

The Good Word

PUBLISHED BY ST. SERAPHIM OF SAROV AND ST. JOHN OF KRONSTADT ORTHODOX CHURCH, LA MESA, CA
WITH THE BLESSING OF BISHOP AUXENTIOS OF ETNA AND PORTLAND



SABBATICAL YEARS AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE¹

by Dr. Seraphim Steger

In our last issue we examined the first of the fall feasts, the Feast of Trumpets (the blowing of the Shofars) which occurs on the 1st of Tishri. According to Jewish Tradition recorded in the *Mishnah*, the 1st of Tishri was used to determine the New Year (Rosh Hashanah), Sabbatical years, and Jubilee years:

1.1. ... The first of Tishri is the new year for [reckoning] the years, for the Sabbatical years, for the Jubilee years, for the planting [of trees], and for the vegetables ...²

WHAT ARE SABBATICAL YEARS

Sabbatical years (first introduced into the Law of Moses in *Exodus 23:11-12*) occurred every 7 years³ just as the weekly Sabbath occurred every 7 days reflecting God's rest on the 7th day of creation week in *Genesis 2:2-3*. In Jewish tradition the Sabbatical Year is called the שְׁמִטָּה *Shemittah*, literally (the year of) *release*.⁴ Hebrew bondservants were not only to be released from their servitude after 6 years, but their Hebrew masters were to furnish them liberally out of their flocks, from their threshing floors (grain), and from their winepresses, *and thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing today*.⁵ Debtors among the Israelites to one another were released from having to pay back any debt that extended into the Sabbatical year (but not the non-Israelite debtors -- they had to continue to pay back the debts owed to Israelites). In Sabbath years the land was also given rest, released from being plowed, cultivated, and reaped. Trees were liberated from being pruned.

1. Scripture passages are from the King James Version unless otherwise stated.

2. *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Volume III, Tractate Rosh Hashanah, 1.1*, Artscroll Mishnah Series, Mesorah Publications, Ltd, Brooklyn, NY, 1990, p. 9. Here we see where the Rabbis proclaimed Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, to be the 1st of Tishri.

3. *Leviticus 25 & Deuteronomy 15*

4. See *Deuteronomy 15:1, 2, 9 & 31:10*

5. *Deuteronomy 15:11-15*

Moreover, the poor of the people were allowed to eat freely from grain, crops, and fruit on anyone's land (*cf. St. Matthew 12:1-3*). One could eat from what grew on its own, but the Israelites were not to reap their crops nor gather their fruit for personal storage, but only to eat directly from the fields, trees, herds, and the increase in their own flocks. Consequently, they were dependent totally on the LORD blessing them, their land and their animals -- whether Israelite or foreigner in their households, whether owner, laborer, bondsman, slave, or beggar.⁶ God's faithfulness had been promised in return for their faithfulness to the covenant they had made with Him at Mt. Horeb. Thus, the land and the people were to have their rest and their liberty:


*for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it: 5 Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day.*⁷

In *Leviticus 26* the LORD promised to take care of the children of Israel if they faithfully obeyed His commandments. He would protect them from their enemies, would bless the land and trees to produce their crops and fruit in the other 6 years which provided them with the stores in earlier years to cover the sabbath year and the time until their next harvest. But, were they not to obey His commandments, they would be severely chastised by Him. And if they continued to despise His judgments and their souls abhorred His statutes, they would be cast out of the land and into the hands of their enemies, so the land could enjoy its sabbath rests during their exile. Unfortunately, and not unexpectedly, over time, the Israelites drifted farther and farther away from obeying the LORD's commandments, including including those *Torah*⁸ instructions on the Sabbatical year. But LORD did not take their disobedience lightly. First, He patiently sent them Prophets to warn and to teach them. Nevertheless, the Northern Kingdom of the 10 tribes fell into greater and greater apostasy, idolatry, and disobedience of the covenant. As a result He increasingly chastised them via the hands of the

6. *Leviticus 25:1-7*

7. *Deuteronomy 15:4-5*

8. The *Torah* is the Jewish designation for the Five Books of Moses, also known as the Law of Moses, i.e., the Pentateuch.



