

## Leviticus Chapter 25 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is “Trust Me”. The good news is the “Me” refers to God. Yours truly is much less reliable. ☺
  - a) We are approaching the end of Leviticus. For those of you who have stuck it out so far, my congratulations. The end is in sight a few lessons away in Chapter 27.
  - b) This is also the last chapter on “how to please God throughout our lives”. The first section of Leviticus focused on how the priests are to perform. Most of Leviticus, including this chapter, focuses on how the “average Israelite” was to live their lives.
  - c) Chapter 25 is the last of the “do’s and don’ts that make up most of Leviticus.”
    - i) Chapter 26 is God giving his list of rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience. There are no special new commands in Chapter 26.
    - ii) Chapter 27, the final chapter has some more laws, but the focus is on “redemption”. We’ll get to that very soon.
2. The actual topic of Chapter 25 is on “special years” and the laws that are to be performed for those special years. There are 55 verses in this chapter, and most of them describe laws that go with these special years.
  - a) The first eight verses deal with a “Sabbatical Year”. God requires the Israelites to work six days and rest on the seventh day. That pattern is repeated in years. There is to be six years of “regular work” (less the sabbaths and holidays) and then a sabbatical year.
    - i) The closest thing we have to this is for college professors. It is common for many universities to give senior professors some time off (say a semester or year) every now and then. This is called a “sabbatical”. It was based on this biblical concept.
  - b) The remainder of the chapter deals with a special Sabbath year that happens every 50 years. The idea is not only is one to stop working for a year, but all debts are cancelled and property is reverted back to its original owner on this year.
3. OK, so let’s suppose I work six years. How do you expect me to make a living on the 7<sup>th</sup> year?
  - a) Funny you ask that. ☺ God Himself asks that question rhetorically in Verse 20. (See, I’m not the only one who asks rhetorical questions. It’s biblical! ☺)
  - b) The short answer is God says He will provide such a good crop in Year #6, that it will tie the Israelites over until one can grow crop again in Year #8.
  - c) Let me answer the question another way: How is it that you and I can have food on our table on Sunday, assuming we don’t work Sunday? The answer is God provides us with enough income to sustain us when we take time off for Him. We trust that God will provide for us on the time we take off without pay.
  - d) God is asking the Israelites to take that trust one step further. He is saying, “OK, you trust Me enough to take off a day a week. Now let’s see if you can trust Me enough to take off one year every seven. It’s a test to see how strong your faith is.” That’s why I call this lesson “Trust Me”. It’s about testing our faith over a long period of time.
4. So is the sole purpose of these time-off years to show one’s faith in God? No.
  - a) This sabbath year has other benefits as well. For starters, those who work farm lands understand the idea of resting the land and crop rotation is good for the soil nutrients.
  - b) Another issue is the greatest danger to our faith: Materialism. The bible states a number of times in both the Old and New Testament how the earth will be destroyed one day. We’ll discuss that near the end of this lesson. I think God mentions the inevitable destruction of the earth just so we won’t get too obsessed with “things” other than God.
  - c) The idea of all of Israel reverting to its original landowners prevents any one person or group of developing some sort of long-term monopoly as a land-baron. The Promised Land is divided up by tribes and then subdivided by families. The individual pieces can be leased, but always revert to the family ownership at this fifty year mark.

- d) It is interesting to note Israel's actual failure to keep these sabbatical years. We'll discuss this later in the lesson. Note that one reason the nation went into Babylonian captivity for 70 years is they "owed" God seventy years of not keeping these special Sabbath years.
5. Are Christians required to observe these special years? No. This Sabbatical year (one year out of seven) and the special 50<sup>th</sup> year (called "The Year of Jubilee") have prophetic fulfillments in both Jesus' First Coming and Jesus' Second Coming. We'll talk about that in this lesson as well.
- a) That is one reason why this chapter is the last of the dos and don'ts commands of Leviticus. These special years are "climatic" and predictive of a future Messianic age.
- b) The idea is the 50-year is a time of celebration. Hey, if I didn't have to make a mortgage payment, rent payment or credit card payment in year 50, I'd be happy too, and so would you! The idea is to have rest in a sense of "relief".
- c) The idea ties to Jesus' First Coming in the sense of the payment of our sins are taken care of. That should give us a sense of relief in a similar sense as this 50<sup>th</sup> year.
- d) The idea ties to Jesus' Second Coming in that the bible promises a future 1,000-year reign by The Messiah (Jesus) over the earth. Life as we know it, dealing with "burdens" will be gone. In many ways, it will be like this special 50<sup>th</sup> year.
- e) In the meantime, God is saying, "Trust Me" to the fact that the price for sins has been paid and all our sins have been released like debts. The bible also says, "Trust Me" in the fact that Jesus does return and a millennial kingdom does happen one day.
- f) The practical day-by-day aspect also has to do with the "Trust Me" concept. The lessons on going a long time without income teach us our dependence upon Him and not our material wealth. We'll get back to this last point in the wrap up section.
6. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai
- a) This is only the second time so far in Leviticus where Mount Sinai is mentioned.
