

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LEVITICUS? INTERPRETING AND APPLYING OLD  
TESTAMENT LAW—THE YEAR OF JUBILEE

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will give an overview of the different ways the Year of Jubilee is interpreted and applied by modern scholars and theologians. First, Lev 25, the Jubilee chapter, will be given a detailed overview with major themes explored more. Then, the different interpretations and applications of the Jubilee Year will be organized into two major interpretive categories, non-Christological and Christological. The non-Christological category of interpretation will be further categorized into economic, ecological, political, and spiritual-ethical principles. The Christological category of interpretation will be further categorized into redemptive, redemptive and spiritual principles, eschatological, and eschatological and spiritual principles. The purpose of this study is to understand these different approaches to interpreting the Jubilee law, which could be generalized to understand how to interpret and apply Old Testament law in general.

## INTRODUCTION

“Proclaim LIBERTY throughout the Land unto all the Inhabitants thereof.” Leviticus is part of American history, and you probably did not even realize it. The Bible verse quoted on the side of the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia comes from a law tucked away in Leviticus. This verse seems to have been chosen to commemorate William Penn’s 1701 charter, which gave religious freedom and the right to self-govern to the citizens of Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Supposedly, this verse went unnoticed during the Revolutionary War. However, Abolitionists later picked it up in their campaign against slavery in America. These words are from Leviticus 25:10, in which God gives the people of Israel a law describing the Year of Jubilee. In the Year of Jubilee, the people of Israel were to set their slaves free and return the land to each other. Despite being set in the book of Leviticus, interest has grown in this law over the years. Many scholars and theologians have taken the Jubilee law and have attempted to apply it to today. There is no agreement on how to understand the Year of Jubilee though. The applications of it in modern society are endless covering many different fields such as economics, social justice, ecological issues, international politics, etc. The social justice and economic applications of the Year of Jubilee have especially become relevant as the Black Lives Matter movement and other social justice issues have become the focus of many in modern society.<sup>2</sup> Are these applications appropriate to draw from the Year of Jubilee law?

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1. “The Liberty Bell,” *National Park Service*, December 1, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/inde/learn/history/culture/stories-libertybell.htm>

This paper seeks to answer two main questions. First, what are the different interpretations and applications that modern theologians and scholars have on the Year of Jubilee? The second question, how should the Year of Jubilee be understood? Before those questions are addressed, it will first be helpful to understand the Year of Jubilee in its context, starting with a brief look at the book of Leviticus down to Leviticus 25 as a whole. The specifics of the Year of Jubilee will be explored, due to its unfamiliar nature to many readers. Then, the different Year of Jubilee law interpretations and applications will be categorized. Finally, the writer will give some concluding thoughts on these different interpretations and applications as well as points for further research.

## YEAR OF JUBILEE OVERVIEW

### **Background – The Year of Jubilee in Context**

The instructions concerning the Year of Jubilee are contained in Leviticus 25, which is contained in the five books of Moses referred to as the Pentateuch or the Torah.<sup>3</sup> Often people view the five books of the Pentateuch as separate and distinct, which is misleading. In fact, they are all part of one long, tightly, interconnected book series, which God gave to his people through Moses.<sup>4</sup> Often, this book series is referred to as the Law. At the heart of the Law of Moses is the book of Leviticus, both in its location and its theology.

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2. Timothy Keller, “Justice in the Bible,” accessed December, 2020, <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible/>

3. While interacting with academic research in the Pentateuch, many authors address the origin of the Pentateuch using methods such as source criticism. The approach to the Pentateuch in this paper is from the perspective that Moses wrote the whole Pentateuch, especially the book of Leviticus.