Assyrian Kings Tiglath-Pilaser III, Shalmaneser V and Sargon II for over 20 years (742-722 BC). These kings progressively invaded and conquered the Israelites and eventually exiled them from their land. Thus, their disobedience cost them their former inheritance in the land of Israel.

In 701 BC, some 21 years after the last deportation of Hebrews out of the Northern Kingdom of Israel by Sargon II, the Assyrians began threatening the Southern Kingdom of Judah. In response to King Hezekiah's impassioned prayer for the protection and deliverance of the Southern Kingdom of Judah from the Assyrians, the Prophet Isaiah reassured King Hezekiah of Judah, that if he promised to keep the sabbath year as well as the following year (a Jubilee year) as instructed,⁹ the LORD would deliver him from the hand of Sennacherib,¹⁰ the current King of the Assyrians, who was besieging him. King Hezekiah agreed, and the LORD quickly showed His faithfulness to His side of the covenant:

4 Kingdoms 19:35-36 *And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. 36 So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh.*¹¹

Over a century later Jeremiah the Prophet reminded Judah that they had not been keeping the *Shemittah* as they had promised the LORD after Moses led them out of the land Egypt, and as Hezekiah had repromised. Because of their continued breaking of their covenant with the LORD, He punished them by the hand of Nebuchadnessar, King of Babylon, who conquered them and brought them back to Babylon in exile for 70 years. Consequently, the land of Judah enjoyed the Sabbath rests that it had been denied.¹²

YOM KIPPUR AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

We can consider the Sabbath Year primarily as a rehearsal of, or an introduction to the Year of Jubilee, the second back-to-back Sabbath Year which occurred after every 7 cycles of Sabbath Years, i.e., every 50 years. But, as we shall see, we also need to understand a little bit about the Day of Atonement on the 10th of Tishri (and the days between the 2nd through 9th of

Tishri) to better understand the Jubilee Year. Therefore, let us first briefly review the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) from the *Torah*:

Leviticus 16:29-34: *And this shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month [Tishri], on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: 30 For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD. 31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls, by a statute for ever. 32 And the priest, whom he shall anoint, and whom he shall consecrate to minister in the priest's office in his father's stead, shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen clothes, even the holy garments: 33 And he shall make an atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make an atonement for the tabernacle of the congregation, and for the altar, and he shall make an atonement for the priests, and for all the people of the congregation. 34 And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.*

The Day of Atonement was that day each year when all of Israel's sins were to be confessed and forgiven through the intercession of the High Priest (Kohen Gadol), first for himself, and then for the nation. Several special sacrifices were specified by the LORD for this day. After many days of preparation with ritual cleansing, the High Priest sacrificed a bull as a personal sin offering and sprinkled its blood 8 times before the Ark of the Covenant (or, in Jesus' day, where the Ark formerly stood). Similarly, he sacrificed a goat as a sin offering for the priests (kohanim) and sprinkled its blood before the Ark. He also smeared the blood of the bull on the horns of the Golden Altar of Incense in the Holy Place and and sprinkled it 8 times on the altar. This was repeated for the blood of the goat. Following this cleansing for himself and the priests, a cleansing by blood, the High Priest then confessed the sins of the nation while he leaned on the head of the scapegoat with his hands, thus transferring the sins of the nation to the animal. The scapegoat was then sent it into the wilderness to carry their sins away as far as the east is from the west. The insides of the bull and goat were removed and burned on the altar. Their skins were intertwined. Once it was confirmed that the scapegoat had reached the wilderness (i.e., was thrown off a cliff or otherwise killed so it wouldn't return), the skins were burned outside of the camp of Israel (outside of Jerusalem)¹³ at the *place of the ashes*, the *Beit HaDeshen*. Thusly, the people and the nation as a


9. **2 Kings 19:15-37 (Lxx 4 Kingdoms 19:15-37)**, especially verse 29. Although this year was not named a Sabbatical year, it was inferred by the 2 years rest of the land back to back indicated to Hezekiah by the LORD. The second year would have been a "Jubilee" year.

10. Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and siege of Jerusalem occurred in 701 BC, so perhaps in the fall on 1st of Tishri the Sabbatical year began followed by the Year of Jubilee

11. **2 Kings 19:35-36 (Lxx 4 Kingdoms 19:35-36)**

12. **Jeremiah 34:12-14 (Lxx. Jeremiah 41:12-14) & 2 Chronicles 36:20-21 (Lxx 2 Paraleipoemena 36:20-21)**

13. Just as Jesus suffered outside of the camp cf. **Hebrews 13:11-12:** *For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without [outside] the gate.*



whole were sanctified before the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

But how is the special year known as the “Jubilee” related to the Day of Atonement? Along with the usual confession, cleansing, and blood atonement on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement for the whole nation, there was something different about the Day of Atonement in the Year of Jubilee. It was heralded with the blasting of shofars all day long throughout all the land as was done on the Feast of Trumpets 10 days earlier. According to the *Mishnah, Seder Moed, Tractate Rosh Hashanah 5:1*, “The Jubilee Year is similar to Rosh Hashanah regarding the blowing and the benedictions.” Thus, Jewish tradition held that the shofar was to be blown in the same manner as it was on Rosh Hashanah, i.e., with the same number number and types of blasts, all day long, but throughout the whole country even on the Sabbath -- not just in Jerusalem on the Sabbath as was done for the Feast of Trumpets.¹⁴

This second שְׁמִטָּה *Shemittah*, also had a far-reaching implication. In addition to the continued release of all Israelites who dwelt there and the continued dependence on the LORD for food -- for what grew of itself and on the increase in their flocks for a second year in a row, there was another blessing beyond what occurred in a typical Sabbath year. Properties sold in the preceding 50 years were returned to their original rightful owners totally free of charge.¹⁵

A great deal of the *Torah* dedicated to the Year of Jubilee deals specifically with the return of these properties to their former owners, the descendants of those Israelites who were given possession of specific allotted parcels of the land according to their tribes family-by-family. This original distribution occurred 7 years after Israel’s crossing the Jordan into Canaan when Joshua (Jesus of Nevi, c. 13th century BC) was leading the armies and people of Israel.¹⁶ After their

conquest of the land of Canaan, the Israelites fastidiously followed the *Torah* instructions for the Sabbath years and the Year of Jubilee, returning sold land to the original owners in the 50th year. However, as the decades passed, the Israelites drifted further and further away from their commitment to the Sabbath Year, the Year of Jubilee, and the rest of the Law. So the Lord gave Israel into the hands of their enemy, the Assyrians, and later, gave Judah into the hands of the Babylonians. At that point the Year of Jubilee ceased to be actively practiced in the land of Israel because both populations had been deported from their ancestral lands by their conquerors. They had lost their stewardship over the land of Israel as a direct result of their sinful behavior just as the LORD had previously warned them (*Leviticus 26* and *Deuteronomy 27-30*). The Rabbis of the Talmudic period clearly recognized this centuries later:

As a punishment for incest, idolatry, and non-observance of the years of release and jubilee exile comes to the world, they [the Jews] are exiled, and others come and dwell in their place, for it is said, for all these abominations have the men of the land done, etc.; and it is written, and the land is defiled,- therefore do I visit the iniquity thereof upon it; and it is written, that the land vomit not you out also, when ye defile it¹⁷. Again, with respect to idolatry it is written, and I will cast your carcasses [upon the carcasses of your idols]; and it is written, And I will make your cities a waste, and will bring your sanctuaries into desolation etc. ... and you will I scatter among the nations. Further, in reference to release and jubilee years it is written, Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies’ land, etc. and it is written, As long as it lieth desolate it shall have rest.¹⁸