- b) This is the location where God gave Moses the 10 Commandments and "the law".
- c) The question becomes, why reference Sinai here and now?
- i) I believe (but can't prove) God wanted to emphasize how important is this idea of the Sabbatical year. It is Moses saying in effect, "What I am about to say is God's law. This will be difficult for us to accept, but it is what God wants us to do".
7. Verse 2: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. <sup>3</sup> For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. <sup>4</sup> But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD.
- a) Verse 2 says, "When you enter the land..." That's a whole lot better than "if". ☺
- i) That means that no matter how much the Israelites mess up, somehow, someday, they will enter this Promised Land. The point is the promise is unconditional.
- ii) Grant it, it did not happen as they expected. Everybody of that generation except for two people were penalized and not allowed to enter. Only the next generation got to actually enter the Promised Land. My point is when God makes a promise, that promise will come through. It may not happen they way we like it or on our timing, but one can count on God's unconditional promises.
- b) Let me paraphrase what God is saying through Moses: "When you eventually settle in the Promised Land (i.e., Israel), you are going to be farmers. Not everyone will be farmers, but that will be the main source for your economy. You are to work the land so that it grows crops. You will do this every year for six years. On year #7, you are to not plant any new crops nor work in the field."
- c) OK, so what's the purpose? Why leave the farmland alone for a year?
- i) The main idea was for the Israelites to trust God. It was a way of testing them as well as a way of resting them. (The rhyme was unintentional. ☺ )
- ii) In farming, occasionally resting the soil is good for the soil. It builds nutrients to let the soil "rest" every now and then.

- iii) The greatest temptation that keeps people away from God it is the love of things. People mistakenly think by working longer hours they can have all they want and be happy. I have met many people who don't want to go to church because they don't want to give up part of their income or part of their weekends. They don't see church as "fun" and would rather live for pleasure than live for God.
  - iv) This concept of not working for a year out of seven is to help break people of being too obsessed with "things". The idea is to take the time one would labor on the farm and somehow, somehow use that time for God. This take a year off method was a way of getting the Israelites focus off of their routines and onto God.
  - d) This reminds me of a joke I heard many years ago:
    - i) A young rabbi asked an older rabbi "Rabbi, what do I have to do to become rich?" The older rabbi said, "Well, for the first 15 years, you have to be a real bastard". The young rabbi stopped for a while to digest that. Finally, the young rabbi asked, "Rabbi, what happens after 15 years?" The older rabbi shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, after 15 years, you get used to it." ☺
    - ii) The morale of the joke is not about how to get rich. The morale is that we get accustomed to living a certain way. Once we develop certain habits, we want to stick to those habits and it is hard to change.
    - iii) To spend six years, working pretty much all the time, and then to "not" work for a year is a difficult thing. This is not about lying in bed and watching television for a year. This is about changing our daily lives for a significant period as to realize our dependence upon God, now and forever.
  - e) Should Christians observe this Sabbatical year? There is nowhere in the New Testament that states Christians to do so. The closest application I can think of is to consider taking some time off from work, to do some great project for God. Consider going on some sort of mission trip. Churches sponsor such missionaries and it is financially possible. The main idea is to get out of our "ruts", avoid the path of least resistance and take time to do major projects for God as a sign of our appreciation for our salvation.
  - f) Let's stop at this point and finish the verses on this topic.
8. Verse 4 (cont.): Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.<sup>5</sup> Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you--for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you,<sup>7</sup> as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.
- a) Let me paraphrase God here: "During this seventh year, a lot of crops will grow all on its own without cultivation. You may freely eat of it, but you cannot gather it to sell it. Anybody can go out and freely eat of what grows wild. The same applies the stranger too as well as the animals."
  - b) If you have ever grown crops, you know that if you leave a plant alone, it may just grow wild if uncultivated. That is what is in view here.
  - c) So how does one financially survive during this year? The idea is to have some savings from the previous six years for this seventh year. Just like most of us save enough money from working five or six days to have enough on the seventh day, so one has to save and prepare for the seventh year. Most grains keep well in dry storage for many years.
    - i) I kept wondering, does that mean no fresh produce for a year? No, because a lot of produce will still come out of the ground or trees even if not cultivated. Further, the Israelites were still free to barter and trade with others from their savings during this time. The restriction is only against working the land.
  - d) It's probably time for a disclaimer here: If one is so destitute that they have to work seven days just to survive, neither I nor anyone else is holding that against you. The majority of people get at least one day off a week. I understand there are exceptions out of necessity.

- e) The sad part of the history of Israel and a key reason that they went into captivity in Babylon was a failure to obey this command:
    - i) "The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah." (2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:21, NIV)
    - ii) Remember that one year out of seven was supposed to be a Sabbath's rest. The Israelites went into captivity for exactly seventy years as predicted by Jeremiah (See Jeremiah 25:11-12, 29:10).
    - iii) The point is for 490 years the Israelites failed to obey this Sabbath law. The number 490 divided by 7 equals 70 years.
