

QUESTION OF LIBERTY

The black velvet spectral veil that cloaks this vast universe serves to frame a silver blue jewel that we call home, the Earth. Spinning on its axis at a quarter of a mile per second while orbiting around the sun at 18½ miles per second, Earth is but one planet in a system of planets that comprise the Milky Way Galaxy – which is itself a wheel of stars that is an unimaginable 100,000 light years in diameter!

We are along for the ride – and we don't even sense it!

Our view of the Earth is from the Earth, a perspective that tends to shrink our view of this planet, narrow its scope and importance.

More than that and because we exercise a measure of dominance over the Earth, we tend to favour the notion that we own it – or at least that part of it that comprises the nation that we hail from, the plot of land on which we reside or the real estate that is ours to farm or to develop.

It's a curious claim, especially given the fact that one generation goes and another generation comes – but the Earth just outlasts them all. Solomon tells us that:

**Ecclesiastes 1:4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.**

His observation is an undeniable fact with profound implications. We can take no credit whatsoever for the Earth's existence. It sustains us. It is not the other way around.

Nor can we claim to have been there when the foundation of the Earth was laid, its measurements determined and the line stretched upon it to sink its bases and lay its cornerstone.

**Job 38:4 “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me, if you have understanding.
5 Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
Or who stretched the line upon it?
6 On what were its bases sunk,
or who laid its cornerstone,
7 when the morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy?”**

Since not one man or woman ever heard the morning stars sing together and all the sons of God shout of joy, that creation and construction of the Earth is an event, one phenomenon about which none of us can say, “I have been there, done that and bought the T-shirt.”

If we appreciate that fact it should inform our understanding and revolutionise our thinking. Sadly it doesn't and it hasn't. Perhaps it is because, as the noted physicist Stephen Hawking has stated:

“The Earth is the way it is because we are the way we are.”

That is, the Earth seems to have been built specifically with you and I – and all of mankind – in mind. That the Earth exists for our benefit, that we have possession of it and exercise a certain dominion over it however, is not sufficient to create in us an absolute right of ownership! But it does, in part at least, explain humanity's misperceptions regarding who is the actual title holder when it comes to the planet Earth.

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No, the Earth does not belong to mankind!

Psalm 24:1 The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof,
the world and those who dwell therein,
2 for he has founded it upon the seas
and established it upon the rivers.

This is one of at least nine direct declarations by the Eternal of just who it is that can lay claim to the title for the Earth. It's a statement by the Eternal establishing His primacy and His ownership of what it is He created.

The Earth is, as far as we know, the *only* planet in this vast universe capable of sustaining life as we know it. This is a fact about which most of mankind, for most of man's history, has remained wilfully ignorant – along with many other things.

Paul tells us about human wilful ignorance:

Romans 1:21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

How did the Earth get here? Man wasn't there; therefore he shouldn't have the right to claim the Earth as his own. Man has failed to acknowledge this fact and this has made all the difference in how human history has developed down through the centuries and millennia – particularly since the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century.

The onset of that revolution marked a major turning point in human society. It was one of the most dramatic events that have ever occurred on the face of this Earth. It isn't an overstatement to say that *every* aspect of human life changed dramatically in some way as a result of that revolution.

There was a transition from manual labour and draft animal-based economies to machine-based manufacturing. It began with the mechanisation of the textile industries; all those lovely things we like to have in our homes, particularly clothing, linens and all of the things that go along with it.

It changed the development of iron making techniques and increased the use of refined coal. Trade expansion was enabled by the introduction of canals, improved roads and railways. The introduction of steam power (fuelled primarily by coal), the wider utilisation of water wheels and powered machinery, mainly in the textile manufacturing industry underpinned dramatic increases in the productive capacity of mankind.

Then came the development of all-metal machine tools. That occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century and it facilitated the manufacture of more production machines for manufacturing in other industries, industries that began to cut across *every* aspect of human life.

