:24 focuses on the outcome of Israel’s extended period of punishment, 9:25-27 focuses on some significant events that are decreed to happen in the intervening time. Daniel 9:25-27 is some of the most debated verses in all of Scripture. Generally

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<sup>66</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 220.

<sup>67</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 220.

<sup>68</sup> Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 220.

speaking, interpreters either read the seventy weeks as symbolic or as literal. Within each of these camps, there is also debate about the terminus of the seventy weeks. The terminus is typically identified either with the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a key moment in the life of Jesus, or Jesus' second coming.<sup>70</sup>

The most compelling view argues that the 490 years are symbolic years that extend from Cyrus' decree in 538 BC to the second advent of Jesus.<sup>71</sup> In this scheme, the first seven-weeks extends through the ministry of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi. This view reads 9:25, "to the coming of an anointed one there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks," (my translation) to mean that the "anointed one" in 9:25 is the same as the cut-off "anointed one" in 9:26.<sup>72</sup> This scheme also allows for the rebuilding of the second Temple: "it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time" after the seven-week period, after which a sixty-two week period passes to the coming of Jesus, who is the anointed one and the prince. The second half of verse 26 refers to the Roman's destruction of the city and Temple in AD 70: "And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed." Then, the final week set forth in Daniel

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<sup>70</sup> The first view argues that the 490 years are literal years that extend from Jeremiah's prophecy (i.e., "decree, Jer 25:11) in 605 BC to the persecution of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in either 164 or 163 BC. See James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 393. The second view argues that the 490 years are literal years. In this view, the first sixty-nine weeks extends from the decree to Ezra in 458 BC to Jesus' baptism in AD 26, with the first period of seven weeks terminating in 409 BC when Nehemiah's ministry had ended. The seventieth week finished at Jesus' second advent. This view is espoused by Miller, *Daniel*, 257-73. A popular variation of this view dates the first sixty-nine weeks from Artaxerxes' decree to Nehemiah in 445 BC to Jesus' death in 32 BC, with a gap awaiting the 70<sup>th</sup> week to be fulfilled in the tribulation. See Harold W Hoehner, "Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, Pt 6: Daniel's Seventy Weeks and New Testament Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 525 (January 1975): 47-65. The third view argues that the 490 years are symbolic years that extend from Cyrus' decree in 538 BC to release the exiles until the time of Jesus. See Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, 203-21.

<sup>71</sup> See Baldwin, *Daniel*, 168-77; Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 113-34.

<sup>72</sup> This translation of Dan 9:25 requires the *athnach* in the text to be read as conjunctive, not disjunctive. As argued by Hamilton, the Old Greek, Theodotion, CSB, AV, NASB, NET, and NIV all render the clause as "seven weeks and sixty=two weeks." Hamilton, *With the Clouds*, 114.

9:27 describes the great seven-year tribulation and the ascent of the Antichrist, who is typified by the fourth kingdom: “And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

One of the strengths of this reading is that it allows the major periods to match the major movements of biblical history without having to rely on literal counting schemes, which remain heavily debated and problematic. A second strength is that this reading allows for the promised “atonement” and “everlasting righteousness” of Daniel 9:24 to be ushered in after the sixty-ninth week at Jesus’ second coming. Second, the jubilee-shape signified by the number 490 adds support for identifying the seventieth week as the period before Jesus’ second coming. The prophecy of Isaiah 61 most clearly shows the Messiah bringing healing to the captive people of God. Paul seems to have picked up on this when he described Jesus’ second advent as one that is accompanied by the sound of great trumpets, which is perhaps an allusion to the Jubilee itself (e.g., 1 Cor 15:52; 1 Thess 4:16). The probability that this is an allusion gains support when it is recalled that Jesus himself considered the Messiah’s jubilee-like release to have been fulfilled at the advent of his ministry (Luke 4:17-21).

### **Daniel’s Contribution to the Eschatological Jubilee**

Daniel 9:24-27 are simultaneously some of the most beautiful and obscure verses in all of the Scripture. However one interprets the seventy weeks, it is clear that these seventy weeks carry a jubilee-shape. The strength of the symbolic reading allows that Jubilee-shape to take even more form as it is much more natural to date the end of the seventy weeks to the second coming of Jesus, an event which itself carries resonance with the Jubilee. However one puts together these beautiful and gracious truths of the Christian hope, Daniel 9:24 shapes that hope in light of the release and restoration that

are part-and-parcel of the Jubilee. As argued in chapter four, the hope of release in the Jubilee caused the drama of it to have a natural forward-looking perspective that caused all of God's people to long for the ultimate tenfold Jubilee which the historical Jubilee typified.

