

THE BIBLICAL JUBILEE and the STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999),

Ross and Gloria Kinsler are co-workers in mission for the Presbyterian Church, spent twenty five years as theological educators in Central America and taught at the Latin American Biblical University in San Jose, Costa Rica.

It is estimated that 240,183 people could be fed for one year with the food that the U.S. population wastes in one day (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 3.

Brueggemann summarizes the essence of the Exodus experience for the people of Israel: Critique of the dominant ideology, public processing of pain and release of new social imagination.

Critique of the dominant ideology: Israel questioned the domination ideology and refused to accept their miserable reality (slavery) as final. *Public processing of pain* (Ex. 2:23-25 and 3:7-8a: People gave voice to their suffering communally and publicly. Brueggemann calls this “an irreversible act of civil disobedience.” *Release of new social imagination:* Israel went on to dream of a new possibility, a Promised Land where all would prosper under the blessing of Yahweh (Ex. 3:8). Brueggemann underlines these three aspects of new social imagination as *liturgical, political and legislative*. Liberation from slavery, from Egypt, must lead to responsible living in social relationships that are liberating and just. Yahweh would reign not only in Israel’s liturgies but also in Israel’s daily life; not only in the Tabernacle but also in their homes, fields, communities, tribes, and nation. This spirituality of liberation is what gave birth to the vision of Jubilee. (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 7-9.

The Kinslers see the three visions, The Jubilee Vision – The Seventh Day, the Seventh Year, the Fiftieth Year interrelated as follows:

Sabbath Day

Ex. 20: 8-11:

“Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it”

This Commandment is really concerned primarily about rest and de-absolutization work – that is, with breaking the cycle of work on a regular, weekly basis so that all, people and animals, including slaves and aliens, might rest. Even God rested the seventh day and blessed the Sabbath Day and consecrated it (Gen. 2:3). The concern for laboring people and animals is thus given divine sanction (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 10.

Ex. 23:12:

“Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. “

This text explicitly expresses the concern for the health of beasts of burden, slaves, and aliens – those most likely be worn out through exploitation.

Deut. 5:12-15;

“Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

Here again the intention is clearly rest and recuperation for laboring persons and animals. The theological foundation here is not the fact that God rested on the seventh day of creation, but rather the explicit reference to Israel’s original status as slaves and their liberation from Egypt (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 11.

Sabbath Year

“You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Ex. 23:9).” The Sabbath Year mandate then follows:

Ex. 23: 10-11:

“For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard

Deut. 15:1-18:

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission of debts.because the LORD’s remission has been proclaimed..... There will be no one in need among you, because the LORD is sure to bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, if only you will obey the LORD your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today.If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the

LORD your God has blessed you. Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today

Deuteronomy presents itself as Moses' last exhortation to his people as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. It contains very specific ethical mandates within Deuteronomic vision for God's people at critical moment in their history.

The text is concerned with two dimensions of a central problem of ancient societies: Debt and slavery. Originally, every family of Israel, with the exception of the Levites, had its own parcel of land as the basis of its economic well-being and social security. Sooner or later, however, families faced natural disasters, violent intervention by local, national, or international exploitation, or even faulty administration. If adversity continued or if loans were provided at high interest, the borrower might not be able to pay them back, and they might lose their land, which was the only security for their loans. If they lost their land, they might become day laborers or share croppers, or they could fall into slavery. This would lead to increasing poverty, breakup of the family, loss of dignity, and, very likely, malnutrition, illness, and even death. So the Deuteronomic Code required that every seventh year debts should be cancelled and slaves freed, halting the "normal" process of socioeconomic marginalization and impoverishment. The express intention is that "there will be no one in need among you" (15:4). In fact this mandate is incorporated into the Law (15:11). The commandment of Yahweh is, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land" (15:11). (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 14.

These economic requirements are divine mandates. The Lord not only provides the land but also its bountiful fruit. Therefore, those Hebrews who fall into slavery are to be freed in the seventh year, and they are not to be sent away empty-handed. God said, above all, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today" (15:15). This subversive memory is reinforced by the warning "your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you, and your would incur guilt," just as the slaves in Egypt had cried out and were liberated (15:9). The Sabbath mandate is a radical confrontation with the principal mechanisms of marginalization and alienation. Further, these mandates are founded upon the spirituality of liberation emerging out of the Exodus experience. God freed the Hebrew slaves in order to create an alternative social order (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 14.

