

Biblical Land Sabbath

Michael Heiss—October 20, 2011

This is the Last Great Day and I want to wrap up what I spoke about yesterday and the day before. We're pretty much through with the criminal justice system, the ultimate, of course, is God pouring out His plagues as the end of His criminal justice effect. What I want to do is start in with the *land Sabbath* and the *Jubilee Year*. I think you'll find it very, very interesting. We're going to start out in Leviticus. We've spent a fair amount of time in Leviticus and Numbers—haven't we?

The Land Sabbath

Leviticus 25:1: "And the LORD spoke to Moses in Mount Sinai, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, "When you come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall sow your field six years, and you shall prune your vineyard six years, and gather in the fruit of it. But in the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest to the land, a Sabbath for the LORD. You shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. You shall not reap that which grows of its own accord for your harvest, neither gather the grapes of your undressed vine *as a harvest*. It is a year of rest to the land. Rather, the Sabbath yield of the land shall be food for you, for you and for your servant, and for your slave woman and for your hired servant, and for your stranger who stays with you, and for your livestock, and for the beast that *is* in your land, shall all the increase of it be for food'" (vs 1-7).

Verse 19: "And the land shall yield its fruits, and you shall eat your fill and dwell in it in safety. And if you shall say, 'What shall we eat the seventh year? Behold, we shall not sow nor gather in our increase!' Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And you shall sow the eighth year, and eat of old fruit in storage until the ninth year; until its fruits come in, you shall eat the old fruit" (vs 19-22).

What God is tell us here is that just as we are to keep the Sabbath, His land is to keep a Sabbath. As we're going to see in two different Scriptures, this is part of the preamble, or part of our introduction to the Jubilee Year.

Verse 23: "The land shall not be sold forever, for **the land is Mine...**" God owns the land and He wants His land to keep a Sabbath as well. To show you how important that is, we're going to look at three other Scriptures very briefly:

Leviticus 26:33: "And I will scatter you among the nations, and will draw out a sword after

you.... [this is if Israel does not obey God] ...And your land shall be a desolation, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy its Sabbaths, as long as it lies waste, and *you are* in your enemies' land; then shall the land rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies waste it shall rest because it did not rest in your Sabbaths..." (vs 33-34). This is important to God, more than we realize.

We're going to find something very similar to it, 2-Chronicles 36:20 "And the ones who had escaped from the sword, he carried away to Babylon where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the Word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah until the land **had enjoyed its Sabbaths**. All the days of the desolation it **kept the Sabbath** to the full measure of seventy years" (vs 20-21).

Just a statement in passing, talking about some of the reforms of Nehemiah. We don't realize what a tremendous effort that Ezra and Nehemiah went through to restore the government in ancient Judea after the Persians let them free. This is just a reference, but notice what it says:

Nehemiah 10:31: "And *if* the people of the land should bring goods or any food on the Sabbath Day to sell it, that we would not buy it from them on the Sabbath or on a Holy Day, and that we would forego the seventh year's *produce* and the exacting of every debt." Here is Nehemiah talking about the land Sabbath.

In the sixth year God promised, 'I will give you a bumper crop.' That bumper crop was going to, in essence, last for three years. You would plant at the beginning of the sixth year, harvest at the end of the sixth year, and the harvest would be so great that you would have enough food for the end of the sixth year and all the seventh. Remember now, you're not planting in the seventh year. Of course, some things will grow up on it's own.

At our home, we have in the back we have some of the most productive, fruitful orange trees you have ever seen. They're Valencia oranges and this year is going to be a bumper crop. Certain fruits and vegetables are going to grow on their own. So, the seventh year you can eat those, but don't harvest them—no merchandizing, you don't sell them. Then you begin to plant in the eighth year, but you're not going to bring in that harvest until the end of the eighth year.

- you have the end of the sixth year
- all of the seventh year
- most of the eighth

You've got three years, and of course you can start to eat of the eighth year's produce at the beginning of the ninth year. That's what God is telling us.

I gave the illustration about 20-30 years ago there was in Israel today—the nation called *Israel*—a religious group that were going to start a 'kibbutz'—a farm, a collective farm. Israel was loaded with farms like this in the 40s, 50s and 60s. It was a religious one. Remember, they all had the calendar; they all had the same years. No such thing as a different calendar year for different groups. They had the same calendar going way back. Everybody knew when the seventh year was, when the sixth year was.