4. R. Reed Lessing and Andrew E. Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 13.

The book of Leviticus is closely connected to the book of Exodus, its first words are וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים-לְמֹשֶׁה (and [the LORD] called to Moses). At the end of the book of Exodus, Moses finishes building the Tabernacle, God’s mobile dwelling place among the people of Israel. After Moses finishes setting up the Tabernacle, “the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was unable to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud rested on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exod 40:34-35, CSB). As Moses stood before the Tabernacle, God instructs Moses on how God wants his people, who he dwells in the center of, to approach him and act while he is in their midst. He does this so the people do not need to wonder what to do, but can just do it.<sup>5</sup>

This is the purpose of the book of Leviticus.<sup>6</sup> It describes the duties of the people in their worship life led by the Levites, expanding on the Tabernacle as the center of their worship life.<sup>7</sup> Another way to think of the purpose of the book of Leviticus is as a “handbook on holy living.”<sup>8</sup>

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5. Moses tells the people of Israel something very similar at the end of his life during his final sermon to them in Deut 30:11-16.

6. Often, when well-meaning and pious Christians decide to read the Bible through in one year, they joyfully start with Genesis and the first part of Exodus. Once they arrive at the second half of Exodus, the Christian’s desire to read the whole Bible is put to the test as God instructs Moses on the specifics of the construction of the Tabernacle. This Christian’s will power continues to be tried as he or she attempts to read through the book of Leviticus. It might be read absent-mindedly or skimmed through to get it done. Many may even view this book as irrelevant for the modern Christian and conclude it is not edifying reading. This should not be the case. On the contrary, the book of Leviticus is relevant for the modern Christian. In fact, it is utterly useful in order to understand the redemption that Christ bought on the cross, Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper III Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 73. Leviticus provides the New Testament with the vocabulary it needs to understand Christ’s forgiveness. Interestingly enough, Leviticus would have been the first book of the Law that Israelite children would have learned and exceedingly practical for them, Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 112. Object lessons abound in it from the effects of sin, the requirements to be restored to God, as well as how to live a holy life in God’s presence. Essentially, Leviticus would have been a user’s manual for the Tabernacle for the people of Israel, Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 98. This is an apt description. For modern Christians, lacking the Tabernacle or Temple, this user’s manual feels like a dry read, much like a user’s manual for a long lost microwave oven would be years after the item was thrown out. It need not feel this way though, especially as a Christian carefully reads and understands Leviticus’ content.

7. Edward A. Engelbrecht, *Lutheran Bible Companion: Introduction and Old Testament* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 1:99.

Through the book of Leviticus, the people of Israel would learn how to relate to God in their worship life. This would be necessary to continue their relationship with God.<sup>9</sup>

In Leviticus, God demonstrated how he wanted his people to live in their undeserved covenant with him. The consistent and constant refrain in Leviticus is, “You shall be holy, for I am holy,” or, “I am the LORD your God.” The people of Israel were to be dedicated to lives of purity. Their life was based on a system of regular sacrifices that were to be followed by a dedication of their life to the LORD.<sup>10</sup> With this in mind, Leviticus has very little narrative; instead, it is filled with legal stipulations and regulations. The only narrative in Leviticus seems to fit into the legal regulations to support or exemplify the rules being revealed.

The style of the legal information in the book of Leviticus is very direct. It is not meant to stimulate the imagination of the reader, but to show the theological ramifications for living with God and breaking his commands or becoming unclean as well as to give clear directions for an Israelite to re-establish their relationship with God.<sup>11</sup> Using the analogy of a user’s manual, Leviticus is similar to a manual for an automated external defibrillator (AED). When someone is suffering from a heart attack, the user and patient do not want their imagination stimulated. They want clear and direct information, so that the one suffering from a heart attack may survive.

Leviticus can be outlined in many different ways. For this thesis, Leviticus will be split into two main sections: 1-16 and 17-27. In chapters 1-16, the legal regulations are mostly concerned with priestly holiness, “for they give instructions about sacrifices and rituals which

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8. Andrew E Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 100.