    - iv) If you calculate the time the Israelites first entered the Promised Land to the time of the Babylonian captivity, it is more than 490 years. The point is during the time span from entering the Promised Land until the Babylonian captivity, the Israelites missed 490 years of Sabbatical rest, so God said in effect, "You owe me 70 years".
9. Verse 8: " `Count off seven sabbaths of years--seven times seven years--so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. <sup>10</sup> Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.
- a) In Verse 8, we switch topics. We are no longer talking about what to do every 7<sup>th</sup> year.
  - b) The new topic is a special "50<sup>th</sup>" year. It is a sabbath-year like the 7<sup>th</sup> year, but even more things are to occur on this year.
  - c) God is saying in effect, "You know that every seven-year sabbath thing? Well, number them as you go along. Call the first seventh-year sabbath #1. Call the second one (seven years later) #2. Keep going until you hit #7. Then on the Day of Atonement holiday on Sabbath Year #7, make an announcement that the next year will be a special year."
    - i) The other implication is the regular holidays are not to be ignored on these years.
  - d) Notice in Verse 10 it says "fiftieth" year. Seven times seven sabbath-years is 49 years. The following year, (#50) is this special Sabbath year. Therefore, this special event only occurs one year out of fifty years.
  - e) The announcement for the sabbatical 50<sup>th</sup> year came was on the Day of Atonement holiday in Year #49. Why have this date as the announcement date? The 50<sup>th</sup> year is a time of special celebration and all debts are to be forgiven. The Day of Atonement is the day of the "two-goat ritual" where all sins are forgiven. The idea is to make the "pun" connection of the forgiveness of sins with the forgiveness of debts.
  - f) If you recall, the Jewish New Year begins in the first month of the fall. The Jewish most holy day of the year, the "Day of Atonement" or "Yom Kippur" occurs on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of that same month. So, to proclaim the Day of Atonement as an "alarm warning" in Year #49 for the 50<sup>th</sup> year-Sabbath is like giving almost full one-year's notice in advance.
10. Verse 10 (cont.): It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. <sup>11</sup> The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.
- a) Notice the word "jubilee" is used three times in these three verses. That is the title for this 50<sup>th</sup> year: The Year of Jubilee". As the word implies, it is a time of celebration.
  - b) Like the every seventh-year sabbath, the fields are to be left alone. Whatever grows naturally in the farm fields becomes a free-for-all for all to eat. Anyone can eat what they want that naturally grows, but no one can work the fields for their own gain.
  - c) Imagine the Israelites hearing these rules while they were still in the desert. What were they thinking? They must have thought, "Wow, two years without working the fields. That's going to take a lot of trust in God." Again, my title of this lesson is "Trust Me".

11. Verse 13: " `In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property.
- a) Verse 13 is the key to understanding this Year of Jubilee. All land returns to the descendants of the original owners.
  - b) When the Israelites first settled in the Promised Land under Joshua, all of the land was divided up by the descendants of the 12 tribes. The latter half of the book of Joshua covers those details. From there, individual cities and individual farmlands were further divided by family members of those tribes.
  - c) The point of Verse 13 is once that division is done, it is permanent. Land could then be leased to others until the next Year of Jubilee, and then it reverts back to the original owners and its descendants.
  - d) Some people think ownership is some sort of "communistic plan". Communism refers to common ownership of all things. This plan is about private ownership. The restriction is against any permanent change of ownership.
  - e) What is behind this is the prevention of any person or family developing a land monopoly. Let's say one shrewd business trader buys up much of Israel. That family would then dominate others for generations. In this system, no one family can dominate land ownership for more than a generation, as every 50 years land reverts back to the original family of ownership.
  - f) What's the point of all this? The Promised Land belongs to God, as we'll read in Verse 23. By using this system, it is a reminder that all "things" eventually belong to God and whatever blessings we enjoy in this lifetime only last a lifetime. To "hoard" say, land for oneself has a temporary blessing, but it eventually ends when we die. This year of Jubilee reminds the Israelites about the "temporary-ness" of this lifetime.
  - g) Should Christians practice this Jubilee year concept? The problem lets say with the United States is that there were not 50 original families that own the 50 states. There is no "original family" to give the land to every fifty years. In Israel, in 70AD, the Romans burned to the ground the Jewish Temple. That destroyed all the genealogical records. My point is even modern Israel cannot adopt this system. (There's far more to it than that for Israel, but you get the point.)
12. Verse 14: " `If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. <sup>15</sup> You are to buy from your countryman on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And he is to sell to you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. <sup>16</sup> When the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is the number of crops. <sup>17</sup> Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the LORD your God.
- a) Here is where life gets a little complicated. Let's suppose you own some land and want to rent it out to farmers. The way to calculate the value of the land is based on the number of years left until the next Jubilee. In the year of the Jubilee, all debts are forgiven.
    - i) Let's say the Jubilee year just happened and now there is 49 years to go until the next one. You could lease the land for the next 49 years. If there is only one year to go until the Jubilee year, you could only lease the land for one year.
    - ii) Let's also say you want one large flat sum of money now as opposed to 49 yearly payments. The point of this verse is the fair market value for that one big payment is a lot more if there are 49 years to go as opposed to one year to go.