### **Conclusion**

While different imagery is employed by Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel, there is a unity to the composite picture that is striking. After an extended period of time, the Lord will deliver Israel, simultaneously, from both physical bondage and spiritual bondage. This deliverance was typified in the Jubilee and reaches its fulfillment in Jesus' jubilee-like release. As Israel was set to experience the joining of spiritual and physical release every generation through the conflation of the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee, so Israel will once again enjoy the ultimate spiritual and physical release through the announcement of a Jubilee and the atonement of their sins. This Jubilee will also release the earth from the curse of the Fall, restoring the land, man, and God back to their right and harmonious relationship. The earth will once again be the Temple where God dwells with man. The historical Jubilee is a type of the great Jubilee and Jesus proves himself to be the ultimate brother kinsman-redeemer who offers redemption to all the clans of the world.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has covered, to the author's knowledge, every major text in the Old Testament which mentions, elaborates, alludes to, or echoes the Jubilee. The hope is that this dissertation fills the gap in evangelical thinking on the Jubilee, both in the academy and in the church. Chapter 1 provided a thorough review of research on the topic of Jubilee, concluding that an evangelical treatment of the topic in the Old Testament was necessary

As stated in chapter 1, this dissertation argues that the Jubilee is (1) a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure, recalled the Sabbath rest of creation, and reenacted Yahweh's liberation of Israel from Egypt; and (2) a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah. A review of the eight observations from chapter 1 and the major points that support each is in order so as to provide a brief and coherent theology of the Jubilee. Observations 1–6 support the first half of the thesis while observations 7–8 support the second half.

#### **Observation 1: Ancient Law**

The first observation places the biblical Jubilee as an ancient law given in Leviticus 25:1–55 by Moses to pre-settlement Israel. The core of this argument is made in chapter two, where parallel laws in the ANE are surveyed. The widespread existence of laws of redemption, laws limiting debt-slavery, and freedom proclamations which released land, debts, and persons together testify that the Jubilee legislation could have been given in the time of Moses. General arguments made at the end of chapter 4 for authorship of the Pentateuch by Moses, the unity of Leviticus, and the settlement context

of Israel likewise contribute to the likelihood that the Jubilee law was given in its whole during Moses' time. Finally, Ezekiel's incidental references to Leviticus 25 in Ezekiel 7:12–13, 11:15, 18:18, 34:4, and 46:16–18 indicate that the Jubilee was known before the exile and that its concepts were part-and-parcel of Israel's conceptual categories. The fact that Ezekiel 46:16–18 adds an addendum to the legislation of Leviticus 25 further indicates the practicality of the Jubilee and argues against any attempts to argue that it was merely a utopian law.

### **Observation 2: Sabbath Rest**

The second observation considers that the biblical Jubilee was a remembrance of the Sabbath rest mankind enjoyed at creation. Chapter 3 develops a theology of the Sabbath in the Pentateuch by looking at the Sabbath spectrum of Israel. The argument begins by looking at God's creation rest in Genesis 2:1–3, where it was argued that God's creation rest was a Sabbath. The six-plus-one principle of God's rest is picked up by Israel's Sabbaths in Exodus 20:8–11 and applied to the Sabbath day, Sabbath year, and the Jubilee. Significantly, Deuteronomy 5:12–15 also connects the Sabbath to the Exodus. Although the text does not make this explicit, there is a conceptual similarity with the emergence of the dry land and freedom to worship God given in the creation account that is paralleled in the Exodus and then in each Sabbath, culminating in the Jubilee. It is the Jubilee that releases debts, land, and Israelites, ensuring that every Israelite is free to worship God and enjoy the covenant on their god-given plot of land.

### **Observation 3: Capstone of Social Justice**

The third observation considers that the biblical Jubilee was the capstone of Israel's system of social justice that was intended to preserve, on a cyclical and generational basis, Israel's kinship structure and egalitarian system of land tenure. Chapter 2 showed that the chief characteristics of Israel's land was the dual ownership by Yahweh and Israel (with a focus on individual Israelites owning their individual plot of

land), the inalienability of the land, and the land's equitable distribution to every Israelite. The equitable distribution to each family-unit ("the father's house") meant that family and land were intimately tied together. As such, the Jubilee sought to preserve this land and family structure, ensuring that once a generation, each family would regain the rights to live on and work their land once again (Lev 25:8–12).