This 'kibbutz' was being started in the sixth year. They didn't have any seed. 'What are we going to do?' So, they went around to some non-religious 'kibbutzing'—do you have any food? Do you have any seed? *Well, we have this musty old seed, we don't even know if it's any good.* They took it and they planted it with the intention that they were going to keep the *land Sabbath*.

Remember, God said *in the land*. These were Jews—not sons of God, not converted, physical Israelites, in the land, and God promised them 'if you do this in the land I will bless you.' Well, lo and behold, one of the biggest bumper crops in the history of the state of Israel. Experts from the University of Tel Aviv agricultural department came and scratched their heads to figure it out. Couldn't do it!

Well, leave it to the orthodox Jewish press to bring this out. They knew what had happened. Every religious Jew in Israel knew what had happened. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob blessed the land and gave it to them. That covenant is in effect today, but it's *in the land*. Whether or not it would work for us here, yes, it's the land of Manasseh this is true—I don't know, I really don't know—nevertheless, we know that God gave them that land.

In terms of tithing, they tithed *in the land*. When they were in Greece or Rome, they didn't tithe. It was unclean, impure. In fact, it was sacrilegious to tithe on produce grown in Greece, Athens, Corinth, Rome. In Babylon, yes, because there were so many Jews in Babylon it was considered part of Israel. By the time of Jesus, in final battle of Alexandria, there were so many Jews in Egypt, it was permissible to tithe on the land in Egypt. But in the colonies, in the early days, no it wasn't because there weren't there many Jews there. That's just a little aside.

The idea is the Sabbath. God says, '*It's My land, not yours; I own it. I give it to you.*' As Fred was talking to us about who really owns the universe, whether you have beneficial use of the

land, He gives us beneficial use, but He's the ultimate Owner of it. Understanding that, we're not going to into:

The Jubilee Year

This is most interesting. There are three concepts to remember before we actually discuss it:

1. All land belongs to God (Lev. 25:33; Psa. 24:1)—God says all the earth is His!
2. Each family had a basic plot of land. It was administered under Joshua and then into the Judges
3. No taxes on the land

Today if you own your home you're going to pay property taxes—tough, that's the way it is. Not so under God, because God owned the land.

You don't have to pay taxes on what He owns. There were no taxes, but the assumption was this: God says this is your land, you're going to live on it. You're not going to be uprooted from it. You are tied to that soil, and the Jubilee Year was to make sure that nobody could rob you of your land indefinitely. That every 50 years, no matter what, back you would come to your land. That way, no big robber land barons, no individuals amassing huge amounts of land wealth. God's system made that impossible.

I thought, what if it could work here, because pioneers coming west, wasn't that similar? *Yes, it was!* But it couldn't work here, because it wasn't setup that way from the beginning. How many of you recall the name Alexis de Tocqueville? Alexis de Tocqueville was a French aristocrat and with a friend came to the United States for about 9-10 months in 1832. He wanted to study democracy in America. He wrote a book called *Democracy in America*. It wasn't for Americans, it was for Frenchmen, because he was from France and he wanted to introduce American democracy to the French. Ostensibly, he came to study penitentiaries, prisons. He told the people of France and the government that 'we want to do this and report on it, and we'll do it at our own expense.' Well, if you're doing it on your own expense, 'God bless you, go, do.' So, they did! But they really wanted to discover what made democracy tick in America. Alexis de Tocqueville realized that democracy—this representative form of government, where God is King and no man—is the way to the future and the way to prosperity. He firmly believed that.

I don't know if you know this—I didn't know it until I studied Alexis de Tocqueville—that when he studied the prison systems, the penitentiaries, do you know where that word comes from, what it really means? *Penitence! Repentance!* The concept was that you would do penitence in

prison. You would become a penitent person—you would repent so that when you got out you wouldn't do what you formerly did. I'll leave it to you as to how affective it really was, but at least this was the concept.

What he found was, that people kept moving west. They had a plot of land here, and after a few years they'd move west. There was no plot of land for each family. He noticed that as 'wonder lust.' God put it in them because He wanted this whole land settled from 'sea to shining sea.' As long as you didn't have a plot of land per family, I realize that, no, this could not work, because there was no family plot that way. He also discovered something else, which I did not realize.

