LEVITICUS

Chapter 25

*The Sabbath Year*

**The Lord said to Moses on Mount Sinai, 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. 3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. 4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the Lord. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. 5 Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. 6 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, 7 as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.**

**Chs 25–26** Comprises a single speech God prepared for Moses to deliver to the Israelites. The speech connects life in the land with the observance of the Sabbath years. (TLSB)

**25:2** *the land shall keep a Sabbath*. The land will rest every seventh year. (TLSB)

**25:3–7** The land was left uncultivated during the seventh year, which helped restore its productive qualities. Whatever it produced during that year was gleaned for people and animal usage, but not sold commercially. (TLSB)

**25:4** *land is to have a sabbath.* See Ex 23:10–11. The Israelites did not practice crop rotation, but the fallow year (when the crops were not planted) served somewhat the same purpose. And just as the land was to have a sabbath year, so the servitude of a Hebrew slave was limited to six years, apparently whether or not the year he was freed was a sabbath year (see Ex 21:2 and note). Dt 15:1–11 specifies that debts were also to be canceled in the sabbath year. The care for the poor in the laws of Israel (see Ex 23:11) is noteworthy. See 23:7, 35; Dt 31:10; Ne 10:31. (CSB)

**25:1–7** Just as humankind needs a Sabbath rest, so the land needs rest. Because the land belongs to God, it was returned to Him every seventh year. All we have belongs to the Lord, our Maker and Redeemer. Honor Him with your property and life, even as He blesses and prospers you in His loving care. • Lord of heaven and earth, may we never forget that all we have, including the salvation of our souls, is provided by Your gracious hand. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Year of Jubilee*

**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. 9 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. 10 Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. 11 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. 12 For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. 13 “ ‘In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property. 14 “ ‘If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do not take advantage of each other. 15 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. 16 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. 17 Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your God. I am the Lord your God. 18 “ ‘Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. 19 Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. 20 You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” 21 I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. 22 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. 23 “ ‘The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. 24 Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. 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. 26 If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, 27 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. 28 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. 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. 30 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. 31 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. 32 “ ‘The Levites always have the right to redeem their houses in the Levitical towns, which they possess. 33 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. 34 But the pastureland belonging to their towns must not be sold; it is their permanent possession. 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. 36 Do not take interest of any kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to live among you. 37 You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food at a profit. 38 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God. 39 “ ‘If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40 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. 41 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. 42 Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. 43 Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God. 44 “ ‘Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. 45 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. 46 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. 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, 48 he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him: 49 An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or if he prospers, he may redeem himself. 50 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. 51 If many years remain, he must pay for his redemption a larger share of the price paid for him. 52 If only a few years remain until the Year of Jubilee, he is to compute that and pay for his redemption accordingly. 53 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. 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, 55 for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.**

**25:9** *Day of Atonement.* See notes on 16:1–34; see also 23:27. (CSB)

**25:10** *fiftieth year.* Possibly a fallow year in addition to the seventh sabbath year, or perhaps the same as the 49th year (counting the first and last years). Jewish sources from the period between the Testaments favor the latter interpretation. (CSB)

 *proclaim liberty … inhabitants.* See vv. 39–43, 47–55. The Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is so named because this statement was written on it. Cf. Isa 61:1–2; Lk 4:16–21. (CSB)

All the land of Israel would be divided for the tribes, clans, and households. The Year of Jubilee included the return of land to its original owner (v 13) and the release of slaves (v 40). This ensured that families always had a place in Israel and would not be sold abroad or forced to wander away from the Promised Land. (TLSB)

 *jubilee.* The Hebrew for this word is the same as and may be related to one of the Hebrew words for “[ram’s] horn,” “trumpet” (see, e.g., Ex 19:13), though in v. 9 a different Hebrew word for “trumpet” is used. Trumpets were blown at the close of the Day of Atonement to inaugurate the Year of Jubilee. Cf. 23:24. (CSB)

Name derived from the horn of a ram, which was sounded to mark the beginning of the year of freedom. (TLSB)

*return*. Each person was restored to the land possessed by his family, which had been provided by God (cf Jsh 13:6–21:45). (TLSB)

**25:11** *neither sow nor reap*. As in the Sabbath Year, the land remained uncultivated during the Year of Jubilee. (TLSB)

**25:12** *eat the produce*. What grew voluntarily could be eaten. (TLSB)

**25:13** *return to his own property.* See v. 10. The Lord prohibited the accumulation of property to the detriment of the poor. “The land is mine,” said the Lord (v. 23). God’s people are only tenants (see 1Ch 29:15; Heb 11:13). (CSB)

**25:14** *not wrong one another*. Fair treatment of others always applies if we are to do as God commands in the Second Table of the Law (Ex 20:12–17). (TLSB)

**25:15–16** Land “purchases” did not give title to the land. A purchaser obtained only the rights to produce a certain number of harvests, with the value of the land established by the number of years until the next Jubilee. (TLSB)

**25:15** *number of years left for harvesting.* In a way, the sale of land in Israel was a lease until the Year of Jubilee (see 27:18, 23). (CSB)

**25:20–22** God promised such abundant harvests that there would be enough to eat while the land rested during the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee (years 49 and 50 in succession). (TLSB)