  - b) For those who don't know this, I make a living as a real estate appraiser. That job in ancient Israel was required good mathematical skills due to this 50-year cycle! ☺
  - c) Verse 17 has the warning of "Do not take advantage of each other". To paraphrase God here, "Hey, don't take advantage of someone who doesn't know about the Jubilee law. If you mess with them due to their naivety, you mess with Me and I'll mess with you!" ☺

13. Verse 18: " Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. <sup>19</sup> Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. <sup>20</sup> You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" <sup>21</sup> I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. <sup>22</sup> While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.
- a) Here is where God asks the question everyone is thinking, "How will we survive during this time frame?" Remember there is a two-year time frame (Year #49, a 7<sup>th</sup> Sabbath year and Year #50 a Jubilee year) where no food is to be grown. God answers that question in effect by saying, "I'll bless your crops so much the year before the work stoppage that you'll have enough to fill the storage bins until the next growth comes."
  - b) In order for God to keep this promise of "Great Year #6", the Israelites have to promise to mentally keep this two-year sabbatical. I can see where the temptation comes when people get rich due in the "Year 6 crop boom" to keep that going for Year #7 and Year #8.
  - c) The older I get and the more I live as a Christian, the more cautious I get during the good economic times and more optimistic I get during the rough economic times. I understand that God is watching out for me financially. If I'm having a great "Year 6", I need to have some caution that a special "Year #7 work stoppage" may be around the corner. This is not about being paranoid, but just about the realization that things can always change at any moment. This is about being grateful to God when the good times come and trusting in God through the difficult times when my "harvest" is not so good.
    - i) Again, the theme of this lesson is "Trust Me". It means to have trust when the bountiful "Year 6" happens and to have trust that God will come through when the difficult times hit during a "Sabbatical".
  - d) Remember that this "Year of Jubilee" is a time of celebration. Imagine the relief one feels when there is no more mortgage payments, no more rent payments and the credit cards have a zero balance. That would be a great sense of relief. That's the idea of the Year of Jubilee. It's a time to enjoy life as all of ones debts are forgiven. God wants us to comprehend what it means to have all of ones sins forgiven. To have this celebration, roughly once per everyone's lifetime, is to comprehend the peace and joy one has when all of ones' sins are forgiven.
  - e) Here's another question to ponder: Why have this Jubilee year only once per 50 years?
    - i) Yes, the number "five" is symbolic of God's grace, but I want to get practical here.
    - ii) Most people would only experience this event once per lifetime. I believe that's the idea. It is the idea that when we get to heaven, we are "perfectly forgiven" and there are no further debts to God, debts to society etc. It is an eternity of peace.
    - iii) Having this event one year out of 50 gives everyone something to look forward to, or something to plan for one's children. It is just often enough where one can plan one's life around it.
    - iv) Switching topics a little, one of the greatest joys of planning a vacation is the anticipation. If one knows there is a big trip coming up, one gets a great sense of peace in the anticipation of that event. The same can be said for having a weekend off. The daily grind of work is more bearable knowing time off is coming and/or there is a vacation coming. This gets back to the Year of Jubilee. It is a mental image to keep in mind to remind us of a great future day coming.
14. Verse 23: " The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants.
- a) First, notice the phrase "the land is mine (God's)" in Verse 23.
  - b) Do the Israelites own the modern land of Israel? No, it is God's. Do the Palestinians? No, it is God's. End of Issue. Like most Evangelical Christians, I am staunchly "pro-Israel" because I understand God gave them this land as an unconditional promise.

- c) At the same time, I understand land ownership belongs to God and the descendants of Abraham only have the right to use that land as long as God says so.
  - d) It is always interesting to contemplate the fact that God, the creator of the universe, including millions of stars, picks out this small piece of real estate on planet Earth and says, "This section is mine".
  - e) This reminds me of a classic conversation between President Reagan of the United States and President Begin of Israel in the 1980's. They met in Washington. After the meeting, Reagan said, "Don't forget to pray about it." Begin answered and said, "I'll pray from Jerusalem. It's a local call." ☺ (I don't know if this is true story, but one gets the point.)
  - f) Back to the text: God calls the Israelites "aliens and tenants" of the land. The idea is that the land of Israel is not their permanent home, but it is only "given" to them by God. If they fail to be obedient, they lose the privilege of having that land.
    - i) There is a principal that Jesus taught that applies here: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world." (John 8:23 NIV)
    - ii) The concept here is that those who follow Jesus "belong" in heaven and the earth is not our true home. "Home" is when we are resurrected and go to heaven. The earth is just a place where "God puts us" to be His witnesses. That same principal applies to the Israelites. The Promised Land is a place God made to temporary put them to be His witnesses.
    - iii) Going back to the Garden of Eden, the punishment for Satan was He was to crawl on his belly the rest of his life. (Ref. Genesis 3:14). I'm not sure what that literally means, but the word-picture is that He is "close as possible to the earth". His eternal home is not in heaven and he "gets" the world. Those who are not saved are nicknamed "of this world" because the only please they will get for eternity is whatever pleasure they get in this lifetime.