An essential piece of the argument is the nature of the sabbath-year release. Chapter 2 concluded that the עֶבֶד עֵבֶרִי of Exodus 21:2 is a gentile (Israelite slave). Chapter 3 continued this argument in the context of Deuteronomy 15:12, arguing that the הָעֶבְרִיָּה וְהָעֶבֶד of Deuteronomy 15:12 refers to male and female Israelite dependent debt-slaves. This is an important and essential distinction as the Jubilee does not release debt-slaves. Instead, it releases the head of household, the *pater familias*, who does not serve as a debt-slave but as a hired worker.

An in-depth analysis of the laws of redemption in Leviticus 25:39–55 further demonstrated that the practice of redemption alone was not sufficient to protect families from the permanent loss of their land. Thus, the Jubilee serves as a necessary override to the practice of redemption and as a necessary complement to the practice of sabbath-year debt and debt-slave release. The Jubilee literally allows every Israelite family to start over on their god-given plot of land once a generation. In this way, the Jubilee serves as the capstone of Israel's system of social justice. It is the proverbial linchpin which holds the social and economic structure of Israel together.

#### **Observation 4: Torah Celebration**

The fourth observation argues that the biblical Jubilee was a celebration of God's giving of the *Torah* at Mount Sinai. The Jubilee was announced via the blowing of a *shofar* horn. It is from this horn, described in Joshua 6:5 as a יֹבֵל, from which the Jubilee received its name. The blowing of this horn signaled the presence of Yahweh and the agency of Yahweh as redeemer to once again constitute his people. In this way, the sound of the Jubilee remembered the blowing of the שֹׁפָר trumpets on Mount Sinai

(Exodus 19:13, 16), the most pivotal time when the presence of Yahweh gave Israel its law and when Yahweh acted as a redeemer to constitute his people as a “kingdom of priests.” (Ex 19:6). Chapter 3 also reviewed the required reading of the law on the Sabbath year at the Feast of Booths (Deuteronomy 31:9–13), arguing that this reading of the law allowed every generation of Israel to experience the giving of the law every seven years, as the Exodus generation had at Sinai. The pairing of the Feast of Booths, the trumpets, and the reading of the law allowed Israel to celebrate and enjoy once again the giving of the *Torah* at Mount Sinai.

### **Observation 5: Exodus Drama**

The fifth observation recognizes that the biblical Jubilee was a reenactment of the Exodus redemption. The Exodus is cited as the reason or ground that Israel is to redeem one another from debt and slavery in Deuteronomy 15:15; Leviticus 25:42; and Leviticus 25:55. The redemption laws likewise echo the language of the Exodus by using the verb נָצַח in Leviticus 25:28, 38, 42, and 55. The intentionally allusive language of “rule over” (Deut 15:6), “cry out” (Deut 15:9), and “ruthlessly” (פָּרַח) in Leviticus 25:43 alludes to Israel’s enslaved condition in Exodus 1:13–14. The requirement that an Israelite master provision a released debt-slave before he departs (Deut 15:13–15) directly cites the Exodus and mirrors Israel’s plundering of Egypt (Exod 12:35, which likewise recalls and reenacts the Exodus. When this evidence is put together, the Jubilee year uniquely brought together multiple dramatic elements that all individually recalled certain components of the Exodus story. Each generation was given the opportunity to experience the fullness of Yahweh’s exodus-redemption as had the first generation. The Jubilee allowed all these elements to happen at once, using ritual to create a multi-act drama. This dramatic remembrance of the Exodus, Sinai law-giving, and conquest of Canaan inculcated in every Israelite a trust in Yahweh and caused them to anticipate the day when Yahweh would redeem not just Israel, but the entire cosmos.



### **Observation 6: Spiritual Forgiveness**

The sixth observation points out that the biblical Jubilee was a category that shaped and informed the meaning of spiritual forgiveness in ancient Israel. The connection between the Jubilee and the Day of Atonement is two-fold. First, the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee are connected structurally within Leviticus. The Day of Atonement provides the means by which the divine presence can dwell with Israel while the Jubilee provides the means by which Israel is guaranteed to dwell in the divine presence throughout their generations. The second connection is in timing. The Jubilee was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, making a conceptual connection between spiritual liberation and physical liberation. By positioning the Jubilee on the Day of Atonement, Israelites are reminded that their greatest problem is spiritual debt and slavery, not physical debt and slavery. The LXX perhaps picks up on this connection, translating both *דָּרוֹר* of Leviticus 25:10 and the *שְׁמִטָּה* of Deuteronomy 15:1 with the accusative *ἄφεσις* and *יִכָּל* with the genitive *ἀφέσεως*. This homogenizing of terms shows that the LXX translator made a verbal and conceptual connection between the release of the Sabbath and Jubilee year and the release of the Day of Atonement.