I know, from being Jewish, having been reared in a Jewish home, that in Judaism you're supposed to be a pious person. A pious person means that *you obey God*. How can you obey God if you don't what God has said. How do you know what God has said? *You have to be able to read!* So, male education was compulsory. I'm sorry that if you weren't a male, well, you females, maybe you did, maybe you didn't. But you could not perform the functions without being able to read and write, which put the Jews light-years ahead of all the Gentile neighbors throughout Europe.

Something else—I don't know if you know this or not; I didn't until some years ago: You go into a wine store, a liquor store, the bottles of wine are different shapes and sizes—aren't they? Why? My wife and I were in San Francisco and took a wine tour. In one of the wineries we had a lecture on wine. What happened was that in the Middle Ages people couldn't read. But in certain sections of France you had certain wines and in England you had certain wines, in Germany you had certain wines, in Spain. Maybe you had a cabernet, maybe it was a merlot, whatever. They put wine in a certain shaped bottle, so when you saw the bottle you knew which wine it was because you couldn't read the label. This is what carried on into the United States, especially from Catholics. Not that the Catholic people were dumb or stupid, they weren't. But they weren't taught to read and write.

The Protestants broke away from that and they said, 'the Scriptures only.' How could you know the Scriptures unless you could read? Every male and most of the females, too, could read. And Alexis de Tocqueville was absolutely flabbergasted! Wherever he went—farms, ranches where the nearest neighbor is 20 miles away—go into that house, as he did, and behold there were at least three books—one of them was a Bible and they could all read it. They all did read it and were educated.

Another one, believe it or not, was Shakespeare. You'd be surprised how many people in this country in the 1820s, 30s, and 40s actually read Shakespeare, but they did. De Tocqueville tried to figure out the strength of the country, what makes this country tick. He saw the farms, but 'we have farms in France, too.' He saw the military, 'you have a strong military, but the British Empire has a strong military, too. Look at machinery, manufacturing—'well, we've got manufacturing in Europe, too.'

Finally, he said that he went into the churches. He said that there he found it. It was a dynamism! This was in the heyday of American Protestantism. This was Protestantism on the march. Not today. If he went into Protestant churches today, he wouldn't come away with the same observations. He said that the American families were strong, solid. I don't think he'd come away with that same observation today. But back then it was, and he said that they didn't preach doctrine so much. He listened to sermon after sermon, not much in the way of doctrine.

- Morality!
- Love of God!
- Honesty!
- Integrity!

He said that America was a land of business. Do recall the famous statement of President Calvin Coolidge? *American business is business!* That's what he said. But to have good business, you have to have honesty, you have to have trust, you have to have integrity. That's what the Protestants taught and that's what was needed for capitalism. Capitalism succeeded because people were honest. If you don't have honesty and trust then it doesn't work—and that's why we're having our problems today. Honesty and trust and morality are going by the boards.

This was Alexis de Tocqueville and he came away with these observations, and do you know what his prediction was for the 20th century and beyond? He said that *the two greatest empires will be #1 the United States and #2 Russia*. Remember, this was the day when Britain was coming into its heyday. One, he said, would be based on oppression and the other would be based on liberty. Amazing observation by Alexis de Tocqueville!

What I'm pointing out here is that you have to have a plot of land. Without reading the whole thing, let me explain what was going on in the Jubilee Year. If you became poor, or maybe your family was aged—whatever it is—and you needed money, you couldn't keep up your land, you could sell it to someone. How would you determine the price? Remember, you couldn't buy the land. You weren't buying the land, because the land was

God's, and God said, 'I give it to your family.' You couldn't take it away from that family. Figure out how many harvests are there to the next Jubilee Year. Obviously, if you were in the fifth year—you have 45 years to go—you'd pay a bigger price. If this were already the 40th year or so, when you have 5-10 years, you'd pay a smaller price.

At any time that you sold it, you could buy it back—at *any time!* So, if you're going to buy someone's land, you've got to think twice: Do I really want to buy the land? How much do I want to pay for it? And realize 'I might have to give it up at any time.' Of course, if it was bought back, you had to figure out what the price would be. Wait a minute, I bought this land with 20 years to go to the Jubilee Year, and after ten years he's buying it back from me. Wait a minute! I've got to be compensated because I've already paid you for 20 years worth. So, you would adjust the price up or down depending how many years there were left.

