

## JESUS, LIBERATION, AND THE BIBLICAL JUBLIEE

Sharon H. Ringe, *JESUS, LIBERATION, AND THE BIBLICAL JUBLIEE* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985),

### **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.

This text introduces the agricultural fallow year that was to be observed every seventh year. The purpose of the fallow year is humanitarian: those who do not own land are allowed to harvest crops produced spontaneously by it in the years when it is not cultivated. The larger context of the chapter accentuates the social, economic, and humanitarian motives and implications of this legislation. For example, Ex. 23:6 calls for justice for the poor, and Ex. 23:9 enjoins against the oppression of those who are “strangers” in Israelite society, just as the Israelites themselves were strangers in Egypt. Similarly Ex. 23:12 establishes the seventh day as a day for the entire household to enjoy rest and refreshment. The rationale for the legislation throughout the Exodus 23 is found in 23:9: “You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” The rationale grounds the legislation in the religio-historical self-understanding of the Israelites. It is their experience of liberation at the hand of God that is the basis of their subsequent actions

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Ringe views the language and content of Deut. 15:12-18 clearly reflect the provisions of Ex. 21:2-6 but with modifications. (P. 19).

The word for the “liberty” that is declared is *deror*, which clearly links this passage to the various royal decrees examined above. That word is joined to the word *yobel* as a double description or name of the event. *Yobel* would seem to refer to the instrument by which the celebration was proclaimed. (25).

God’s sovereign possession of the land joins God’s liberation of Israel from captivity in Egypt as the reason why these laws (mandates / policies) must be obeyed (Lev. 25:23; 42-55)

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- Lev. 25:8-10** deals with the manner of calculating and proclaiming the jubilee;
- Lev. 25: 10b and 13** speak of a return to property and family;
- Lev. 25:11-12** announces an agricultural fallow year;
- Lev. 25:14-17** and **25:23-28** regulate the sale and redemption of real estate, while
- Lev. 25: 29-34** deals with the special case of land in Levitical cities;

**Lev. 25:39-43** and **25:47-55** mandate the redemption and liberation of kinfolk who have sold themselves into slavery, and thus by implication also mandate the cancellation of the debts that have necessitated the sale. (26)

The disparate collection appears to be made up of pieces of ancient material from several periods, probably woven together as part of the Holiness Code by a priestly editor of the late exilic or postexilic period. The new compilation would resolve a major problem accompanying the people's return from exile, namely, the allocation and subsequent management of the land. She further claims that the Jubilee laws are public, general laws affecting the whole country at once, and not private contracts between creditor and debtor, as is the case in Exod. 21:2-6 and Deut. 15:1-18. The laws in Lev. 25:47-54 provide for the release of those indentured to non-Israelites, which the Sabbath-year laws do not. The command to return to the land of one's ancestors, marks another significant difference between the laws in Leviticus and those in Deuteronomy and Exodus. Like the laws concerning the release of slaves, provisions for a return to one's land imply the cancellation of debts. With the restoration of real estate, however, the former debtor could hope to attain economic independence instead of merely beginning a new cycle of poverty and indebtedness. 26-27.

The oracle found in Is. 61:1-2 gives evidence that Jubilee imagery was a much at home in the poetry of the visionaries as in the legislation of their rivals:

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.

She continues:

“These images have their roots in oracles of Second Isaiah, and in Psalm 146 where God is depicted as creator and as the sovereign who carries out the royal obligation of doing justice among the people, as well as in the Jubilee traditions found in Lev. 25.

The images in the text have their roots in oracles of Second Isaiah, and in Psalm 146 where God is depicted as creator and as the sovereign who carries out the royal obligation of doing justice among the people, as well as in the Jubilee traditions found in Lev. 25. 29-30.

As Israelites sought to rebuild their society (upon returning from exile), the visionary community carried on the themes and concerns of Isaiah and his exilic follower (Second Isaiah). In so doing, they celebrated God's commitment to justice and concern for the poor and suffering, and the requirement that people confess their faith in God by showing that the same commitment and concern. 32