Today we have what might be termed a “virtual” revolution, imposing incredible technologies onto an industrial infrastructure, doing amazing things to once again increase productive capacity. Everything changed: labour, child labour, transportation, urbanization, housing, family, agriculture and social life. Nothing was untouched!

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The scientific analysis that spawned the development of industry was applied to the development of political institutions, namely representative democracies like the ones we see primarily in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world.

It also revolutionized sociological constructs which culminated in Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* which was subtitled, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of National Wealth*. It was an account of economies at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, but more than that, it was a rhetorical piece advocating a free market, a liberated market and a liberal market; free of government intervention, a free market economy promoted as being more productive and more beneficial to society in general.

Central to this thesis was Smith's theory of "the invisible hand." The theory of the invisible hand states that if each consumer is allowed to choose freely what to buy, and if each producer is allowed to choose freely what to sell and how to produce it, the market will settle on a product, its distribution and its price in a way that is beneficial to all the individual members of a community and therefore to the community as a whole.

The reason for this is unabashed, openly stated human greed. Smith posited that greed would drive actors to beneficial behaviour because when people act (as they always do) in their own self-interest, the best result will obtain. In such a system, "there is no need for orders from the top down, only rational decisions based on enlightened self-interest at an individual level – and everything will work" – or as Gordon Gekko put it in the movie, *Wall Street*, "Greed is good."

It was a new liberal economic model for a new liberal economic reality, an economic reality that included mass production and distribution, one that was designed to work hand-in-glove with a new political structure that liberated people from oppressive monarchs and dictators to be governed by those who would rule by the consent of the governed, those who would govern by the will of the people.

With the implosion of the Soviet Union and the lifting of the Iron Curtain in 1989 that revolution continues throughout the world today at a relentless, irrepressible pace. Mankind had "liberated" himself. He had become "the master of his own destiny," deciding what he would own and what he wouldn't, deciding who would rule him and who wouldn't.

Having learned how to forge the beauty of this Earth into power, he had "liberated" her as well – to produce unimaginable things in unfathomable quantities. There was no foreseeable reason why it ever had to change, why it couldn't just continue infinitely into the future. For the first time since the Tower of Babel, man's pursuit of a world of his own making, one without limits, was within his grasp. Mankind still believes that.

The Earth, it seemed was up for the challenge and capable of generating infinite economic growth and prosperity that defined what man came to believe was his divine right: to take from the Earth anything he could produce for his own benefit: forget whether he needed it or not. "The Earth was his and he could take what he wanted from it and use it in any way he saw fit."

All was good in this little "fairy tale" until late in the 20th century cracks in the system appeared. In 1976, in his book entitled *The Poverty of Power*, noted biologist Barry Commoner addressed the distress that had become apparent – primarily in the United States because we

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were the largest producer in the world and the largest beneficiary of the Industrial Revolution. Mr Commoner addressed environmental degradation as one major crisis, the limited resources to fuel this massive industrial complex that had taken over the Western world, and economic instability not unlike the kind we see today some 30 years later.

But Mr Commoner took a unique approach in looking at these crises. He noted that the crises creating the distress were not, in fact, distinct afflictions as politicians and policy-makers so often wanted to treat them. He said they were the result of a single, basic defect: a fault that lies deep in the design of modern society. Man had baked the wrong kind of pie!

The Industrial Revolution, while it was perceived at least initially and for almost two centuries, to be a revolution of liberation, had, in fact, perverted the complex interactions – and thus the relationships – between three inter-related and highly integrated systems upon which every human being relies. You and I depend on these three things every day of our lives, more so than we would like to think about – because most of us are not tied to the land and we don't have the ability to produce or sustain our own lives from the land any more.

Those systems are:

- The ecological cycles that comprise the Earth's skin, supply its resources – and thus supply our resources.
- The production system: a manmade network of agricultural and industrial processes that converts those natural resources into goods and services.
- The economic system which is a network of manmade systems that delivers goods and services to the world's population. The economic system is dependent upon the wealth created in the production system. We know that now because we see the economic system slowing down. We see it in distress. We see the production system slowing down.

