

LEVITICUS

Chapter 25

The Sabbath Year

25 The LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, **2** “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, **When you come into the land that I give you, the land shall keep a Sabbath to the LORD.** **3** For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, **4** but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. **You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.** **5** You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. **It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land.** **6** The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, **7** and for your cattle and for the wild animals that are in your land: **all its yield shall be for food.**

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 *rest for the land, 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. 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 “You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years. **9** Then you shall sound the loud trumpet on the tenth day of the seventh month. **On the Day of Atonement you shall sound the trumpet throughout all your land.** **10** And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. **It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his clan.** **11** That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; in it you shall neither sow nor reap what grows of itself nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. **12** For it is a jubilee. **It shall be holy to you. You may eat the produce of the field.** **13** “In this year of jubilee each of you shall return to his property. **14** And if you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. **15** You shall pay your neighbor according to the

number of years after the jubilee, and he shall sell to you according to the number of years for crops. 16 If the years are many, you shall increase the price, and if the years are few, you shall reduce the price, for it is the number of the crops that he is selling to you. 17 You shall not wrong one another, but you shall fear your God, for I am the LORD your God. 18 “Therefore you shall do my statutes and keep my rules and perform them, and then you will dwell in the land securely. 19 The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and dwell in it securely. 20 And if you say, ‘What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?’ 21 I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years. 22 When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating some of the old crop; you shall eat the old until the ninth year, when its crop arrives.

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 after the jubilee.* 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)

Redemption of Property

23 “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. **24** And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.**25** “If your brother becomes poor and sells part of his property, then his nearest redeemer shall come and redeem what his brother has sold. **26** If a man has no one to redeem it and then himself becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it, **27** let him calculate the years since he sold it and pay back the balance to the man to whom he sold it, and then return to his property. **28** But if he does not have sufficient means to recover it, then what he sold shall remain in the hand of the buyer until the year of jubilee. In the jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property. **29** “If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, he may redeem it within a year of its sale. For a full year he shall have the right of redemption. **30** If it is not redeemed within a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong in perpetuity to the buyer, throughout his generations; it shall not be released in the jubilee. **31** But the houses of the villages that have no wall around them shall be classified with the fields of the land. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the jubilee. **32** As for the cities of the Levites, the Levites may redeem at any time the houses in the cities they possess. **33** And if one of the Levites exercises his right of redemption, then the house that was sold in a city they possess shall be released in the jubilee. For the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the people of Israel. **34** But the fields of pastureland belonging to their cities may not be sold, for that is their possession forever.

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 redeemer...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 *cities 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)

Kindness for Poor Brothers

35 “If your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall support him as though he were a stranger and a sojourner, and he shall live with you. **36** Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God, that your brother may live beside you. **37** You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. **38** I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God. **39** “If your brother becomes poor beside you and sells himself to you, you shall not make him serve as a slave: **40** he shall be with you as a hired worker and as a sojourner. He shall serve with you until the year of the jubilee. **41** Then he shall go out from you, he and his children with him, and go back to his own clan and return to the possession of his fathers. **42** For they are my servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. **43** You shall not rule over him ruthlessly but shall fear your God. **44** As for your male and female slaves whom you may have: you may buy male and female slaves from among the nations that are around you. **45** You may also buy from among the strangers who sojourn with you and their clans that are with you, who have been born in your land, and they may be your property. **46** You may bequeath them to your sons after you to inherit as a possession forever. You may make slaves of them, but over your brothers the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another ruthlessly.

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 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)

Redeeming a Poor Man

47 “If a stranger or sojourner with you becomes rich, and your brother beside him becomes poor and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner with you or to a member of the stranger’s clan, 48 then after he is sold he may be redeemed. One of his brothers may redeem him, 49 or his uncle or his cousin may redeem him, or a close relative from his clan may redeem him. Or if he grows rich he may redeem himself. 50 He shall calculate with his buyer from the year when he sold himself to him until the year of jubilee, and the price of his sale shall vary with the number of years. The time he was with his owner shall be rated as the time of a hired worker. 51 If there are still many years left, he shall pay proportionately for his redemption some of his sale price. 52 If there remain but a few years until the year of jubilee, he shall calculate and pay for his redemption in proportion to his years of service. 53 He shall treat him as a worker hired year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. 54 And if he is not redeemed by these means, then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee. 55 For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

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)