Subsequent to their release from captivity in Babylon and their return to Jerusalem and the land of their fathers, a big question arose among the Jews as to whether or not they celebrated the Jubilee. Many Rabbis in the Talmudic Age, and later, reasoned that the *Torah* regarding the observance of “Jubilee” really only applied when the Jewish people actually lived in the land of Israel according to their tribes-- something which hadn’t been the case since before the 6th century BC. Others argued that partial representation of each tribe was sufficient to fulfill the mandate to declare a Jubilee Year. Despite much argument in the Rabbinic literature, the Rabbis failed to come to any definite conclusion. However, with the capture of Jerusalem and total destruction of the Second Temple by the Roman armies under Vespasian and Titus in AD 70, the Jews

14. See our previous issue of THE GOOD WORD for the numbers and types of shofar blasts for Rosh Hashanah, the Feast of the Blowing of the Shofars. Also, on Rosh Hashanah, if it were on a Sabbath day, the shofars were only blown in the Temple. On other days of the week shofars were blown throughout the entire country and in the diaspora.


15. Even then the Israelites were only stewards of the land. The LORD was the true owner, and He had given it to the Israelites as an inheritance, and here He was returning it to them as long as they faithfully obeyed His commandments.

16. Cf. *Joshua* chapters 14-19. In *Joshua 14* Caleb was given Hebron as his allotment at the age of 85. He was 40 at the time of the Exodus. Two years later he was one of the 12 Israelites sent to spy out the land of Canaan. Because of his courage and truthfulness, Moses allotted to him the land he walk on 45 years later and 47 years after the Exodus. Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness until that generation of unbelief died off. So 47-40 years leaves 7 years for the conquest of Canaan. The Jewish scholar Rashi concurs in his

commentary on *Joshua*. See http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15798#showrashi=true

17. *Leviticus* 19:25-28

18. *Babylonian Talmud, Seder Moed, Tractate Shabbos*, p. 33a, Socino Talmud, Socino Press, London, DVD (Davka Corporation)



were left without a Sanhedrin until it was reconstituted in Yavneh. So, if not before, the Jubilee certainly ceased to be celebrated in any form after that time.¹⁹

Let's refresh and deepen our understanding about this special Year of Jubilee by reviewing it in the books of *Leviticus* and *Numbers*:

Leviticus 25: 8 *And thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years; and the space of the seven sabbaths of years shall be unto thee forty and nine years. 9 Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound [Hebrew שופר תרועה *shofar teruah* = the shofar blasts] on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet sound throughout all your land. 10 And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty [Hebrew דְּרֹר *d'ror*] throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: **it shall be a jubilee** [Hebrew יובל *yobel* = a ram's horn]²⁰ unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family. 11 **A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you:** ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed. 12 **For it is the jubilee; it shall be holy unto you:** ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field. 13 In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession. 14 And if thou sell ought unto thy neighbour, or buyest ought of thy neighbour's hand, ye shall not oppress one another: 15 According to the number of years after the jubilee thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: 16 According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. 17 **Ye shall not therefore oppress one another; but thou shalt fear thy God:** for I am the LORD your God. 18 **Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. 19 And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. 20 And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: 21 Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. 22 And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store. 23 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me. 24 And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. 25 If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away***

19. Rabbi Baruch S. Davidson, "When is the Next Jubilee Year," Chabad Organization, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdoaid/513212/jewish/When-Is-the-Next-Jubilee-Year.htm

20. יובל *yobel* = a ram's horn, is the word transliterated as *Jubilaeus* in Latin and *jubilee* in English. The Jewish commentator Rashi states it was called the "ram's horn" because of the shofar that is sounded upon the commencement of this special year. See http://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdoaid/9926#showrashi=true
The Greek expression in the Septuagint for jubilee is ἀφέσεως σημασία, meaning *release* and *giving a signal or command*. Thus, the word we read as "jubilee" really means [blowing of the] *ram's horn* (i.e., a shofar) as a signal or command for release (from debts, from slavery, or from bondage), and, in most cases, a return of property to the original owners.