15. Verse 24: Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.
- a) One of the requirements for the Israelites to live in Israel is to "provide for the redemption of the land". That simply means to observe the seven-year sabbatical and the Jubilee year.
  - b) What is implied in this verse is that if the Israelites failed to observe these rituals they would be kicked out of the land. That is what happened in the Babylonian captivity.
    - i) What about the fact the Israelites were not in the land from 70AD to 1947? We'll talk about that in the next lesson. Stay tuned. ☺
  - c) Verse 24 is God saying in effect, "This is My land and just as you must take a rest on a 7<sup>th</sup> day, My land must take a rest on a 7<sup>th</sup> year."
16. Verse 25: " If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. <sup>26</sup> If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, <sup>27</sup> he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property. <sup>28</sup> But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property.
- a) Now let's discuss a topic of which I have a lot of experience: Appraising real estate. ☺
    - i) Let's suppose you owned a bunch of farmland. There are say, 23 years left until the next Jubilee year. You figure out the fair market value as a flat-fee for farmers to use the land for the next 23 years, and you collect that flat fee up front.
    - ii) Now supposed you become you want to buy back that farmland some time later. What these verses are saying is that you or a relative has the right to buy back the remaining years at the fair market value at that point in time.
    - iii) In real estate, we call this a "purchase option". In some lease documents, there is a clause that says a tenant has the right to buy the property at a fair market value.

- a) That is the idea here. The original owner has the right to buy the land back assuming 1) the owner has the cash 2) he or she pays fair market value.
  - b) A point of these verses is a "rich relative" has the right to buy it back for you.
  - c) This law is used in the Book of Ruth. To summarize the whole book, Naomi was a Jewish woman who moves out of the Israel. Eventually her husband and two grown children die. She eventually comes back to Israel only with her (non-Jewish) daughter in law Ruth. The hero of story Boaz marries Ruth and "buys back" the land that Naomi owned as part of her heritage. Boaz was a relative and had the right to purchase the land based on the laws here in Leviticus 25. There's much more to the story of Ruth, but that's how this law applies to that story.
  - d) Now let's discuss Revelation Chapter 5. I call that chapter, "The close of escrow".
    - i) In that chapter, Jesus takes claim to the title deed to the earth, so to speak. The point is Jesus is the only sinless "human" who was worthy of inheriting the earth. The world was made for man, but sinned "ruined" the place and it became Satan's domain. Jesus "redeemed" the earth for us by His payment on the cross.
    - ii) The comparison is Jesus is our "rich relative" who bought back the world for us the same way a rich Jewish relative could buy back ones "own" land that was sold.
17. Verse 29: " If a man sells a house in a walled city, he retains the right of redemption a full year after its sale. During that time he may redeem it. <sup>30</sup> If it is not redeemed before a full year has passed, the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the buyer and his descendants. It is not to be returned in the Jubilee. <sup>31</sup> But houses in villages without walls around them are to be considered as open country. They can be redeemed, and they are to be returned in the Jubilee.
- a) In this section, we get into some special exceptions for the Jubilee Year rules.
  - b) God says in effect that if a house is located within a city and it is sold, that sale can be permanent after a specified time-period. Verse 29 says that the seller has one-year option to buy it back. After one year, the sale becomes permanent.
  - c) Remember that cities in those days had large walls to keep out invaders. That is how to tell the difference between a city and an "open" village. It's not based on population; it is based on whether or not the perimeter of that town has walls.
  - d) The point is farmland can be redeemed at any time. Any farmland or homes that aren't part of walled cities are always part of the Jubilee rules and can be redeemed any time.
  - e) OK John, this is all interesting. What is the point? How does it apply to my life?
    - i) I believe God is saying that "homes in walled towns" are not as valuable as those out in the open fields. (Sorry, the appraiser in me is coming out again. ☺) If one owns a home in "walled city", one is trusting in the "walls" for protection more than one is trusting God. This is a world where raiders could come and steal one's crops. Those who lived in the open field truly had to trust God even more than those living behind walled cities do.
    - ii) This is a "pun" of God saying in effect, "Those who trust in Me are those who can be redeemed at any time. Those who put their trust in "things" (like walls) do not trust Me for their safety and their redemption."
    - iii) By the way, God is not against living in walled cities here. The subtle point is about fully trusting in God and not "things".
18. Verse 32: " The Levites always have the right to redeem their houses in the Levitical towns, which they possess. <sup>33</sup> So the property of the Levites is redeemable--that is, a house sold in any town they hold--and is to be returned in the Jubilee, because the houses in the towns of the Levites are their property among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup> But the pastureland belonging to their towns must not be sold; it is their permanent possession.
- a) As I stated, this section of Leviticus 25 gets into special exceptions to the rules of the Jubilee year. This paragraph focuses on exceptions for the Levites.