The production system is dependent upon the resources supplied by the eco-system. Mr Commoner's analysis suggests that the economic system ought to conform itself naturally to the requirements of the production system. We ought not to try with money, with leverage and debt, to create demands for things that we can't produce or that don't exist, or that aren't ready for production or that are sub-standard.

The production system ought to conform its requirements to the limitations and structure of the eco-system. That seems to make sense because you can't really take out of the Earth or manufacture from the Earth something it isn't capable of giving.

But Mr Commoner notes that in fact the relationships are the other way around. Our ignorance with respect to these relationships and the effect of our own individual actions upon them has only heightened the problem. The further away we get and the more dependent we become, the bigger the problem.

It opens to our view an Earth held captive – with a population in the same position. It is held captive by a brutal system that competes for just about everything: everything from fresh drinking water to Gucci handbags.

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But perspective is everything! So let's change ours. Let's have another look at the "pie recipe" and explore what might be possible if we accept, without reservation, one simple truth: mankind does not own this Earth! He was given what it could produce to sustain himself and a certain dominion over the life that the Earth sustains.

Genesis 1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."

This is what God gave man. In order for man to enjoy the benefit of that, man had to have a certain dominion over the Earth and be able to work the Earth so that it could produce what it was designed to produce for the benefit of mankind, to sustain his life and the life of the animals.

That means that our possessory interest of the Earth is similar to that of a trustee. Our duty is similar to that of a fiduciary, a trusted servant, someone who manages property and assets according to the standards and direction of the one who created the trust: in this case, the Eternal, the Creator.

God did not leave mankind without instruction when it came to using His property. It is important for us to consider this instruction as an alternative to what we deal with and what we are dealing with and what we will continue to deal with for at least another year or so to come in our own economy, in this world economy.

Leviticus 25:1 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying,

2 "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."

The land shall keep a Sabbath. We associate the Sabbath with "rest." It would complete our understanding and be far better for us to view the Sabbath as a period of "cessation from certain activity," because while we cease to do certain things as outlined in Scripture (essentially follow our own pursuits), we also must *work* at doing other things! For us that primarily involves the activities that we engage in to strengthen our relationship with our Creator and with one another.

In the context of the land keeping a Sabbath, the concept of "cessation" is a good one as well. God was interested that the land would cease to do what the land normally does when the land is being worked, to produce what the land is supposed to produce for the benefit of mankind. That means that if the land is going to keep the Sabbath, mankind needs not to work the land the way the land is typically worked when it is not a Land Sabbath. It is a cessation from the normal productive activities of the land.

This does not mean, just as when we come to the Sabbath, that all of our activity ceases. What ceases is our normal activity that we engage in six days a week. What we pick up and do more of is the kind of activity we don't normally have the time to devote to during the week: building our relationship with our Creator.

In the context of the land keeping the Sabbath, while the land isn't being worked, work is being done on the land! There is an intricate system, a web of life that lives in the soil, regenerating and reviving the land – preparing it to work again. But it needs to rest. It needs to be worked on. It needs to be rejuvenated and revived.

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But in a world where mankind is looking for infinite growth from one year to the next, where is there an opportunity for the land to rest? When has mankind ever allowed the Earth time to rejuvenate? I haven't seen it in my lifetime – and there is simply nothing recorded in history to suggest that mankind in general has ever engaged in such a principle.

But Israel was commanded to give the land its rest:

3 “For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits,

4 but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land ...”

You have to take care of what takes care of you!

4 “... a Sabbath to the LORD ...”

This is just as holy as the Sabbath that you and I keep! This is just as important because the Earth is God's. He created it. He constructed and built it – for a purpose. The purpose wasn't just so *we* could take whatever we want, whenever we want, out of it.

4 “... You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

5 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.”