*some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. 26 And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it; 27 Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession. 28 **But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession.** 29 And if a man sell a dwelling house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year may he redeem it. 30 **And if it be not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house that is in the walled city shall be established for ever to him that bought it throughout his generations: it shall not go out in the jubilee.** 31 **But the houses of the villages which have no wall round about them shall be counted as the fields of the country: they may be redeemed, and they shall go out in the jubilee.** 32 Notwithstanding the cities of the Levites, and the houses of the cities of their possession, may the Levites redeem at any time. 33 And if a man purchase of the Levites, then the house that was sold, and the city of his possession, shall go out in the year of jubilee: for the houses of the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. 34 But the field of the suburbs of their cities may not be sold; for it is their perpetual possession. 35 And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. 36 Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. 37 Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. 38 I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. 39 **And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: 40 But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee: 41 And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. 42 For they are my servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen.** 43 Thou shalt not rule over him with rigour; but shalt fear thy God. 44 Both thy bondmen, and thy bondmaids, which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of them shall ye buy bondmen and bondmaids. 45 Moreover of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: and they shall be your possession. 46 And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them for a possession; they shall be your bondmen for ever: but over your brethren the children of Israel, ye shall not rule one over another with rigour. 47 **And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: 48 After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: 48 Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself.** 50 And*

he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubilee: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. 51 If there be yet many years behind, according unto them he shall give again the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. 52 And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubilee, then he shall count with him, and according unto his years shall he give him again the price of his redemption. 53 And as a yearly hired servant shall he be with him: and the other shall not rule with rigour over him in thy sight. 54 **And if he be not redeemed in these years, then he shall go out in the year of jubilee** [בשנת היבול, *b'shanat ha-yobel*, in the year of the ram's horn], **both he, and his children with him.** 55 **For unto me the children of Israel are servants; they are my servants whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**

Leviticus 27: 16-24 And if a man shall sanctify unto the LORD some part of a field of his possession, then thy estimation shall be according to the seed thereof: an homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver. 17 If he sanctify his field from the year of jubilee, according to thy estimation it shall stand. 18 But if he sanctify his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall reckon unto him the money according to the years that remain, even unto the year of the jubilee, and it shall be abated from thy estimation. 19 And if he that sanctified the field will in any wise redeem it, then he shall add the fifth part of the money of thy estimation unto it, and it shall be assured to him. 20 And if he will not redeem the field, or if he have sold the field to another man, it shall not be redeemed any more. 21 But the field, when it goeth out in the jubilee, shall be holy unto the LORD, as a field devoted; the possession thereof shall be the priest's. 22 And if a man sanctify unto the LORD a field which he hath bought, which is not of the fields of his possession; 23 Then the priest shall reckon unto him the worth of thy estimation, even unto the year of the jubilee: and he shall give thine estimation in that day, as a holy thing unto the LORD. 24 In the year of the jubilee the field shall return unto him of whom it was bought, even to him to whom the possession of the land did belong.

Numbers 36:4 And when the jubilee [יובל, *yobel* = ram's horn] of the children of Israel shall be, then shall their inheritance be put unto the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they are received: so shall their inheritance be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers.

So what does all this mean? Origen of Alexandria, who wrote many commentaries on the Old Testament Scriptures, seems to have been quite baffled by the “Year of Jubilee:”

Origen, **On Prayer** 27:14: “Who is there who has grasped the mind of Christ so well that he knows the meaning of the seventh year of freedom of Hebrew slaves and the remission of debts and the intermission of the cultivation of the holy land? **Over and above the feast of every seventh year is the feast called the jubilee.** No one can ever come near divining its precise meaning or the true import of the prescriptions enjoined by it, except him who knows the Father's will and his disposition for every age according to *his incomprehensible*

judgments and unsearchable ways.”²¹

On the other hand, the Venerable Bede (English monk, scholar, and writer, AD 673-735) appears to have apprehended some of its essence:

