

The Shemitah and Yovel

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Introduction

I am frequently asked about the *Shemitah* (Sabbatical—Hebrew שְׁמִטָּה) and the *Yovel* (Jubilee—Hebrew יוֹבֵל) year. This article explains some of the mysteries and confusion surrounding these biblical events.

The Laws of the *Shemitah* and *Yovel* are contained within the Mosaic covenant. They were given by the Lord exclusively to the nation of Israel. They do not apply to any other nation or people group. The rabbis teach that the Law of the *Shemitah* (its blessings and curses) applies to the Jewish people even outside the land of Israel.ⁱ These are the Laws of the *Shemitah* and *Yovel*:

"In the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard" (Leviticus 25:4, NKJV).ⁱⁱ

"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts" (Deuteronomy 15:1).

"And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet [Shofar] of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet [Shofar] to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25:8-10).

Over the past several years, there has been quite a stir within the charismatic and evangelical communities about a tetrad of lunar eclipses, blood moons, recent solar eclipses, and the corresponding *Shemitah* cycle. Rabbi Mark Biltz and Pastor John Hagee helped bring awareness to these events. Rabbi Jonathan Cahn's books "The Harbinger" and "The Mystery of the *Shemitah*" show an apparent correlation between the *Shemitah* cycles and drops within the U.S. stock market. Many are also claiming that we have now entered a *Yovel* year. All these subjects are controversial and wildly debated even amongst the rabbis. Accounts of the *Yovel* vary, but some estimates place the last observed *Yovel* around 150 years before the destruction of the first Temple. Therefore, the exact timing is unknown.

Israel and the Covenants

Christians often confuse the New Covenant and its dispensation of grace as a replacement for the Mosaic Laws. While the Laws of Moses were never intended to be a path to salvation—salvation is by faith in Christ alone—the Laws themselves, through biblical Judaism, established the nation of Israel and its rich and ancient culture that we cherish to this day. Christ did not abolish the Law. He fulfilled the Law, specifically the ceremonial Law, of sacrificing animals and the atonement for sin.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jeremiah's prophesy gives the nation of Israel a promise that God would make a "new covenant" with them and write His Law on their minds and hearts.^{iv} And Isaiah's prophesy further assures that the nations (Gentiles) will go up to Jerusalem to learn the Law of God, for it says that out of Zion shall go forth the Law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.^v For this alone, the Law is perfect because He who established the Law is perfect.^{vi} The Gentiles were never covenantally bound to the Law, yet one of Israel's callings was to obey God's Laws and teach the nations how to walk in them.

The Hebrew Calendar

Further complications arise from the misunderstanding about the Hebrew calendar. In actuality, the rabbis acknowledge several calendars for the nation of Israel. These include:

1. The biblical or religious calendar God initiated during the exodus from Egypt starts in the spring, around March or April;^{vii}
2. A civil calendar that mirrors several agricultural calendars that begin around September;
3. A fourth calendar for the kings of Israel that followed a slightly different cycle.

A Jewish *Aggadah* in the Talmud and another Rabbinic Midrash commentary on the bible show differing opinions about when God created the universe, and hence also contain varying opinions about which month is the beginning of the calendar.^{viii} This debate and a harvest cycle ending in the fall provided rabbinical justification to roll the Jewish calendar back during the first or second century and establish the Feast of Trumpets (*Yom Teruah*) as the civil Jewish New Year.^{ix} To ensure the proper cycle of the *Shemithah* was observed, the rabbis would require its observance six months prior and six months after the fall date to ensure the appropriate time was not missed according to the Mosaic Law.

The *Shemithah* and *Yovel*, along with the other seven feasts of the Lord, are all considered Sabbaths and, for this reason, should follow God's biblical calendar, which starts in the spring.^x It would also make sense that God would establish the beginning of the year to coincide with the spring when we see a new birth and new beginning, life from death, and light from darkness.

America and the Shemitah

If we assume that America is not subject to the Law of *Shemitah*, why do we see an apparent correlation between the seven-year Shemitah cycle and the U.S. stock market in Jonathan Cahn's books? This can be explained by two verses in the book of Jeremiah:

"For I am with you," says the Lord, "to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished" (Jeremiah 30:11).

"Do not fear, O Jacob My servant," says the Lord, "For I am with you; For I will make a complete end of all the nations To which I have driven you, But I will not make a complete end of you. I will rightly correct you, For I will not leave you wholly unpunished" (Jeremiah 46:28).

