

## Year of Jubilee – A Historic Perspective from the Old Testament



1. **The time of celebration** – The *Year of Jubilee* was celebrated every fiftieth year, marking the half century; so that it followed the seventh sabbatical year, and for two years in succession the land lay fallow. It was announced by the blowing of trumpets on the Day of Atonement (about the 1st of October), the tenth day of the first month of the Israelites civil year (the seventh of their ecclesiastical year).
2. **The laws connected with the jubilee** – These embrace three points:
  - a. **Rest for the soil.** (Leviticus 25:11 Leviticus 25:12 ) The land was to lie fallow, and there was to be no tillage as on the ordinary sabbatical year. The land was not to be sown, nor the vineyards and olive yards dressed; and neither the spontaneous fruits of the soil, nor the produce of the vine and olive was to be gathered, but all was to be left for the poor, the slave, the stranger and the cattle. (Exodus 23:10 Exodus 23:11 ) The law was accompanied by a promise of treble fertility in the sixth year, the fruit of which was to be eaten till the harvest sown in the eighth year was reaped in the ninth. (Leviticus 25:20-22) But the people were not debarred from other sources of subsistence, nor was the year to be spent in idleness. They could fish and hunt, take care of their bees and flocks, repair their buildings and furniture, and manufacture their clothing.
  - b. **Reversion of landed property.** "The Israelites had a portion of land divided to each family by lot. This portion of the Promised Land they held of God, and were not to dispose of it as their property in fee-simple. Hence no Israelite could part with his landed estate but for a term of years only. When the jubilee arrived, it again reverted to the original owners." –Bush. This applied to fields and houses in the country and to houses of the Levites in walled cities; but other houses in such cities, if not redeemed within a year from their sale, remained the perpetual property of the buyer.
  - c. **The manumission of those Israelites who had become slaves.** "Apparently this periodic emancipation applied to every class of Hebrew servants—to him who had sold himself because he had become too poor to provide for his family, to him who had been taken and sold for debt, and to him who had been sold into servitude for crime. Noticeably, this law provides for the family rights of the servant." –Cowles Hebrew History
3. **The reasons for the institution of the jubilee** – It was to be a remedy for those evils which accompany human society and human government; and had these laws been observed, they would have made the Jewish nation the most prosperous and perfect that ever existed.
  - a. The jubilee tended to abolish poverty. It prevented large and permanent accumulations of wealth. It gave unfortunate families an opportunity to begin over again with a fair start in life. It particularly favored the poor, without injustice to the rich.
  - b. It tended to abolish slavery, and in fact did abolish it; and it greatly mitigated it while it existed. "The effect of this law was at once to lift from the heart the terrible incubus of a life-long bondage—that sense of a hopeless doom which knows no relief till death." –Cowles.
  - c. "As an agricultural people, they would have much leisure; they would observe the sabbatical spirit of the year by using its leisure for the instruction of their families in the law, and for acts of devotion; and in accordance with this there was a solemn reading of the law to the people assembled at the feast of tabernacles." –Smiths larger Dictionary.
  - d. "This law of entail, by which the right heir could never be excluded, was a provision of great wisdom for preserving families and tribes perfectly distinct, and their genealogies faithfully recorded, in order that all might have evidence to establish their right to the ancestral property. Hence the tribe and family of Christ were readily discovered at his birth."
4. **Mode of celebration** – "The Bible says nothing of the mode of celebration, except that it was to be proclaimed by trumpets, and that it was to be a sabbatical year. Tradition tells us that every Israelite blew nine blasts, so as to make the trumpet literally sound throughout the land, and that from the feast of trumpets or new year till the day of atonement (ten days after), the slaves were neither manumitted to return to their homes, nor made use of by their master, but ate, drank and rejoiced; and when the day of atonement came, the judges blew the trumpets, the slaves were manumitted to go to their homes, and the fields were set free." –McClintock and Strong.
5. **How long observed** – Though very little is said about its observance in the Bible history of the Jews, yet it is referred to, and was no doubt observed with more or less faithfulness, till the Babylonian captivity.