- b) OK, time for some quick background. There were original 12 tribes of Israel. One of the 12 tribes was the Levites. The High Priest was a Levite. God said to the Levites that all its tribe members were to be priests. If you were a Levite, your job is to be a priest. If you were Jewish and not a Levite, your application to seminary was rejected. ☺
    - i) When the land of Israel was divided up by tribe, the Levities were not to get a geographic share of the land. Instead, there were given certain cities scattered through the land so they could minister to everyone. Further, the Levites were given some pastureland surrounding these cities as a source of food and income.
    - ii) Further, Verse 34 says the land belonging to the Levites can never be sold.
  - c) With all of that in mind, we can get back to Leviticus 25 and the Jubilee year rules:
    - i) In the last paragraph, a home within a walled city can be permanently sold after a one-year period of time. The “exception to this exception” is when that home belonged to a Levite. That priest had the right to buy it back at any time and it automatically went back to him or his descendants at the year of Jubilee.
    - ii) Remember I jokingly asked earlier, “Does this mean a person living within a city wall can’t be saved?” In a sense, this exception clause is my “pun-proof”.
      - a) A Levite is someone specifically chosen by God to be a priest. That person had no say so in the matter, they were “born” to have this priestly position. The same applies to Christians. From God’s perspective, Christians are all “chosen” by God to serve Him. As I’ve stated in the early lesson of Leviticus, we as Christians are all called to be priests. (See 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:5,9).
      - b) All priests have the right to Jubilee “redemption”. One can see this word-picture as a good safety clause for Christians “living in walled cities”. ☺
19. Verse 35: " If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you. <sup>36</sup> Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. <sup>37</sup> You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. <sup>38</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.
- a) The topic of Verses 35-37 is about dealing with fellow Israelites who become poor.
  - b) The focus is not on the poor, but how to treat those who are poor.
  - c) The essential idea is not to abuse them or take advantage of their misfortune.
  - d) To paraphrase Verses 35-37, “Suppose there was a stranger among you who has some money and a Jewish old-timer who was poor. You don’t show favoritism toward the stranger over the poor old man because the stranger has more money.”
  - e) Verse 38 then says in effect, “I am the God who brought all of you out of Egypt. That includes the poor guy or gal standing next to you. You’re going to be with them in heaven forever. Get used to them. Treat them well.”
    - i) The basic idea is about showing love and respect to all of those who worship God.
  - f) Now its time to talk about the more controversial verse: charging interest.
    - i) The Hebrew word translated “interest” literally means, “to pinch” as if to pinch another person. If you make monthly loan payments, you understand. ☺
    - ii) Some believe it refers to charging excessive interest rates and others believe it argues against charging any interest at all in loans. Notice it is forbidden for Israelites to charge interest against fellow Israelites, not against strangers.
    - iii) The context of these verses is about taking advantage of someone who is poor.
  - g) Now let’s talk about these verses in context of the main topic: The Jubilee Year.
    - i) Here is a one-year period where no food is grown. It is a time of celebration and trust in God. It would be tempting for a farming community to “make a little extra money on the side” by selling food at a high profit to a poor person desperate to buy it.

- ii) Another example would be to charge high interest on a loan to someone desperate for money. In both examples, the main idea is not take advantage of someone.
  - iii) The purpose of the Jubilee Year is to have all debts be forgiven. It is a time of "relief" without having the burden of any sort of debt hanging over one's head. It would be hypocritical to have this Jubilee period and place debts upon others.
  - h) Let's get back to the theme of this lesson: "Trust Me". It is about trusting God during a long length of time without one's main source of income, like a Sabbatical year.
    - i) God threw in this paragraph to say in effect, "Don't use this time to take advantage of others who are hurting. You were slaves yourself once you know. This is a time to rest in God, not to use that time to take advantage of others, especially those who trust in God the way you do."
    - i) OK, we as Christians don't do a Sabbatical year or Jubilee year. What's the application?
      - i) Does this mean Christians can't go in the banking business? No. ☺
      - ii) It does mean we have compassion on people, especially those who are hurting. We don't take advantage of the less fortunate, especially those who believe in God.
      - iii) These verses are not saying we have to give away everything we own to anyone who asks. These verses are about not taking advantage of those who are suffering and not showing favoritism to those who have money. On the other hand, to have compassion on the less fortunate means to help them out when possible.
20. Verse 39: " `If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. <sup>40</sup> He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. <sup>41</sup> Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers. <sup>42</sup> Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. <sup>43</sup> Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.
- a) In this culture, when someone was poor and could not afford to pay back money they owe, they would sell themselves into slavery or their children into slavery in order to pay back debts. This is one reason God forbidden the idea of taking advantage of the poor, as the idea of having a personal slave was appealing as cheap labor.
  - b) God is saying in effect, "If someone who is Jewish offers to sell themselves to you to pay off debts, treat them as a hired worker or a stranger. They must only work for you until the year of the Jubilee and then they are free as all debts are cancelled."
  - c) With all of that in mind, we can partially see God's view on slavery: It was something God "tolerated" because people were accustomed to the idea. It was not encouraged. Israelites were to treat Jewish slaves like employees. They must release the slaves when the year of Jubilee occurred. The sin is stated in Verse 43, to not treat them ruthlessly.