It is true. This great nation will one day come to a complete end. Not necessarily destroyed, but a full end to its autonomous and autocratic rule as an independent nation apart from God's covenant nation, Israel. In the future, all countries will be brought under Israel's dominion, with Jerusalem at the center of God's earthly Kingdom.^{xi}

Jesus, Yeshua is the King of Israel and every nation. Therefore, the Jewish people in America are still subject to the Law of the *Shemitah*. All nations will eventually be judged for Israel's disobedience. But they will also be judged for how they have treated the Jewish people and their land. For this reason, America is also judged according to the Law of *Shemitah*.^{xii}

The symbolism of the Shemitah and Yovel

What do the Laws of the *Shemitah* and *Yovel* symbolize? The Law of the *Shemitah* requires a release of all debt and a Sabbath rest for the land. The Law of the *Yovel* further involves the emancipation of all slaves and bondservants of the sons of Israel. And a return to the land of their inheritance. Unlike the *Shemitah* (which did not apply to the Levites who could not own property and slaves who remained with their master), the *Yovel* was celebrated by the entire nation of Israel.^{xiii}

As all scripture points to Christ, Jesus paid the debt for sin during His First Advent. He released the sons of Israel from their debt to sin to those who believe. God's first work on the cross was finished, so He declared a Sabbath rest for the land.

The *Yovel* is the year of return. The year of the Lord's second coming is when the last trumpet (*Shofar*) is blown on the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*).^{xiv} A Hebrew synonym for *Shofar* is *Yovel* (Jubilee), which represents liberation. The Hebrew word "*Kippur*" (atonement) is a derivative of the words "*kaporet*," correlating with the cover of the Holy Ark in the Sanctuary, and "*kopher*," the cover of Noah's Ark and the Holy Altar in the Temple. Therefore, *Yom Kippur*

(the Day of Atonement) resembles a spiritual veil that separates the holy from the mundane the spiritual from the material.^{xv}

The Lord, in scripture, calls Satan "a covering cherub."^{xvi} And He promised to destroy Satan's covering, a veil of darkness by which he has deceived the nations, as it is written, "*And He will destroy on this mountain The surface of the covering cast over all people, And the veil that is spread over all nations*" (Isaiah 25:7).

On this Day of Atonement, the Lord will descend to Jerusalem and stand on the Mount of Olives. He will gather all Israel from the nations where He has scattered them and bring them back to the land of their inheritance.^{xvii} All Israel shall be saved, and as the trumpet is blown, it will announce that God's final redemptive work with the nation of Israel is finished.

Ibn Ezra translates *Yovel* as "sending away," which refers to the sending away slaves.^{xviii} Likewise, Nachmanides translates it as "freedom," which means freeing the slaves.^{xix} Rabbi Bechaya translates it as "rivulet," meaning a small stream of water, which refers to the idea that during the *Yovel*, everything flows back to its source.^{xx} It is written, "*For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*" (Revelation 7:17).

We observe a shadow of the *Shemitah* in the Feast of Passover and the *Yovel* in the Feast of Weeks. Just as the Feast of Weeks comes forty-nine days after the Passover, the *Yovel* comes forty-nine years after the *Shemitah*. The Passover and *Shemitah* represent the release of debt or Christ's payment for our debt of sin, while the Feast of Weeks and *Yovel* represent the promise of entering and receiving His inheritance. The token of this inheritance is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Feast of Weeks. The final inheritance is our entering the Kingdom of heaven into the presence of God in the *Yovel* year.

Until this appointed time, the sons of Israel remained slaves to the nations and bondservants of God. Jesus told His disciples that He no longer called them slaves but now called them friends.^{xxi} Therefore, all who are in Christ are the seed of Abraham. We are free sons and daughters of God and, like Abraham, are called His friends.^{xxii} But Israel, apart from Christ, remains enslaved to the Law of sin and death.

If this or the next year is indeed a *Yovel* year, we could see a great return of Jewish people to their Messiah and land. While this is neither the final *Yovel* nor the final harvest at the end of the age, it could yield a significant harvest for the Kingdom.

The Solar and Lunar Eclipses

There has been confusion and fear about the recent tetrad of lunar eclipses coinciding with rumors of wars and judgment against Israel and the nations. From scripture, we see these celestial signs declare God's blessings contained in His covenant promises towards the nation of

Israel, as it is written, *"My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips. Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: His seed shall endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Me; It shall be established forever like the moon, even like the faithful witness in the sky. Selah"* (Psalms 89:34-37).