Jubilee:

According to Kinslers, the Sabbath Year is intertwined with the central Jubilee text in Lev. 25: The primary passage dealing with the Jubilee Year are Lev. 25:8-17 and 23-55. The Jubilee is like a super-Sabbath Year, coming after seven Sabbath Years or seven weeks of years. It is to be proclaimed with the sound of a trumpet (*Yobel* –probably origin of the word Jubilee) on the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year. The Jubilee is proclaimed as "liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants" (25:10). This passage is based on the socioeconomic-spiritual vision of the tribes of Yahweh before the

formation of the monarchy, is set in the context of the return from exile, when critical questions about the distribution of the land the shape of Israel's life s people of God had to be discussed.

The first mandate for the Jubilee Year is that during the fiftieth year every family of Israel, except the Levites, will have the right to recover and return to their land.

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces. In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property (Lev. 25:10-13).

The theological foundation for this mandate is found in 25:23:

“The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.”

For any peasant culture dependence on the land is fundamental for food, survival, security, and present and future well-being. Here the ultimate solution is found to the problem of exploitation, poverty, and marginalization, every fifty years, through the redistribution of the land to all the families of Israel. It was meant to provide hope to all the people, event o those in the worst circumstances, that their lives would be reestablished in the Year of Jubilee. It was not simply a socioeconomic plan; it was a divine mandate (policy), a holy obligation in keeping with God's rule. “You shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God” (25:17) (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 15-16.

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God (25:38).

For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold (25: 42).

As Kinslers presents, Yahweh's policy on the Sabbath Day, Sabbath year, and Jubilee shed some lights as to how people could have fallen into poverty and homelessness after settled down in the Promised Land. The text presents Yahweh's policy for prevention and solution to the homelessness of Israel people.

Is. 61:1-2a:

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor,

The above phrases do not repeat explicitly the four cardinal elements in the Sabbath and Jubilee texts – *cancellation of debts, freeing of slaves, return to family lands, and rest for the land and for workers*. They do however point directly to the essence of the Jubilee mandates in that they promise to overcome oppression and suffering. This passage has been called, in fact, a radicalization of the Jubilee in that it goes beyond the

specific mandates of the earlier texts and proclaims a general, comprehensive response to oppression and poverty as God's intention. This text thus serves as a summary of the various Isaiah traditions which speak concretely to the various oppressions, sufferings, and illness of God's people with promises of liberation, hope, and healing.

The passage links the jubilee tradition directly with Jesus' proclamation of Jubilee as his own mission. This is the text that Jesus read for his "inaugural sermon," according to Luke (4:18-19), which is somewhat different. (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 16).

The year of the Lord's favor thus focuses on liberation as God's primary intention (policy) for God's people. Liberation here cannot be spiritualized into a pietistic or religious matter. It is connected with socio-economic oppression, which in ancient times was primarily manifest in the distribution of the land, debt servicing, and labor relations. Throughout its history Israel was tempted to follow the "natural" tendencies of neighboring peoples to allow some to become rich and many to become poor through the practice of usury, the accumulation of land, and slavery. The Sabbath Day, the Sabbath Year, and the Jubilee provided divine mandates to resist and reverse these tendencies so that all God's people might enjoy fullness of life (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 17).

"For Israel the land is also temptation. It can be seductive. For the land may give the people a sense of security so that they no longer remember their identity as people of Yahweh, delivered from slavery in Egypt, covenanted with the Lord who delivered them. For Israel the land is responsibility to keep the Law. For Israel the land is threat. Given the new security of possessing their own land, Israel might forget her real identity as a liberated people gifted with this land and fail to trust in Yahweh. They might abandon their covenant with Yahweh and its Sabbath obligations toward debtors, the poor and slaves. This new power and wealth might even lead them to adopt other gods more in keeping with their aberrant life in the land and also in keeping with their pagan neighbors. Thus the people of Israel might lose their faith, their identity, their social experiment, and the land, which normally would mean that they would lose their very lives and existence as a people."¹

(Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 32-33.

Jesus and the Jubilee

The exile is usually dated 587 or 586 to 538 B.C., but the history of that period is complex. The first major deportation actually took place in 598 when King Jehoiachin and many officials, warriors, artisans, and elites were taken to Babylon by King

¹ (Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 32-33.

Nebuchadnezzar. The worst destruction took place in 587, but another deportation to Babylon in 582. Many Israelites fled to neighboring lands and Egypt. So the majority of the Jews came to live outside of Judah and Jerusalem, leaving behind primarily poor laborers and peasant farmers. 70

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 70.