  - d) It is important at this point to read the next three verses then come back to this topic.
21. Verse 44: " `Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. <sup>45</sup> You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. <sup>46</sup> You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.
- a) In Verses 44-46, God is saying in effect that the Israelites can have a double standard. They can have slaves who are not Israelites and treat them like property. If one has a slave who is a fellow Israelite, then that person must be treated like a hired servant and be released in the year of the Jubilee. They can have permanent slaves of non-Israelites.
  - b) Does this mean God is condoning slavery? I believe the better term is to tolerate it. One of the commands given in Leviticus 19:18 is to "Love one's neighbor as oneself". Jesus himself stated that this is one of the two most important commands in the bible. (Ref.: Matthew 22:37-40). My point here is to read these slavery verses in that context. The Israelites had to treat slaves well, and I'll add, much better than the surrounding nations.

- i) I've stated in past lessons God's view on slavery should be compared to God's view on divorce. It is something tolerated, but not desired. (See Matthew 19:7-9).
- ii) When Paul was preaching the Gospel, most of the Roman world was in slavery. Paul never condemned slavery, but never condoned it either. He just accepted it as a part of society and he focused on what God called him to do, which was preaching the Gospel. Freedom from within must come before dealing with the societal issue of the legality of slavery. I'm convinced that if Paul was ever emperor of Rome, he would make slavery illegal.
- c) These verses are not saying to be nice to fellow Israelites and ruthless to all nonbelievers. That is violating the command of Leviticus 19:18 ("Love your neighbor as yourself"). On the other hand, these verses are saying that the Israelites are to have a double standard when it comes to slavery.
  - i) Does that mean Christians should have a double standard about how they treat believers versus non-believers? That's a complicated question. In terms of respect and decency, the answer is no. In terms of judging behavior, I would argue yes. We should hold those who claim they follow Jesus to a higher standard than those who don't. As a practical example, let's say someone in our church is guilty of some sin and refuses to confess it or admit it was wrong. At the worse, we may kick them out of the church. If a non-Christian commits the same sin, we may admit is a sin, but that's about it. (Civil laws and crimes are a different issue.)
  - ii) What is the focus of these verses is about having respect for fellow believers in God. We can't read people's minds, but we can judge their behavior. To those who are sincerely making an effort to follow God, we are to respect them and not show any prejudice based on financial status.
  - iii) The best New Testament commentary on this whole topic is James Chapter 2. James condemns Christians who favor the rich Christians over the poor Christians. James reminds us that many poor Christians will have rich rewards in heaven. (Ref.: James 2:5). Further, James calls the law to love one's neighbor as oneself "the royal law" (James 2:8 NIV), meaning that law has priority over others.
- d) The context of these slavery laws is the Jubilee year. The basic idea is that a fellow believer must be released in this year, but it is not applicable to a nonbeliever.
  - i) The idea of the Jubilee is "God has forgiven all of our sins and this special year remembers that fact by us forgiving the debts owed to us".
  - ii) If someone refuses to trust in God, they still have the "debt of sin" over their head. That is the word-picture here of the non-Israelite who is still a slave in the year of Jubilee. They are still a "slave to sin" and not automatically forgiven.
    - a) The point to the nonbeliever is one can only approach God for forgiveness based on His terms. One cannot be forgiven for example, because "my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds". One must approach God on the terms of full submission to Him and trust in Him.

22. Verse 47: " If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien's clan,<sup>48</sup> he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him:<sup>49</sup> An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself.<sup>50</sup> He and his buyer are to count the time from the year he sold himself up to the Year of Jubilee. The price for his release is to be based on the rate paid to a hired man for that number of years.<sup>51</sup> If many years remain, he must pay for his redemption a larger share of the price paid for him.<sup>52</sup> If only a few years remain until the Year of Jubilee, he is to compute that and pay for his redemption accordingly.<sup>53</sup> He is to be treated as a man hired from year to year; you must see to it that his owner does not rule over him ruthlessly.

- a) A question would arise at this point, "Suppose an Israelite is in debt and sells himself or herself to a non-Israelite as a slave in order to pay that debt. Would the non-Israelite slave owner still be bound by the Jubilee law rules?" The answer is yes, at least in Israel.
  - b) The idea of this paragraph is if a non-Israelite is living in the Promised Land, they are still bound by the rules of the Jubilee year, especially to the Israelites who are his slaves. That Israelite slave has the right to redeem himself by:
    - i) Paying off his debt and being set free; or:
    - ii) Having a rich relative pay it off for him or her; or:
    - iii) When the Jubilee year comes around, the debt is automatically cancelled.
    - iv) In fact, the buyer of the slave has to set the fair-market-value of the slave based on the number of years left before the year of Jubilee. For example, if the year is two years away, and a poor person offers to work for you to pay off that debt, the fee to him is based on the market value of two year's labor and no more.
  - c) There is a wonderful word-picture behind this paragraph:
    - i) The idea is a "believer" in God has to sell himself or herself to a nonbeliever.
    - ii) That person always has the right to be redeemed! They could do it themselves or "God does it for them" with these laws centered on the Jubilee year.