In other words, you are not entitled to profit from the land's rest. You are not entitled to go into your fields and harvest what is going to grow. There will be after-growth, no matter what you do. While that land is resting, it will still produce after-growth. But you are not permitted to reap and harvest – and turn around and sell and market. You are not to treat the land the way you do the other six years in the seven year cycle.

The Creator says, “You need to alter your perspective for the sake of the land that I own, because you don't own it. I do, and this is how I want My land treated.”

In economic terms, this is a forced recession! Things will slow down. There won't be the flurry of economic activity in the Land Sabbath year that there would be in the other six. So the issue in God's mind when it comes to economics and profits is *not* infinite growth from one year to the next! That is not God's concern. It was never His concern. That is not the issue. Mankind got it wrong. As Mr Commoner put it, that is a “fundamental defect in the way we think.”

6 “The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you,”

... everybody gets to enjoy the after-growth. You can't merchandise it, but you certainly can eat from it and sustain yourself.

7 “and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: all its yield shall be for food.”

The Land Sabbath was a part of what we lawyers like to call an entire “legislative scheme,” part of a structure of law that defined an order to provide relief and ensure commercial and economic relief for the land. But as we are going to see, it wasn't just relief for the land. It was relief for people too: to ensure that the commercial and economic activity that formed part of

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normal everyday life ceased! This is a legislative scheme that says, “It’s got to stop! Your normal, economic commercial industrial pursuits should stop once in a while – and that’s okay! I command you to stop working! It’s okay!”

Part and parcel with the Land Sabbath was a general release of debts at the end of every seven years.

Deuteronomy 15:1 “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release.”

This is talking about a general release of *all* debts in society.

2 “And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor ...”

Nobody is exempted. There are no exceptions to this statute.

2 “... He shall not exact it of his neighbor ...”

If he doesn’t pay, you can’t take him to court and sue him to collect. It’s over. As we are going to see, you should have done a better job of loaning the money.

2 “... He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD’s release has been proclaimed.

3 Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release.”

This general release of debts coincides with the Land Sabbath. Had this law been followed, there would be no debt to release – because when the debt was incurred, the lender would have said, “There are only so many years until we get to the Sabbatical year, the year of release, therefore I will only loan you this much money,” and the borrower could only borrow as much as he could pay back in that period of time.

It’s important to appreciate that the combination of these two things (the Land Sabbath and this general release of debts) working together would have effectively stopped all economic activity in the nation for an entire year!

But this doesn’t mean that people wouldn’t be working and it doesn’t mean that there wouldn’t be things to do. It just means that all this buying and selling, all this focus on making money, this focus that turns us inward on ourselves and on what we think we need, would be – for the better part of a year – completely gone!

What would be wrong with that? That sounds really good to me! It sounds like a formula for happiness!

But it gets better in the Year of Jubilee!

Leviticus 25:8 “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.”

In Scripture, “seven” is a number of completeness and perfection. So when there had been a complete cycle of seven Land Sabbaths that was a marker for another significant event in the life

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of the nation. It should be noted that in one sense it marked the passing of a generation! Fifty years is about the span of a generation. It also marked a significant time for the land.

9 “Then you shall sound the loud trumpet (the one that you sound on the Day of Atonement because this was the day of the year when the Jubilee was proclaimed) 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 ...”

Yes, indeed! It should be a Jubilee for you. Why? For one thing, it is not a coincidence that the Jubilee is proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, a time that symbolized Israel’s reconciliation of all their relationships with their Father in heaven, with the Lord, with the Eternal, the One whose blood had saved them in Egypt and who had brought them into the land and had given them the land. You can read the progression of all of those reconciliatory acts in Leviticus 16. It was a time when the nation of Israel, regardless of bad decisions or the ravages of life, those who may have lost their land had the opportunity to have their property returned to them:

10 “... when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.”

What is happening there? Sometimes people make bad choices. Sometimes life puts us in situations we can’t control. Things happen and we have to react in the interest of our own survival perhaps. It was possible to lose one’s land through a set of circumstances, one’s own bad choices, famine in the land or whatever it was.