Venerable Bede, **Homilies on the Gospels** 2:17: “In the law the fiftieth year was ordered to be called [the year] of jubilee, that is, “forgiving” or “changed.” During it the people were to remain at rest from all work, the debts of all were to be canceled, slaves were to go free [and] the year itself was to be more notable than other years because of its greater solemnities and divine praises. Therefore by this number is rightly indicated that tranquility of greatest peace when, as the apostle says, at the sound of the last trumpet *the dead will rise and we shall be changed* [1 Cor 15:52] into glory. Then, when the labors and hardships of this age come to an end and our debts, [that is] all our faults, have been forgiven, the entire people of the elect will rejoice eternally in the sole contemplation of the divine vision. And that most longed for command of our LORD and Savior will be fulfilled: *Be still, and see that I am God.*”²²

Venerable Bede, **On the Tabernacle** 2-2: “We read in the law that the fiftieth year was ordered to be designated as a jubilee (that is, a year for releasing or exchanging), in which the whole people should rest from all cultivation of the land and everyone's debts should be canceled. And we know that in the New Testament the grace of the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost (that is, the fiftieth day of the LORD's resurrection) and hallowed the beginnings of the church that was being brought into existence by its coming. It is agreed then that by this number can rightly be figured either the grace of the Holy Spirit or the joy of future blessedness, to which one is brought through the gift of the same Spirit and in the perception of which alone is true rest and joy.”²³

Here the Venerable Bede connects the Year of Jubilee with the future blessedness that the entire people of the elect of God will receive when the last trumpet is blown: *the dead will rise and we shall be changed* [1 Cor 15:52] into glory. Nevertheless, I believe that Origen and the Venerable Bede are both missing an important part of the puzzle -- the biggest part of the puzzle. The greater part of the description of the Jubilee is concerned with the possession of the land, the land that is the LORD's (see **Lev. 25:23** above) -- the land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants, i.e., the Promised Land of Israel, wherein each tribe and family had an inheritance from the LORD. It was their own parcel of the Holy Land entrusted to them as stewards by the LORD, which was to be passed down from generation to generation. They might even lose their inheritance for a while by selling it off in difficult times. Unless they were Levites, were it sold within the city

21. Joseph T. Lienhard (ed), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Old Testament III: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2001, p. 198.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-9.

walls (perhaps a type of Babylon the Great, or the Kingdom of the Antichrist) they lost/sold their inheritance permanently, were they not to redeem it back within a year. Those who lost/sold their inheritance outside of the walled cities (outside of those concentrated dwellings of the ungodly) would receive it back in the Year of Jubilee, which commenced on Rosh Hashanah on the 1st of Tishri, but was announced publicly on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, on the 10th of Tishri, and which continued right on through the Feast of Tabernacles on the 15th of Tishri -- were it not redeemed earlier.

So Jubilee, the Year of the Blowing of the Ram's horn (the shofar,) is a type, a preview, of the consummation: the redemption and release of the elect of God from bondage/slavery, the reinstatement of rightful inheritances in the Kingdom of God, i.e., a place in that greatest peace of the age to come, where Christ has many mansions,²⁴ where Christ will tabernacle among His people living in those mansions²⁵-- even as the LORD tabernacled among His people in the wilderness for 40 years. There He "dwelt" in the Holy of Holies, and they, surrounding the Tabernacle, dwelt in tents with three tribes assigned to each of its four side.²⁶



ILLUSTRATION OF THE CAMP OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS WITH THE TENTS OF THE 12 TRIBES SURROUNDING THE TABERNACLE

On the final Jubilee the ram's horn will blow, a great shofar blast, like on the Feast of the Blowing of the Shofars, signaling the gathering of the Israel of God who had sold their inheritance to others, who were now

24. *Gospel of John 14:2*: In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you...