    - iii) To put it another way, a person believing in Jesus is always saved (assuming they have that continual trust in Jesus as Lord and as payment for sin). That salvation is there no matter how much we are in "debt to the world". We could find ourselves in a deep financial pit, emotion pit, or a physical pit. We still have the "right of redemption". If we can get out of it ourselves, we have that right. If God sends us help via a rich relative, we have that right. If we have to wait until our "Jubilee " (i.e., time we go to heaven) we still have that right no matter how deep our pit is dug.
    - iv) In another word-picture idea, Jesus is that "rich relative" who can and does redeem us from our sins.
    - v) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but I have two more verses to cover. ☺
23. Verse 54: " `Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee,<sup>55</sup> for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.
- a) These last two verses reiterate what I was saying over the last few paragraphs. It is God saying in effect, "If all else fails, you who are suffering in debt as a slave will be released when the next Jubilee comes around."
  - b) These verses reiterate God's unconditional promise of salvation to us. These verses emphasize the fact the Israelites were slaves and God "plucked them out" to be His witnesses to the world. In the same way, God "plucks out" individual Christians out of the world to be His witnesses. With that concept comes the idea of "What God promises to us unconditionally are just that, unconditional promises. There is a Jubilee day coming where all of our debts are completely forgiven. No matter how bad our life is at the moment, no matter how much trouble we are in, a "Year of Jubilee is coming".
24. This leads me to what I've wanted to talk about since the introduction, so please bear with me a little longer. There is a passage in Isaiah that ties directly the Jubilee year. It is quoted in Luke 4:18 and I'll read it from Luke. (The text in Isaiah is slightly different as Jesus is reading from the Greek translation of the original Hebrew. The English translation of Isaiah is from the Hebrew).
- a) Jesus read, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." (Luke 4:18-19, quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, NKJV). Notice the phrase "set at liberty those who are oppressed" and "acceptable year". This is directly talking about the concept of the year of the Jubilee.

- b) What is important is that in Luke 4:21 Jesus then says, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:21 NKJV).
- i) What does that mean? It means Jesus stated He is the fulfillment of the prediction of the Year of Jubilee.
  - ii) It also means Jesus understood this prediction to be more than a once-per-50-year event. Jesus also stated that the year of Jubilee is prophetic of His once and for all payment for all our sins. Each of us who believe in Him are now permanently forgiven of all of our "debts" (sins) to God.
  - iii) The year of Jubilee was an event to be held every 50 years. There is also the idea of patterns and phrases in the bible are also prophetic of Jesus. You can't find a passage in the Old Testament that says, "The Year of Jubilee will be ultimately fulfilled by the Messiah's payment for our sins." What is important to understand when one reads the Old Testament is that it is full of patterns and word-pictures that do tie to Jesus. Jesus himself states that this passage about the Jubilee year is fulfilled in His ministry. (What I'm trying to do is teach you how to study the Old Testament in context of the New Testament. It is not the only application in reading the Old Testament, but it definitely one way to read these passages.)
25. Next, one has to see the year of Jubilee tying to the events of Jesus Second Coming.
- a) Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21 speak of a time after God destroys the heavens and earth as we know them. (The "heavens" probably refer to the sky above the earth). The idea is that these things are hopelessly contaminated by sin.). God then creates a new world for us to live in. This is a world of peace. In some ways, it is like the time of the "Jubilee" in that we have a great sense of relief knowing there are no more debts to pay. We will have an eternal world without worry and without suffering. That is what the year of Jubilee was meant to "preview" as a coming attraction.
26. I call this lesson "Trust Me" with the "Me" referring to God.
- a) Leviticus ends this long section of do's and don'ts with the idea of setting apart significant chunks of time to get our focus off the material world and onto God. God wants us to trust in Him that He will provide for us during such times. This is about the concept of "Trust Me" in the present tense.
  - b) Another aspect of "Trust Me" is we are trust in the fact that all of our sins have been forgiven at the cross. God is perfect and can stand no sin whatsoever. When we sin against God, He cannot just ignore those sins. God has perfect knowledge. Those sins count as debts against us. We have been released of all of our debts to God. The Year of Jubilee is a reminder of that fact as is the Sabbatical year. This is about applying the concept of "Trust Me" in the past tense.
  - c) The final aspect of "Trust Me" is to look forward to a future day of ultimate peace with God. Just as Israelites were to keep their eye on this 50-year cycle, so we are to keep an eye on the fact Jesus will return for us one day. That too, is an unconditional promise. We are to measure our lives by the fact our "Jubilee" will come day and keep that in perspective as we live our lives. This is applying "Trust Me" in the future tense.
27. Let's pray: Father, We thank You for the forgiveness You have provided for us. The only thing You ask of us in "The Lord's Prayer" is to forgive others. Give us the faith and strength to forgive others as You have forgiven us. Help us not to be so materially focused that we can't enjoy our sabbatical times with you and take significant times out of our lives to focus upon You. Help us to remember that an ultimate Jubilee is coming for us one day and keep that perspective as we live out our lives for You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.