

Leviticus 25v1-22

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

Leviticus 25 reminds us that Israel is still camped at the base of Mount Sinai. Many of these laws and commands in Leviticus then are given in 'faith' that is, the Hebrews have not yet entered the promised Land to enact many of these instructions. In fact, the generation hearing these commands will not be the generation doing these commands. One takeaway is that holiness can still be performed, and should be performed, whilst in the wilderness and not only in our comfort zones of the Holy Land. For these instructions to be performed in Israel they will need to be handed down from one generation to the next. It is incumbent upon parents to teach their children the Word of God.

Here Moses addresses all the people of Israel, not only the priesthood or the ruling elites. In the future when the people enter the Land, the earth itself is engaged in a Sabbath rest. In the Biblical mind, the physical land was not separate from the spirituality of the community. Instead, it was an intimate part of the spiritual health of the community. The land needs to rest as much as the people do. This concept of a sabbath for the earth is not new to Leviticus, it was mentioned before in Exodus 23vs11 but reiterated here in connection to holiness. In Moses' last speech before Israel enters the land of Canaan, he adds that during the Sabbath year (also known as the Sh'mitta) in the Feast of Sukkot the Torah is to be read before the people Deuteronomy 31vs9-13. Thus the seventh year is both a rest for the land and an extensive time of community Bible study for the nation. Allowing the earth to recover from the rigours of farming and not sowing or reaping as normal is an immense application of trust in God. It is a radical declaration that the land belongs to the Lord and not to the farmer. Agriculturally allowing the land to fallow is wise management of the soil's nutrients and longevity. Something in there about us having dominion over the earth in the right way! Spiritually, relinquishing control over the earth is a form of submission to the King in the Kingdom of Heaven.

When Israel finished the conquest under Joshua, the land would be allotted among the tribes of Israel. However, the Land is a gift and it ultimately belongs to God. These initial portions of territory would become permanent among the twelve tribes. Should an Israelite fall into difficult economic times and be required to sell (really lease) his property, then eventually there would come a time of restoration where all things would be returned to the family. This is the Jubilee. It is not a socialist system of land redistribution as it is retained within specific original families, not given to poor strangers. In the Jubilee year, another sabbath of the land is observed. The Lord declares that He will supply the needs of the people by 'commanding a blessing' so the Land will produce enough to sustain everyone for three years. At a command from the Lord the earth will not be able to say no, it will supply what is necessary. Historically we do not know whether the Year of Jubilee was implemented in Israel on a national scale.

There is a lack of literary evidence. Jeremiah 34vs8-15 describes an attempt to implement at least some of the Jubilee principles, particularly the freeing of slaves. Once exile occurred and tribal distinction was lost then the Jubilee was unable to be fulfilled in the literal sense. Thus it began to take on a more prophetic and messianic sense, such as in the book of Daniel, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Second Temple work called the Book of Jubilees. With that background, we continue our study in the instructions of the Jubilee in Leviticus 25.