25. *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologion 21:3* And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

26. E.g., *Exodus 40:34-5, 38; Deuteronomy 31:15*

being freed from bondage to the devil and his minions so that they might serve their true Master, Who is willing to receive them back and give back their rightful inheritance in the Promised Land, in the Kingdom of Heaven. That assumes, of course, that they had not permanently lost it earlier, but regained it through their own repentance and their restoration by the LORD to their inheritance. The Israel of God, the Church, composed of both Jew and Gentile, who had, as individuals, at times, been serving another master by selling themselves through their passions to the adversary (Satan), would now be set at liberty to serve the LORD their God. Their debts forgiven, their labors finished, being redeemed they could now enter into their inheritance, that greatest peace of the LORD that the Venerable Bede mentioned above. They could now tabernacle with Him forever.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE: THE KINSMAN REDEEMER

The scriptures on the Year of Jubilee also introduced the concept of the kinsman redeemer.²⁷ If an Israelite had lost his allotment of the Promised Land from the LORD by selling it to a fellow Hebrew or foreigner under the jurisdiction of Israel in difficult economic times, and if he had the means to buy it back, he could redeem it himself. Or, more likely, if he had sold himself into bondage, he most likely wouldn't have the means to redeem himself and the land. Then he would have to look elsewhere, to a kinsman who could repay his debts, to a kinsman who could redeem his God-given inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven, the true Promised Land. Who was that redeemer? A Kinsman, a Son of man born of woman, a fellow Hebrew, One not in debt to Satan, One full of compassion for those in bondage to the Law and to their passions, Who had the means and the will to redeem them. That Kinsman was our LORD Jesus Christ, Who was like us in every way, except without sin, Who redeemed us from our sins with His own blood. In the Psalms and the Prophets of the *Old Testament* we see the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob describe Himself many times as Israel's redeemer. For example, the Prophet Isaiah declares:

*Isa 41:14 Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD, and thy redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.*²⁸

Similarly, in the *New Testament* St. Paul writes that Christ Jesus the Son of God redeemed those under the Law, receiving them back as sons and heirs:

27. *Ibid.*, And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

28. *Isaiah, 41:14*

Gal 4:3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: **4** But when the fulness of the time was come, **God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,** **5** To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. **6** And because ye are sons, **God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.** **7** Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; **and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.**²⁹

Furthermore, St. John the Theologian, writing in the last book of the *Bible*, the *Apocalypse*, shows us that the redemption limited to Israel under the Law of Moses under the Old Covenant was superseded by the grace of faith under Christ Jesus our Lord, wherein we too, who are gentiles from every kindred, tongue, people, and nation, from ages past to the present, have also been redeemed by our Kinsman Redeemer, we the children of Abraham by faith, wild branches grafted into Israel by faith, will receive our allotted inheritance -- just as the 4 living creatures (the seraphim) and the 24 elders around the throne declare in their song:

Rev. 5:5-9 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, **the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,** hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. **6** And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, **stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.** **7** And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. **8** And when he had taken the book, **the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.** **9** And they sung a new song, saying, **Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;**³⁰

St. Andrew of Caesarea (c. AD 563-637) comments on this: "It is a new song, which we have been taught to sing, who from every tribe and tongue have been freed from the antiquity of the letter and through the Spirit have received light."³¹

As St. Paul writes, not all Israel is Israel, not all are sons of Abraham by faith (cf. *Romans 9:6-7*). Many, as Christ Jesus said, were of their father, the Devil, who was a liar and murderer from the beginning (cf. *Gospel of St. John 8:44-5*), and consequently had no inheritance in Israel, be they Levites or not.

As the 6th century Christian writer Oecumenius notes, "And with very good reason he said from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. For while he

29. St. Paul, *Letter to the Galatians 4:3-7*

30. *Apocalypse of St. John the Theologian 5:5-9*

31. Archbishop Averky Taushev and Fr. Seraphim Rose, *The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Ancient Christianity*, St. Herman of Alaska Press, 1995, Platina, CA, p. 120.

did not gain all nations -- for many have died in unbelief -- yet he acquired from every nation those worthy of salvation."³²

Those from "Israel" who died in unbelief, i.e., those who were not children of Abraham by faith, essentially lost all right to their allotted inheritance. Consider those Priests/Levites and Pharisees who sold off their inheritance within the walled city of Jerusalem, by their unbelief in Christ as the Messiah, Redeemer of God. They continued to refuse Him as their Kinsman Redeemer the entire 3 years of His ministry. As a result they lost their inheritance forever in contrast to St. Joseph of Arimathea and St. Nikodemus.