**25:8–22** The Year of Jubilee provides God’s people with restored freedoms. Lands are returned to their original owners, slaves are freed, land is given rest, and loans are written off. In this way, the Lord emphasizes freedom, family, property rights, and devotion, which make a nation strong. In Christ, we find our jubilee. In Him, our sins are forgiven, and we receive our “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). • Thank You, Lord, for freeing us from the bondage of sin. May we honor You by our freedom, family, and goods. Amen. (TLSB)

**25:23** *the land is Mine*. Although God gave the land to the Israelites, He retained ownership and could terminate the lease if they proved unfit tenants. (TLSB)

*strangers and sojourners with Me*. The Israelites resided in the land at God’s discretion. (TLSB)

**25:24** *redemption of the land.* That is, the right to repurchase the land by (or for) the original family. (CSB)

God provided means by which the land stayed within the family. (TLSB)

**25:25–34** Two cases of redemption are specified. (1) If a man sold property out of necessity, his paternal next of kin was obligated to buy it back. Should the poor man prosper, he also could buy back his land. Regardless of circumstances, the land returned to its original owner at Jubilee, when God acted as redeemer. (2) Homes in walled cities were redeemable only within the first year; otherwise, all family rights were forfeited. There were two exceptions: houses in rural villages (v 31) and houses in towns belonging to the Levites (vv 32–34). (TLSB)

**25:25** *nearest relative is to come and redeem.* See Jer 32:6–15. This is apparently what the nearest relative was to do for Naomi and Ruth (Ru 4:1–4), but he was also obligated to marry the widow and support the family (see Dt 25:5–10). Only Boaz was willing to do both (Ru 4:9–10). (CSB)

**25:33** *towns of the Levites.* See Nu 35:1–8; Jos 21:1–42. (CSB)

**25:23–34** Land is God’s gift to His people through their tribes and clans. God desires that this gift stay in families and never be bargained or sold. God’s laws of redemption made this possible. At all times, land sold by a poor family member could be redeemed. How greatly the Lord treasures families! In love, God has redeemed us from sin through the precious blood of His Son. We are bought and paid for. We are His. • Lord, we praise You for sending a Kinsman-Redeemer, Jesus Christ, to redeem us with His precious blood. Amen. (TLSB)

**25:35** Family members were to care for relatives who were poor by allowing them to work for them. (TLSB)

*brother*. Fellow Israelite. (TLSB)

**25:36** *interest.* The main idea (see NIV text note) was not necessarily to forbid all interest, but to assist the poor. The law did not forbid lending so much as it encouraged giving. (CSB)

Interest was often taken in advance of a loan. In this case, no interest was to be taken. (TLSB)

**25:38** God reminded the Israelites that He freed them from Egyptian bondage so that He might provide them land, fulfilling God’s promise to Abraham (Gn 15:18–21). (TLSB)

**25:39** *sells himself to you*. An Israelite could sell himself to another in payment of a debt. (TLSB)

**25:40** *hired servant*. A fellow Israelite received the same treatment as a hired worker and was never to be mistreated. (TLSB)

**25:44–46** Although the enslavement of their fellow Israelites was not allowed, they were allowed to own slaves purchased from foreign lands or from among the aliens living with them in Canaan. (TLSB)

 **25:35–46** Israelites are to respect one another, regardless of their financial circumstances. God expects His people to honor Him for His great provisions by treating others with respect (Ex 20:12–17). We also see God’s faithfulness in the provision of land. For our sakes, Jesus Christ became poor, that He might provide us with God’s blessings (2Co 8:9). As our Brother, He frees us from the bondage of sin. • Merciful Savior, lead me to love and respect my brothers and sisters and serve for their benefit, in accordance with Your merciful goodness. Amen. (TLSB)

**25:47–55** The compensation paid to redeem an Israelite enslaved for his debt was based on the number of years until the next Jubilee; if only a few years remained until the Jubilee, a yearly rate was established. (TLSB)

**25:48** An indebted Israelite was always redeemable; a slave was not. (TLSB)

**25:49** *redeem himself*. Servants were allowed to earn money. If their financial circumstances changed, Israelites could pay for their own release. (TLSB)

**25:50–54** God provided a means to calculate what was owed for a person’s redemption from servitude. (TLSB)

**25:55** *servants.* Covenant terminology, similar to “vassals.” Slavery, however demeaning, is not brutal where the masters truly recognize themselves as God’s servants. Cf. Paul’s exhortation to both slaves and masters (Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1). (CSB)

The Israelites were free only because God freed them from Egyptian captivity. Because He redeemed them, they no longer belonged to themselves but to God. (TLSB)

 **25:47–55** God set apart the Israelites by His covenant. Those who entered bond-service because of debts were to be treated with respect, for they did not belong to their master but to God. Today, those in Christ are likewise beneficiaries of God’s grace (Ac 10:39–43). Because we are released from our debts, we are called to have mercy on others, to release them from their debt (Mt 6:12). We now await the restoration promised in the heavenly Jubilee (Ac 3:21). • Lord of promise, thank You for our release from sin. We await the fullness of heaven, through Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)