But the concept was that you were tied to the soil; this was your inheritance. God didn't want you to lose that inheritance. Do we understand the stability of the system? *No big booms or busts!* You couldn't be forced into cities. You couldn't! God said the land 'I give you.'

On the other hand, if you were in the city—this was a little different. You were in the city and you wanted to sell your land. You could sell your house; someone could buy it. You had one year in which to redeem that house. If you could redeem it—and you could at any time—it went back to you. But, if one year came and went, the new buyer, it was his in perpetuity. You lost the right to that house, because there was a difference between your farmland, your home right there in the heart so to speak. That was the land. What you had in a walled city was not the land. It was also a benefit to the one who bought it, because then the one who bought could make improvements to it.

If you wanted to redeem that house, you would have to pay not just the price of the house that you sold it for, but wait a minute he made improvement to it. What was the value of those improvements? You had to add that. Therefore, a person who bought that house realized that

1. If the former owner did redeem it, he could get paid fully for all his efforts
2. If he couldn't redeem it, it would be his

That gave him incentive to put improvements in the house; so the cities were built up properly. But if you bought someone's farmland you had to be careful, because no matter what you're going to lose that land. You weren't buying the land, you were simply buying the harvest. A house in a walled city, you were buying the house.

This did not include the Levites' land. You will find out that you could never take away the land of the Levites—God forbade it!—because they had no inheritance. There was concession. Here is Judea, Naphtali, Rueben, Ephraim, Manasseh—that was their land. But the Levites had none, therefore, their cities were inviolate; you could not take away their cities no matter what.

In this Jubilee Year everybody went back to their land, so you would have prosperity and you wouldn't have poverty. Yes, people could be poor, but they could always come back to their land, always have a fresh start. It was an amazing system; a marvelous system! I wish we could do it today, but we can't. We're in a totally Babylonian system; we're in a greedy system; we're in a system where malice runs and greed—or as it has been said: vanity, jealousy, lust and greed. Even though you might have greed in the old days, the system God set up would nullify that. I don't care how greedy you were, you had to give back the land in the Jubilee Year.

One thing, this is a small thing, but you should annul it: We've talked about trumpets and the shofar. The Jubilee Year—Lev. 25:9: "Then you shall cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth *day* of the seventh month; in the Day of Atonement, the trumpet shall sound throughout all your land." This indeed is the shofar, but remember, you didn't have only the shofar. When it came to the religious procedures at the temple, the shofar was not blown. In English translations, including what we have here, doesn't always make that clear. It's pretty tough because you can translate a trumpet, but notice what it says in:

Numbers 10:1: "And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 'Make two trumpets of silver...'" This is not shofar; this is 'chtutztrth ksph'—*trumpets of money*. Back in those days, money was silver; that's why we know it's trumpets of silver. I don't know how you would build a trumpet of dollar bills; it wouldn't work! But the Hebrew word for *money* is 'ksph'—silver was money. That's why we translate it *silver*. You read throughout, when the priests would blow the trumpets in religious ceremonies at the temple they weren't blowing the shofar, they were blowing the silver trumpets. Only the priests could blow the trumpets. Priests could also blow the shofar, too, but it was primarily their function to blow the trumpets.

When you read throughout the Old Testament: '...and Joab blew the horn...' that was always the shofar. When you read in Exo. 19, '...the trumpet sounded long and loud....'—shofar; always shofar. But with religious rites and the priests, it was the silver trumpets. And where it says, '...blow the

horn in Zion...' or '...blow the horn here...'—you've got to be careful. You're talking about a national thing or you're talking about the priestly city. When it's a priestly city it may say *horn* or *trumpet*, but it's going to be the *silver trumpet*.

The silver trumpets are always connected with the priests. The shofar is connected nationally: a time of war, a time of gathering the people. That is as far as I'm going to go in delving into the Jubilee Year. Read the rest; it talks about if you took a slave in; if your Hebrew brother be 'poor and wax' here in Lev. 25—take him in and he goes out in the Jubilee Year and you give him liberty, he's not your slave. So, you couldn't have perpetual slaves.

Other nations, yes. If you had 'the Gentiles'—'goyim' in the Hebrew—then God permitted you to have slaves indefinitely. You also want to compare Lev. 25 with Num. 21 and what happens when you take in a Hebrew manservant—it's almost identical, the principle is there.