If you had to sell your land in order to survive and protect your family, you had to do that. On occasion, because one or both of those kinds of events, people had to sell themselves into slavery. This Year of Jubilee was a time when all of that changed! It was as though somebody pulled out a big eraser and erased it all out! It is no more. It never happened. In golf, they call it a “mulligan.” It’s a do-over. You get to pick the ball up and throw it on the fairway and pretend nobody was looking. You don’t have to count the stroke. There’s no penalty. It all comes back. It’s like playing a Country and Western song backwards! Everything comes back to you.

11 “That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you ...”

It would be if you got it all back!

11 “... in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines.

12 For it is a jubilee. It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.”

This sounds a lot like the Land Sabbath – because it was!

But wait a minute! In year 49 we had a Land Sabbath. We didn’t grow anything. Stuff grew but we didn’t grow it, we didn’t harvest it and we didn’t reap it or sell it in the market. We didn’t make any money.

“Now, in year 50 I’ve got to do that again? I got my land back but I am not able to make any money from it? How is a back-to-back Land Sabbath a good thing?”

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Once in a generation, the land had two years to be rebuilt and replenished. Talk about an enforced recession! It is most likely that production would have been lower in year 50 than it was in year 49.

Yet this was a blessing for people! God intended it to be a blessing to people – for economic stability, for their own mental sanity, for their own emotional well-being, to lift them outside of the pursuit of their own life and point them towards Him as the One who sustained them and provided all that they had.

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

14 And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another.”

What is that about?

15 “You shall pay your neighbor according to the number of years after the jubilee ...”

So if a person has to sell their land, the reference point for determining the price of what is being sold is the next Jubilee.

15 “... and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops.

16 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.”

Notice specifically that the land is omitted here! When one sold their land, they didn't actually sell their land. What they sold was what could be *produced* with the land – the crops. The numbers of crops that could be sold depended on how many years there were to the next Jubilee – and that determined the value of what was being purchased. God is emphatic:

17 “You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God.”

You don't get to play with the price! If an Israelite became impoverished and had to sell their land, they could only sell what they owned, what was theirs – the crop production. The value was computed based upon the number of crops being sold from the period of time when the sale was taking place until the year of the Jubilee. That was the outside reference point. The price was, more or less, dependent upon the numbers of crops.

The price was further discounted for the Land Sabbaths which were not included in the years that the land produced crops because those years weren't available for general marketing or economic exploitation.

The proscription against harvesting during a Sabbatical Year ran with the land. It meant that if I buy your crops on your land, I can't now come in and start sowing, reaping and harvesting on your land. It was a “land use right” issue. The land had rights – and those rights transcended human rights! I would like to see our Supreme Court wrestle with that!

A buyer of another's crops couldn't produce an economic windfall by producing during a Sabbatical Year.

In our world today there are two general over-arching principles that drive land-based economics. One is the notion of “highest and best use.” In the laws of most modern societies,

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courts and legislatures protect the right to have land designated for its highest and best use. This generally means, “How can you get the most money out of it? What development will produce the greatest return?”

This is why some of the richest agricultural land in all of California – on the coastal plain from Huntington Beach to San Diego – is covered with pavement instead of crops as it used to be when I was a child. It was because of “highest and best use.”

Along with that principle, our law protects “the free alienation of property.” This is to say that the law abhors restrictions on transferring property. Our law would abhor the restrictions imposed on the transfer of property in Leviticus 25. It wouldn’t tolerate it.

The city of Venice in Los Angeles used to look like Venice, Italy in every detail. The man who built it had gone to Venice and fallen in love with it. He came back, bought all of that property, dug canals and leached water from the ocean into these canals. There were gondoliers.

While it was quaint and romantic and all those lovely things, that didn’t fit “highest and best use” for that property. This man had paid the best lawyers in all of California to write covenants into deeds to preserve and to protect “for ever” what he had built. The language in those deeds is very clear. But you can’t find a canal in Venice today. You can find a lot of kooks (crazy people with different lifestyles) – but no canals.