### **Observation 7: Second Exodus**

The seventh observation notes that the biblical Jubilee was a key motif amplified by the prophetic expectation of the second Exodus. The drama of release and return that are part-and-parcel of the Jubilee are picked up and applied by the prophets. Particularly, as the Jubilee recalled the Exodus redemption, it also anticipated a future redemption, a redemption from exile in Babylon. Isaiah 40–66 makes use of both redemption metaphors and Jubilee allusions to give hope to Israelites that their exile will not be final. By the use of these metaphors and allusions, Isaiah explains the exile as a period of debt-slavery from which Yahweh redeems them and returns them to their land. The root *גָּאַל* occurs twenty-two times in Isaiah 40–66 with the Lord bearing the title of

“Redeemer” thirteen times.<sup>1</sup> Three separate passages extend the metaphor of redemption to its logical counterpart, redemption from debt-slavery: Isaiah 48:20; 50:1; and 52:3–6. All three of these passages liken Israel’s exile to debt-slavery and liken Israel’s release from exile to the practice of redemption.

### **Observation 8: Type of Redemption**

The final observation is that the biblical Jubilee is a type of God’s coming eschatological redemption. Four passages in Isaiah extend the redemption—from-slavery metaphor to its logical end by including Jubilee themes as well. Isaiah 27:13 pictures Israel being called to return from the nations to Jerusalem via the blowing of a great שׁוֹפָר trumpet. The correspondence between the horns, release, and return set up the Jubilee as a type that anticipates the shape of the second exodus, which is tantamount to Israel’s restoration and the fulfillment of all of God’s promises. Isaiah 40–55 likewise picks up the Jubilee, extending the redemption-from-slavery metaphor to the similar conceptual ideas of release and return, which typologically escalates the drama of the Jubilee. Isaiah 49:7–9 pictures the Servant as an enactor of a Jubilee and describes the second exodus with jubilee motifs. Isaiah 58:5–6 contrasts two types of fasting, a contrast which condemns false piety and celebrates jubilee-like social justice. The Messiah-King servant of Isaiah 61:1–3 announces the specifics of his ministry with seven infinitives, three of which make a direct allusion to the Jubilee. The parallel with the Jubilee’s release and return motif cannot be missed. given that Isaiah 56–66 is thoroughly forward-looking and eschatological, it is not a stretch to see why Jubilee images are wedded into an eschatologically-loaded passage. The Jubilee, by its very nature, looked forward to the time when Yahweh would release all mankind from the curse and return them to their right relationship with the earth. Isaiah 61:1–3 confirms this eschatological interpretation

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<sup>1</sup> Bergsma, *The Jubilee*, 192. Isa 41:14, 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:9; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 62:12; 63:4, 9, 16.

as it equates the day of Yahweh with a Jubilee proclamation.

Ezekiel and Daniel likewise look to the Jubilee as a type of the coming restoration, although their use of the type focuses not on the categories of release and return, but instead on the numbering scheme of the Jubilee. First, Ezekiel 40:1 pictures a vision of a jubilee-like cosmic temple coming to the prophet twenty-five years into the exile and perhaps on the Day of Atonement. This year marker signifies that Ezekiel receives the vision at a half-period of the Jubilee. This is confirmed by the content of the vision, especially in Ezekiel 40 and 42, where the dimensions of the Temple are set in multiples of twenty-five or fifty. The result is that the cosmic temple has a Jubilee shape, which indicates that Israel's restoration from exile will be like a great Jubilee (cf. Isa 27:13) and that the result will usher in the Edenic conditions the Jubilee anticipated. The prophet Daniel, likewise, decrees that Israel's glorious restoration will come after a period of seventy weeks. This seventy weeks is a period of 490 years, which is equivalent to a sevenfold extension of the exile because Israel did not repent (see Jer 29:13–13; Lev 26:39–52). The full significance of the 70 weeks is realized when 490 is seen as a tenfold Jubilee. Daniel's chronological scheme is in keeping with the prophesied Jubilee horn of Isaiah 27:13, messianic Jubilee proclamation in Isaiah 61:1–3, and the jubilee-shaped Temple of Ezekiel 40–42.