Good Decision/Bad Decision:

One thing I want to leave you with. There is a phrase in the Old Testament:

- he said to himself
- he thought within himself
- he said to his heart

There are two different prepositions that are used. One is 'ba'—in, with or by. This is a person thinking *within* himself. This is the self. What did Jeremiah say, 'Oh, Lord, I know that the way of man is not *within* him.' This is *within*!

The other one is 'la'—*upon, to*—in that sense he's speaking *to* himself. He's directing himself.

- You'll find that every time you have the 'ba'—bad decision!
- Every time you have the 'la'—good decision!
- The Israeli airline is El Al—*up to*!

This is what I call 'witgta'—worthless information to good to throw away. This we will call 'witgta': When you go to Israel, when you went to the Lord—what did you do? *You went UP to Jerusalem!* You didn't go *down*. 'Let us go UP to the house of the Lord.' So, when you're going to fly to Israel, today, you're flying to God's country, you're flying to God's Holy Land. Where are you going? *You're going UP!* El Al means *going UP TO God's country!* That's why they named it El Al.

Now, let's take a look at three or four Scriptures, a couple of illustrations: Genesis 8:21—this is God speaking to Himself right after the Flood: "And the LORD smelled a sweet savor; and the

LORD said **in His heart**... ['in' is a correct translation, but you have to understand, is this 'ba'—*within* or is this 'la'—*to*? *It is 'la'*—God is speaking to Himself, saying]: ...'I will not again...' " *Good decision*; God always makes good decision, never makes a bad decision; but the form is *to*.

Genesis 27:41—I'll let you come to the conclusion as to which preposition this is. This is where Jacob, the supplanter, has taken away the birthright. Jacob was a conniver; we know that. Esau was furious! "And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him. And Esau said **in his heart**..." What do you think? Is this speaking to himself, giving himself direction in a positive way? *or* Is this the vanity, the jealousy, the lust from *within*—'ba'—always bad decision; wrong thinking.

Psalm 14:1—I'm sure this is one that we have all read and commented on many times. "The fool has said **in his heart**..." 'ba'—bad decision; bad conclusion. You will find throughout the Old Testament when it says 'within himself; he thought to himself; he through within him.'

The book of Esther—this is the account when the king of Persia couldn't sleep and they read him the book of the Law, about the bodyguards who were going to assassinate him, and what Mordecai did, and he's trying to figure out how to honor him. In comes the wicked Haman, the evil one.

Esther 6:6: "So Haman came in. And the king said to him, 'What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?' And Haman thought **in his heart**..." All right, good decision/bad decision; good person/bad person. You know without even going to the Hebrew what it is—'ba'—*within* him. You know it is!

When you read throughout Genesis to Chronicles, anybody, a king a peasant, false prophet: he said *within* himself; he said to himself; he thought to himself—when it's a good decision, I have never seen it fail, it's always 'la'—because this is a person in his mind serving God directly himself. But the 'ba' comes from *within*, the human nature. Jeremiah said, 'Oh, Lord, I know the way of man is not *within* himself.'

Jeremiah 17:9: "The heart *is* deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" Thinking within his own heart devoid of God's Spirit. It's going to be 'ba'—bad decision.

There are other things I could say, but it's been my pleasure to speak to you these last three days. I hope from a technical point of view, from the point of God's criminal justice system, His tithing system, economic system, at least you have a better feel for the system that God established in ancient

Israel. All we can do is speculate how it is going to be in the world tomorrow. We have a glimpse from what He did, but just exactly how it's going to be we'll just have to wait and Jesus of Nazareth, our elder brother, will tell us.

Who knows, if we learn enough and grow enough, He might just say to some of us: 'Good, you understand this. You go apply this. You go administer this over here.' Wow! Wouldn't that be great?

Scriptural References:

Land Sabbath:

- 1) Leviticus 25:1-7, 19-23
- 2) Leviticus 26:33-35
- 3) 2 Chronicles 36:20-21
- 4) Nehemiah 10:31

Jubilee Year:

- 1) Leviticus 25:9
- 2) Numbers 10:1

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Leviticus 25:33
- Psalm 24:1
- Exodus 19
- Numbers 21

Also referenced: Book: *Democracy in America* by Alexis de Tocqueville

Good Decision/Bad Decision:

- 1) Genesis 8:21
- 2) Genesis 27:41
- 3) Psalm 14:1
- 4) Esther 6:6
- 5) Jeremiah 17:9

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