THE YEAR OF JUBILEE IN THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST JESUS

Isaiah 61:1-The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim **liberty** to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; **2** To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; ...

After Jesus had overcome the devil during the 40 days He spent in the desert, He began teaching in the synagogues of Galilee. But on the first sabbath back in His home town of Nazareth He made an announcement:



FRESCO: JESUS READING FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH IN THE SYNAGOGUE, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME..."

St. Luke 4:13 And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from Him for a season. **14** And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about. **15** And, He taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. **16** And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as

32. St. Andrew of Caesarea, in *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, in *Greek Commentaries on Revelation*, IVP Academic Press, Downers Grove, IL, 2011, p. 132.



THE GOOD WORD

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His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day and stood up for to read. 15 And there was delivered unto Him the book [scroll]³³ of the prophet Esaias. And when He had opened the book [scroll], He found the place where it was written, 18 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” 20 And He closed the book, and He gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him. 21 And He began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. 22 And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph’s son?

Unfortunately the listing of Jewish readings for synagogue services from Temple times have not survived. But the *Haftarah*³⁴ reading for that Sabbath in Nazareth was obviously to have been from the Prophet Isaiah because the scroll of Isaiah was handed to our LORD Jesus to read. So, whether or not *Isaiah 61:1-9* was read during the High Holy Days in Temple times is presently unknown.

The descriptions of the *acceptable year of the LORD* in both of these passages sound very characteristic of

33. βιβλιον, translated in the KJV as book, is more appropriately translated *scroll*. It can mean either, but the Jews traditionally used scrolls in the synagogue.

34. *Haftaros* are the readings from the Prophets in the Synagogue and are only read on Sabbaths and special holidays. Were this day Rosh Hashanah the current reading would call for *Isaiah 55:1-13*; were it the Day of Atonement -- *Isaiah 57:14-58:1*; were it the Sabbath before Rosh Hashanah -- *Isaiah 61:10-62*.

the Year of Jubilee. Indeed, the word for the *liberty* in the Hebrew text of *Leviticus 25:10* for the Year of Jubilee is the same word for the *liberty* as in *Isaiah 61:1*. Moreover, the passage Jesus reads announces the *acceptable year of the LORD*. His message of salvation was of redemption, deliverance, and liberty from sin, bondage, spiritual blindness, and captivity by the devil. It was preached [read] to those who were poor in spirit, who had been bruised by life, who were broken-hearted. The redemption of all by faith in Christ Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world, is that release from bondage and captivity of the devil (one master) unto liberty to follow our true Despot and Kinsman Redeemer, to receive our allotted inheritance in the Kingdom of Heaven.

So, our LORD Jesus truly may have been proclaiming a Year of Jubilee to Israel in the first year of His earthly ministry in AD 27,³⁵ a wonderful foreshadowing of the greater liberty the Saints will experience in that final Year of the Blowing of the Ram’s Horn. Again, in this first year of ministry, as with each Year of Jubilee in the past, that announcement of the *acceptable year of the LORD* was short of the fullness of the final Jubilee that will be announced at the consummation. But it was the first Year of Jubilee under grace, and what grace it was. Nevertheless, the redemption proclaimed, the liberty gained, and the inheritance reserved in the Kingdom of Heaven will be infinitely greater than the shadow of the Year of Release revealed to Moses and the Hebrews.

35. If AD 27 was a Year of Jubilee, then the next Year of Jubilee will be in AD 2027. It would be the 40th Jubilee under grace!