The reason is because of these two principles of law: the “highest and best use” and the “free alienation of property,” both of which run completely counter to everything we are reading in Leviticus 25. But it is these principles that created the opportunities for the “bubbles” that created the excessive use of credit in our economy that opened the door for sub-prime loans and that helped generate the economic crisis that this country – and indeed the world – is in, because these principles are not just practised in the United States. They are practised in Western Europe, in Australia, in New Zealand, in Canada – and now in Dubai and in Saudi Arabia and many places in the Middle East.

These principles artificially inflate the prices of real estate. What is more, they don’t necessarily allow real estate to be used in the best possible way for all of mankind! They do purport to allow real estate to be used to generate the most money for those who control its development.

Make no mistake, excessive debt is the key to our current economic crisis – and it is not over. It is going to get worse before it gets better. We haven’t hit the bottom of this yet – at least most realistic experts don’t think so. It is not just me saying that. As the British economic historian Niall Ferguson put it:

“We are living through the very painful end of an age of leverage which saw a total private and public debt (at least in the US) rise from 155% of gross domestic product ...”

... that is 155% *more* than what real goods and services in this economy in the United States could actually produce in year. We had debt of 155% of what we actually produce in a year that is of any tangible value.

“During this bubble period, largely fuelled by development in real estate ...”

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... and in securities and other things, but real estate is a huge component ...

“... we saw that 155% rise to 342% of gross domestic product by the middle of 2008.”

That is why it couldn't go on.

Not all the bad news is out in other countries. You hear more about what happens in America because we have a more open press. Our banks can't hide what they do as easily as banks in other countries hide what they do. You haven't heard the bad news about insurance companies and their failure to book sufficient loss reserve ratios to cover claims and the bad debts that they hold. People are still in denial – huge denial.

This crisis, our environmental crisis and our energy problems would not be what they are today had we followed this legislative outline in constructing our economic system, because the beauty of Leviticus 25 is that it starts with the land and it acknowledges the fact that the Earth has limits! But we are so narrowly telescoped into our own little lives on this planet. While it seems to us that the Earth can just keep producing and keep producing and keep producing, it can't!

God knew that. He created it – and He commanded us to let it rest once in a while – and for us to rest along with it. This is not a bad thing. It is not a bad notion!

18 “Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely.”

There would be no economic crisis, no energy shortage and no pollution.

19 “The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill (you will have everything you need) and dwell in it securely.

20 And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’

21 I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years.”

... which, interestingly according to Deuteronomy, is the year of tithing. That is when it produces.

22 “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.

This is not a zero sum game. The problem is, when we take it to ourselves, when we decide that we know how to make a better pie, we end up having to eat our pie! We are not in a position to be able to command this blessing! But when we follow this formula, it is not a zero sum game. It isn't a matter if somebody loses over here, somebody wins over here and somebody lost over there. It's a matter of God intervening to provide a blessing that goes beyond anything that we can imagine is possible in the natural world as we understand it from our limited perspective.

23 “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity ...”

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This is another law that would alienate people today, a law that our law would abhor. God says we can't sell the land in perpetuity. It is restricted. It can't be alienated in perpetuity ...

23 "... for the land is mine ..."

... says God. He is not transferring title to it. He is not giving it away!

He says, "You can't give away something that isn't yours. Don't think about it."

23 "... For you are strangers and sojourners with me."

"You are here temporarily. One generation comes; one generation goes. You are just going to be here a while. You are just sojourners."

24 "And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land."

With God there is a "do-over." If a person gets beaten up in life they get a chance to be redeemed. "Because you are with Me, you have to allow that. This is My land. You have to allow it to be redeemed. You cannot hold onto it forever."

25 "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 you had an obligation to a family member, if you had a family member who got into a problem and you had the ability to help him out by redeeming his property, you had a responsibility under the law to do that. The purpose was to keep that integrated web of human relationships, kins and clans together; to not let it get scattered, broken down and divided, to not allow people who had fallen to stay in that state; but to build them back up so that they could sustain themselves again.