### **Conclusion**

This dissertation has argued that the Jubilee is (1) a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure, recalled the Sabbath rest of creation, and reenacted Yahweh's liberation of Israel from Egypt; and (2) a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah. Despite the length of this work, there is much more to be considered in depth. The language, chronology, and concepts of the Jubilee are used extensively in the Second Temple literature. Jesus himself reads Isaiah 61:1–3 in Luke 4:16–21, proclaiming that the prophecy has been fulfilled. Numerous allusions and echoes of the Jubilee fill the pages of

the New Testament. While these have all been studied by New Testament scholars, they await someone to put both testaments together into a coherent theology of the Jubilee. Perhaps more importantly, the Jubilee has enormous ethical implications for the shape of gospel proclamation, the goals of caring for the poor in the church, and the methods for addressing issues like global poverty.

Given the silence of the historic record as regards the observance of the Jubilee, its practicality is often questioned. The silence of the historic record is the most difficult problem facing the thesis of this dissertation. It might be argued that the drama of the Sabbath and Jubilee year point to its utopian nature. Nevertheless, if its practicality were idealistic and its drama only pedagogical, then it is unlikely that the prophets, Jesus, or other New Testament writers would have looked to the Jubilee to shape their understanding of the redemption of Jesus and its implications for the life and faith of the church. The way in which the Jubilee guarantees a comprehensive system of economic and social protection, as other ANE proclamations for millennia attempted, testifies to its very real practicality, not just as an institution, but in the hearts and hopes of every generation who has followed God.

The Jubilee became a template by which God's people could expect God to act. Throughout the history of Israel, enslaved and indebted Israelites would look to Yahweh to redeem them from slavery and realize the practical effects of the Exodus redemption for their generation. As Israelites looked to Yahweh, this longing for redemption in the present created a longing for the freedom-rest that existed between land, man, and God in the creation. This longing was likewise picked up by the fertile ground of the prophet's imagination, as inspired by the Spirit, in predicting the shape and drama of Israel's second Exodus from Egypt. While Israel's return to Jerusalem was accomplished by a freedom proclamation from Cyrus, it only corresponded to the hope of the Jubilee in action, but not in extent. As Daniel predicted, a sevenfold extension of the exile was necessary before Yahweh himself would show up in the person of Jesus to

redeem the true people of God from their bondage to sin. The true Israel has experienced the spiritual release from bondage as birth pangs of the physical jubilee-like release and redemption of the cosmos that will come at Jesus' second coming (Matt 24:31, 1 Cor 15:52, and 1 Th 4:16), where the great jubilee-horn of Isaiah 27:13 will be blown and the New Jerusalem will come down from heaven, perhaps shaped in multiples of 25 and 50 to signify mankind's freedom to worship God and live on God's earth free of the burdens of the curse, debt, and bondage.

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## ABSTRACT

### THE YEAR OF THE LORD'S FAVOR: AN OLD TESTAMENT THEOLOGY OF THE JUBILEE

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This dissertation argues that the Jubilee is (1) a law of ancient Israel that aimed to preserve Israel's egalitarian system of land tenure, recalled the Sabbath rest of creation, and reenacted Yahweh's liberation of Israel from Egypt; and (2) a type of God's coming eschatological redemption and rest through the King-Messiah. The biblical Jubilee thus offers several fruitful trajectories of inquiry: historical, redemptive-eschatological, and ethical. Forming a coherent theology from these various categories is no easy task. The aim of this work is to weave together an Old Testament theology of the Jubilee that takes into account a number of textually-based observations regarding the Jubilee.

Chapter 1 provides a history of research. Chapter 2 looks at ancient near Eastern parallels of the Jubilee and identifies the slaves of Exodus 21 as Israelite debt-slaves. Chapter 3 places the Jubilee within the Sabbath spectrum and argues that the Jubilee looked back to the Sabbath rest mankind enjoyed at creation. Chapter 3 also deals with Deuteronomy 15, arguing that the Sabbath year provided for release of debts and debt-slaves but did not release land that had been lost or leased. Chapter 4 looks in-depth at Leviticus 25. It argues that the Jubilee was the capstone of Israel's system of social justice, that the Jubilee reenacted the Exodus redemption, celebrated the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai, and released land along with debts and debt-slaves. The final chapter shows how the Jubilee became a motif within the prophetic expectation of the second exodus and a type of God's coming eschatological redemption.

Chapter 6 provides a summary theology of the work based on eight observations regarding the Jubilee.

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