

The Jubilee

Rev. George M. Schwab, Ph.D.

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Lev 25:13

(BHS)

בְּשָׁנַת הַיּוֹבֵל הַזֹּאת
תָּשָׁבוּ אִישׁ אֶל-אֲחֻזָּתוֹ:

(ESV)

In this year of **jubilee**
each of you shall return to his property.

An interlinear translation could read, “In-the-year-of the-jubilee the-
this, you-will-return a-man to-his-property.” Very often, when Hebrew names
and terms start with *yod*, they transliterate into English with an initial J. As
you can see, “jubilee” is such a word, the Latinized/Anglicized version of *yobel*
(Latin is *iobelei*).

“Property” is the land that one’s family traditionally holds as an
inheritance. In hard times, one’s land might be forfeited, and the family
dispossessed. But in the year of Jubilee, all debts are wiped clean and the land
can be reclaimed by its rightful owners. So, a rich family can only buy the land
from a poor family for a limited amount of time before it reverts back. This
happens every 50 years (seven sevens plus one). On the Day of Atonement, the
10th day of the 7th month of the 49th year, a blast on a special trumpet shall
announce this (Lev 25:9).

Yobel (pronounced yovel, with a long *o* like oval) denotes a ram’s horn.
Blowing a ram’s horn begins the year of remission. The only exception to this in
Scripture was a one-time event, when Israel drew near to God on Mount Sinai
(Exod 19:13). This is the exception that proves the rule, since the giving of the
law was a necessary prerequisite to receiving the land. After that foundational

event, blowing a ram's horn, almost by definition, announces the *Yobel* = iobelei = Jubilee.

The question is sometimes raised, did Israel ever do this? Was there ever a Jubilee, when Israel's disenfranchised peoples returned to their ancestral lands? Did the inheritances ever revert to their rightful owners after a period of sevens? The answer is a resounding Yes! But it only happened once. To discover when that was, the basic meaning of the *yobel* must be our interpretative prism.

The distinctive feature of the Jubilee is the blowing of the *yobel*. Interestingly, this only happens in Joshua 6. You know the story. Seven priests with seven *yobelim* marched around Jericho seven times on the seventh day (Josh 6:4). When the *yobelim* blasted and the people shouted, the walls of the city fell. And that is the last mention of blowing a *yobel* in all of Scripture. That was the *yobel*, which by definition announced the start of Jubilee.

Israel at that time began to claim their inheritance. It took seven years, but inevitably the land reverted to its rightful owners. The squatters, those who owned and operated the land, had to leave. Thus Joshua led Israel in its one and only, real and long-lasting, Jubilee.

Though long-lasting, the Book of Hebrews says that it was also temporary and inadequate. The Jubilee they experienced was not the ultimate. The greater Joshua, namely Jesus (the names are the same actually), brings his people into a better Rest (Heb 4:8 – 10). This is a better Promised Land with a better Jubilee. Hebrews exhorts us to make every effort to enter that Rest (4:11).

In other words, today is the Year of Jubilee. This is the day when you may enter into and claim your inheritance. Everything that the land was, Jesus is now. The land sustained them. The land was the place of blessing. It was appropriated by faith. It imparted grace. Today, Christians find in Jesus all these things and more, as we trust him and pattern our lives accordingly.

Israel had to fight for seven years to secure their inheritance. In an analogous way, your life is a struggle. To enter the joy of your salvation you must persevere to put off what entangles. Don't give up. If you fail today, in faith keep looking to Jesus to make you fit for his kingdom. Your promised inheritance is this: Jesus through his Spirit will continue to work in you to become more and more like him.

Christian, have you entered by faith into your inheritance? Are you enjoying your Jubilee as you might? What is distressing you? What is intimidating you? What sin has caught you? Don't give up. Step out in faith.

Someday, the struggle will be finished. "For the *yobel* will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:52). "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the *yobel* of God" (1 Thess 4:16). With a climactic blast on the heavenly horn, the great and consummate Year of Jubilee will be announced. It is in the hope of that longed-for Day that we strive now without getting discouraged. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!