26 "If a man has no one to redeem it and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it,"

... then he can go and buy it back.

27 "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."

Then the property is his again. The man who bought it doesn't get to make a profit. He doesn't get to inflate the value of the land. This literally rips the profit motive, the greed aspect out of everything to do with land-based economics! We can obviously see why nobody wants to do this!

28 "But if he has not sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee ..."

In all events, no matter; it is coming back! No matter what, there is the opportunity for redemption.

28 "... In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property."

QUESTION OF LIBERTY

Urban property was a little different than rural property. Up to this point we have talked exclusively about farm land or ranch land. But in verse 29 the law shifts:

29 “If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city ...”

... typically that individual is living there because he is not depending upon the land for his livelihood.

29 “... he may redeem it within a year of its sale ...”

If he sold it, he had a year to buy it back.

29 ... “For a full year he shall have the right of redemption.

30 If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer ...”

You could sell urban property in perpetuity. Those who appreciate the “alienation of property” principle will like this. The person who bought it could keep it ...

30 “... throughout his generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee.

31 But the houses of the villages that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land ...”

Unwalled property was more like rural land.

31 “... They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee.

32 As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites may redeem at any time the houses in the cities they possess.”

There was no similar restriction on houses in Levitical cities.

33 “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 among the people of Israel.

34 But the fields of pastureland belonging to their cities may not be sold, for that is their possession forever.”

There has been a notion that the Levites didn't actually have access to their own property. That isn't exactly true. They did have the ability to own property as we see here. They did have access to fields where they could grow crops and sustain their lives.

This, by the way, is the proclamation of liberty. It is not a mistake that it begins with the land – because in the order of things, the land is what sustains human life.

Following on, the rest of this chapter is devoted to the proclamation of liberty for people – for people who are poor, who can't maintain themselves, people who had to be supported by you giving them a job if you could (in other words, buying them). They worked and in this construct they are called “slaves.” But they were not slaves in the traditional sense that we think of slavery or the institutions of slavery that we are familiar with. An Israelite slave had to be paid wages. It wasn't that you just brought him in, provided him housing and have him work. He had to be paid wages.

QUESTION OF LIBERTY

In other sections of Scripture, we find that when that slave was released, you had to stake him. You had to give him some money when he left you so that he wouldn't end up falling on hard times again. They could get going again. Taking a slave on in Israel wasn't an economic boon to the person doing it. It cost you. You were maintaining this individual. To be sure, they were working, but you were maintaining them. You couldn't profit from them in that sense. If you lent them money you couldn't charge them interest. You couldn't sell them food for profit. There goes the company store!

36 “Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you.

37 You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit.

38 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.

39 “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave:”

... not in the traditional sense, not the way the nations did.

40 “he shall be with you as a hired servant and as a sojourner ...”

He is not there forever. There is going to come a time when he goes, so it's up to you, while he is with you, to help him understand how it is he got into that position in the first place, to help educate him and bring him along so that he doesn't end up back there again.

This is a *huge* responsibility in terms of strengthening and building up that important and intricate network of human social relationships. Contrast that with modern welfare! Contrast it with the disconnection that we see in families as a result of the industrial society which has taken people away from the land, away from their families, into urban centres and spread them far and wide over the face of the Earth, away from their support systems, away from people who would care for them naturally and who would love them. It's a huge, huge difference!

40 “... He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee.

41 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.

42 For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves.”

The poor man could be redeemed by a near relative in the same essential procedure as redemption of the land – with a different computation in terms of the price. The Jubilee represented a proclamation of liberty. It is nothing like the liberty that man thought that *he* had created with the advent of the Industrial Revolution, with the mechanisation and the urbanisation of society and even now with the technological virtual overlay that often sends us into a state of awe. It was nothing like that. This was true liberty – liberty for the land that sustained man and all of the animals.