Historically, the *Shemithah* has often coincided with judgments against Israel. For example, the exile of the ten tribes and the destruction of the first and second Temples all occurred in a *Shemithah* year. Also, Israel was exiled to Babylon for seventy years for not observing the *Shemithah*. In contrast, many tetrads in recorded history have followed the advancement of God's Kingdom and blessings for the Jewish people.^{xxiii} Several significant events concerning Israel occurred around the timeframe of a tetrad. For example:

1. The exodus from Egypt, writing of the Psalms by King David;
2. Printing of the first Bible;
3. Discovery of the American continent as a place of refuge for the Jewish people during the Holocaust;
4. The establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948;
5. Recapturing of Jerusalem in 1967.

The recent signs in the heavens are God's reminder to Israel and the nations of His covenant promises to the Jewish people, including the Second Advent of their Messiah, Christ the Lord. As God's enemies see His redemptive plans, they will likely try to thwart God's blessings through war and other destructive means. Who can fathom what God will do after this recent tetrad?

Conclusion

In conclusion, we see that the Laws of the *Shemithah* and *Yovel* contain blessings and judgments for Israel and for the nations where God has scattered the Jewish people. The lunar tetrad, in contrast, speaks to God's covenant blessings for the nation of Israel. These blessings are also given to the Church and the Gentiles in Christ as they share the same promise, with Israel being fellow heirs with the saints of the Kingdom of God.^{xxiv}

Because the *Shemithah* and tetrad recently coincided in an infrequent celestial occurrence, we could likely see a dichotomy of God's redemptive (disciplining) judgments and blessings poured out upon Israel and the nations over the next several years. We are also likely to see Satan's wrath poured out on Israel and the countries that support her; all these signs as we enter the time of sorrows and the last days before the tribulation and return of Christ.

The Gentiles have been called to provoke Israel to jealousy.^{xxv} This demonstration of God's love will be the Church, moving in all signs and wonders through the power of His Spirit. The hands of His faithful servants will receive this subsequent outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and I pray, bring in a tremendous harvest for the Kingdom. For the Jews, request a sign.^{xxvi}

As the Jewish people come to salvation in their Messiah, provoked by the Gentiles, they fulfill their calling to bring God's covenant promises and blessings to the nations and be a light to the Gentiles.^{xxvii} Joining with their Christian brothers and sisters as "one new man" in Christ, we collectively will be sent into the nations to complete the great commission, not apart from Israel, but through Israel, for salvation is of the Jews.^{xxviii}

Jesus said He would not return until the Jewish people cried out for their Messiah, and the message of the gospel is preached in every nation as a witness.^{xxix} Only then would the end come, and the Lord establish His Kingdom forever in Jerusalem.

Amen!

ⁱ Rav Grossman, Yonatan. *The Covenant of Bechukotai and the Mitzva of Shemitta*.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew 5:17-18.

^{iv} Jeremiah 31:33.

^v Isaiah 2:3.

^{vi} Psalm 19:7.

^{vii} Exodus 12:2.

^{viii} Rabbi Reiss, Yona, and Grill Dean, Max and Marion. *When Was the Universe Created?*

^{ix} Alperin, Michele. *How Rosh Hashanah Became New Year's Day*.

^x Leviticus 25:8.

^{xi} Isaiah 60:12.

^{xii} Joel 3:2, Matthew 25:31-46.

^{xiii} Rabbi Levi Avtzon. *10 Jubilee Facts to Know*. Chabad.org.

^{xiv} Leviticus 25:9.

^{xv} Ettinger, Yoram. Yom Kippur 2021: A Guide for the Perplexed. The Ettinger Report.

^{xvi} Ezekiel 28:13 & 16.

^{xvii} Jeremiah 12:15.

^{xviii} Leviticus 25:10.

^{xix} Ibid.

^{xx} Leviticus 25:8. Hakesav Vehakabalah (Leviticus 25:10-13) offers a few more interpretations.

^{xxi} John 15:15.

^{xxii} Ibid.

^{xxiii} O'Dell, Bob. *Blood Moons God's Gift to Jews*. Root Source.

^{xxiv} Ephesians 3:6.

^{xxv} Romans 11:11.

^{xxvi} 1 Corinthians 1:22.

^{xxvii} Isaiah 42:6.

^{xxviii} Ephesians 2:15, John 4:22.

^{xxix} Matthew 23:39, 24:14.