According to the Kinslers,

The return to and restoration of Jerusalem took place in stages over at least the next 100 years. The first group of returning exiles set out from Babylon in 538 B.C. The second group, probably much larger, left in 520 B.C. under Zeubbabel as civil governor and Joshua as high priest with plans for rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. By 515 B.C. the new structure was dedicated, and regular worship and sacrifices were resumed. In 445 B.C. Nehemiah was named governor and sent back with purpose of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, repopulating the city by gathering people from the countryside, and reforming the Temple worship. Sometime later the priest and scribe Ezra returned with the task of establishing at which the Law was proclaimed by Ezra. What he read that day many have been the then-completed Pentateuch or the Holiness Code portion in Leviticus. Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 71.

Deuteronomic tradition displays a particular concern for those who have none of the built-in supports which Israelite society normally provided – specially those supports provided by one's tribes and family. This concern is expressed through the oft-repeated refrain which points to the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner as objects of particular concern. This humanitarian tendency is present in Deuteronomy 15 as well, which, though it holds out the ideal of a land without poverty (15:4), recognize that it is the ongoing existence of the poor which causes the law to be given (15:7, 11).

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 73.

The Kinslers continue:

The Priestly Tradition brought the Pentateuch to final form during the critical periods of the exile and restoration, ending by 400 B.C. Jeffrey Fager comments on the social function of the priestly writings:

“The purpose of P is threefold: (1) to preserve the ancient traditions now endangered by the Babylonian conquest, (2) to explain that conquest in terms of divine punishment, and (3) to provide a foundation for proper living in the future. The Jubilee land laws were used by P to perform this threefold function in the social milieu of the exile for the sake of the community and in order to promote some of their own interests.

It is likely that the roots of Sabbath and Jubilee legislation go back to the early experience of the tribes of Yahweh and their decentralized political economy based on the family, clan, and tribe and centered in the Liberator-God who required them to reject the surrounding models of wealth accumulation and slavery and to institute practices that would protect the life and well-being of the large peasant population. These ideals were reformulated in critical moments in Israel’s history, and the Priestly Tradition played an important role in maintaining these mandates as sacred, not just civil, obligations.

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 76.

The principle Jubilee passage is Leviticus 25, a key text from the Holiness Code. This passage includes portions concerning the Sabbath Year (vv. 1-7 and 18-22), but the rest concerns the Jubilee Year. It may be that Jubilee originally referred to seven-year cycle and later to forty-nine or fifty-year cycles. In any case, the remarkable addition in Leviticus 25 is the mandate that would permit every Israelite to return to his or her land and home at the time of Jubilee. This mandate completes the socioeconomic intention of the Sabbath release laws of Deuteronomy 15, that is, the reversal of the mechanisms of wealth accumulation and marginalization.

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 76.

In [Luke 4:18](#), Kinslers claim that the reference to the Jubilee is clear in the phrase, “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,” through the Isaiah passage does not contain the specific Jubilee mandates concerning the remission of debts, return to the land of one’s family, and the fallow year. The emphasis is clearly on liberation of the oppressed-poor which is the central concern of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee texts, Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25.

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 81.

The Kinslers quote Thomas Hanks who notes that Is. 61:1-2 passages as cited by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 contains an additional phrase from Isaiah 58:6: “to let the oppressed to free” or “to send the oppressed away liberated.” This could be a later scribal gloss, but Hanks insists that this was most likely the work of Jesus himself: Hanks comments:

“The hypothesis I propose to defend here is that the insertion of Isaiah 58:6 in Isaiah 61:1-2 is best explained by recognizing that both of them reflect the teaching of

Leviticus 25 concerning the Year of Jubilee, and that the originality and boldness exemplified in relating the two texts is best accounted for as reflecting Jesus' own exegetical insight and passion for *liberation*.”

Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 81. 여기까지를 눅 4:18 해석에 넣을것

Hanks further asserts that

“It is interesting that Isaiah 58:1-12 is a Sabbath text – framed by references to the Sabbath in 58:13 and 56:2 – and that the central concern of the passage is true fasting. ‘Although four other fasts began to be observed in the post-exilic period (Zechariah 7:3, 8:19), the only fast *commanded* in the Law is that of Day of Atonement (Leviticus 26:29-31). The Year of Jubilee began precisely on that day (Leviticus 25:9), the day of fasting *par excellence*.’” The message of Isaiah 58:3-7 drives home the central Sabbath-Jubilee message and declares that religion without justice is rejected by the God who liberates. Ross Kinsler and Gloria Kinsler, *The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 81-82.