It was a year that followed a general release and cancellation of debt – which itself is a form of slavery. Scripture says that when we are in debt, we are slaves to whomever it is we owe money. This was a time when bad decisions and bad circumstances were erased! This was a time when stress could melt away as people rested, a time when a younger generation could enjoy a new start, unencumbered by the wrong choices of their parents if that is what happened as sometimes it did, or tragic events that were beyond the control of their parents – as can happen, and often does.

QUESTION OF LIBERTY

It was a time of renewed hope for the entire society. If Israel was paying attention to all those rituals in Leviticus 16 they should have understood that God was never saying that they were responsible for all the bad things, all the transgressions and all the deviations that had occurred. He understood that they had an enemy, an adversary – although this didn't mean that they didn't have to take responsibility for themselves where it was their responsibility to do so.

But God also understood the nature and structure of the world in which His people lived. If they were paying attention they should have understood that about their Creator. This was a time when people were given a new start because God understood there was an external influence creating problems for mankind. God was going to give them an opportunity, free of that influence for the time being (not completely) to start over. This was a true proclamation of liberty.

It was a time to build life again – just as the land rebuilds life when it isn't being worked.

When Jesus began to do His Father's work He quoted:

**Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor ...**

We have been talking about the poor. The whole law of the Jubilee is about the poor, and about the wealth of nations and how not to become poor by taking care of the land that provides your wealth.

**1 ... he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives (those who are oppressed),
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound (recovering of sight to the blind);
2 to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour ...**

I would submit to you that the Jubilee was just such a year. It was the year of the Lord's favour, a double Sabbath!

For the nation of Israel in its infancy, the Jubilee was important. There was instruction about how to use the land. It was an opportunity for regeneration, rebirth, for redemption. It was a reminder about the need in human society for reconciliation with their Creator, a reminder about events and how choices can become outcomes that are undesirable – but certainly not outcomes that are intended by God.

It was celebrated on the Day of Atonement, no doubt as a reminder that events can occur for which no human can be blamed. There is an adversary.

But in all events for Israel, the Year of Jubilee was a personal and national event. It was a forced recession, one of eight that occurred every 50 years.

Had they understood and appreciated it for what it was, they would have seen it as a stabilizing factor in their lives economically, socially and in every other way. They would have seen it as protection from rapacious governments and greedy creditors and bad actors.

QUESTION OF LIBERTY

But with the coming of the Anointed One, this proclamation of liberty, something more important took place. It was a complete regime change. No longer would the proclamation of liberty be limited to the land of Israel or her citizens. This was a proclamation of liberty for *all* mankind – and with that proclamation of liberty, events were set in motion to liberate in advance a select group of people, the called-out ones.

The apostle Paul calls them the children of God, the Church of the firstborn.

Interestingly, their liberation was celebrated on a day that came after seven Sabbaths marked from the time that the Messiah, the Anointed One, was liberated from the grave. On that 50th day, the Church was consecrated, set apart and given the Holy Spirit of God and liberated to do the work of God on this Earth. It is these people who will inherit the Earth! It should not escape our attention what the apostle Paul has to say in this context:

Romans 8:19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay (corruption) and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

24 For in this hope we were saved ...

As with so many laws and social structures given to ancient Israel, the Jubilee foreshadowed this great event! It was personal and national for Israel but it tells a story, not surprisingly, about God's creation. It is not a coincidence that it involves the number 50. It's not a coincidence that those to whom this creation will be released in what really *will* be a Jubilee have been prepared by God over time.

We, of all people have to understand the importance of what transpires in that whole legal structure that surrounds the Jubilee because we are the ones to whom God looks to take care of His creation – according to the formula that He prescribes – and not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of all mankind!

That is what is represented by a millennial rest when all of the nonsense that surrounds us today, all the chaos, ceases. There will be a complete cessation of what goes on now – but a whole lot of work to accomplish the will of God on the face of this Earth and to see His creation finally produce what it is He intended from the beginning! ❖