

The Year of Jubilee
By Rev. Erik Buss
September 16, 2018

Many laws in the Old Testament are challenging to understand until we know their inner meaning. The teachings from Leviticus 25 are such laws. Every seven years let all your fields lie fallow – all at once rather than in rotation. You could eat what grew on its own but then so could everyone else. Even though the Lord promised a good crop the year before, this would have felt like a big risk. It would be similar to planning on taking a year off work every seven years, with no income at all.

Then in the 50th year, all land reverted to its hereditary owners, all Israelite slaves went free, and all debts were canceled. Since people knew this was coming, prices for land or slaves revolved around how long you would have them.

The Lord was making a radical assertion of a spiritual principle that we all know but one that we have a hard time applying. The principle is that “the land is Mine.” (Lev. 25:23) The Children of Israel were simply tenants of the land, and the Lord was the owner.

We think of our things as ours the way a farmer might define himself by his land and occupation. And if someone took them without compensation, we would be outraged. What if we saw our things, our time, or our bodies as a loan from the Lord? What do you think you might do differently?

The times of rest required trust. Would there really be enough? Six years stands for times of trial, struggle and effort. A lot of our lives involves digging deep to make the effort. When we do this, we feel that we are in charge of our own lives.

Yet stopping can sometimes be harder. Haven't we all had times when we get so busy that even when there is nothing to do we make work? Or we sit down and think about what's next so that our minds aren't at rest. It can be much harder to stop, to read the Word, pray, meditate, and rest. It requires a new way of thinking.

Stopping was so important that the Lord built stopping into each week (the Sabbath), each year (the festivals the Jews were to observe), every seven years (the year of no planting) and then every 50 years (the year of Jubilee).

Here are some of the rules for the year of Jubilee and brief thoughts about what each suggests for us:

All debts were cancelled. Debts relate to forgiveness. What if we did housecleaning every now and then, and let go of resentments, or noticed all the times we feel like a martyr?

Land reverted to its original hereditary owner. The Lord orders and arranges our lives, not us. He is the architect who sees the whole picture. Are we willing to trust that His truth will order our lives in a way that is actually good, even when it does not appear to be?

Slaves were freed. Think of this as rearranging your priorities. In times of crisis at work, family gets subordinated. In times of war, respect for life gets subordinated. Freeing slaves means stopping to reflect, put our life and the truths we know in their own, proper order. What good things in your life have fallen captive to urgent matters that may not be all that important?

The Lord tells us to stop, to trust Him, to put aside our daily life to consider deeper things. It appears that this will get in the way of daily living. But doing this is when we really start to live.

Lessons: Leviticus 25; *Arcana Caelestia* 8455, 6206