9. Hill and Walton, *A Survey*, 52.

10. Engelbrecht, *Lutheran Bible Companion*, 1:102.

11. Dillard and Longman, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 76.

ceremonially relate to holiness in life with Yahweh.”<sup>12</sup> Chapters 17-27 deal “more with practical holiness that is worked out in daily life with people.”<sup>13</sup> Another way to understand the two sections is, “Love the Lord your God,” for the first half and “Love your neighbor,” for the second half.<sup>14</sup> The transition chapter is 16, which relates the regulations concerning the great Day of Atonement. This chapter serves as the middle of the book of Leviticus, both theologically and literarily, as well as the center for the Pentateuch.<sup>15</sup> It also serves as the culmination of the previous section on sacrifices, the priesthood, and purity laws.<sup>16</sup> It is the great day of God’s reconciliation with his people as he cleanses their sin from his presence, so they can continue to dwell with him. After this day, the people of Israel are now ready “to live according to God’s will as he has revealed it in his laws on holy living.”<sup>17</sup> They are ready to live holy lives because God has cleansed them from their impurity, due to his great love for them and his desire to live among them. In this section, also known as the “holiness code,” the regulations concerning the Year of Jubilee are recorded.<sup>18</sup>

## **Leviticus 25 – the Year of Jubilee Law**

### Overview

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12. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 99.

13. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 99.

14. Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC 3A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 43. Rooker also labels each section of Leviticus as doctrine and application, which would follow other books in the Bible such as Romans and Ephesians.

15. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 107.

16. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992)., xxxv.

17. Hartley, *Leviticus.*, xxxv.

18. This is an important note to make, as will be seen in the evaluation of the different ways the year of Jubilee is interpreted and applied.

Chapter 25 is the only chapter that reveals the legislation concerning the Year of Jubilee. It is also the only chapter in the Pentateuch on the practice of land tenure and its related laws.<sup>19</sup> The chapter can be broken down into three parts: Sabbath and Jubilee laws (vv. 1-17), laws related to the land (18-38), and laws related to people (39-55). Each section ends with “I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:17, 38, 55, CSB), which is the motivation for following the legislation in previous verses.<sup>20</sup>

### **VERSES 1-18**

In vv. 1-18, the Sabbath and Jubilee laws are given by God to Moses. Verses 1-7 relate to the Sabbath year law directly. After six years of harvesting, working the soil, and pruning vineyards, “There will be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land in the seventh year” (Lev 25:4).<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Sabbath day in which the people and animals are the focus of the weekly rest,<sup>22</sup> the land is the focus during the Sabbath year of rest.<sup>23</sup> The people are allowed to eat the food produced naturally (Lev 25:6-7), but they are not allowed to “sow your field or prune your vineyard” (Lev 25:4).<sup>24</sup>

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19. Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1989), 168.

20. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., vol. 3 of *AB* (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 2149.

21. Scholars debate over the relationship of the Sabbath year to the debt forgiveness in Deut 15:10-11 or the releasing of slaves in Exod 21:2-6. All three happened every seven years. Ultimately, the focus is purely on the land receiving rest after being worked for six years.

22. Exod 20:10 and Deut 5:14

23. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2154.

24. Levine, *Leviticus*, 272. Levine believes that one of the practical purposes of letting the land lie fallow is to prevent the buildup of alkaline in the soil that would adversely affect the land’s crop production. In fact, he points to the collapse of the Neo-Sumerian economy because of over farming and its resulting crop failure, which is attributable to the high alkaline content in the soil.



Verses 8-17 contain the regulations concerning the Year of Jubilee. The Jubilee<sup>25</sup> year started during the 49<sup>th</sup> year or the seventh Sabbath year<sup>26</sup> on the tenth day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, when the trumpet was blown. On this day, liberty was to be proclaimed throughout the land and everyone would return to their ancestral property. During this year, “you are not to sow, reap what grows by itself, or harvest its untended vines...you may only eat its produce directly from the field” (Lev 25:11-12).

There is some debate about the timing of the Jubilee year. Some suggest it is a short period inserted into the 49<sup>th</sup> year that would realign the Jewish calendar after 49 years, much like a modern leap year.<sup>27</sup> Others suggest that the 49<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> years are the same year. This would be possible by inclusive counting, which was common in Jewish culture.<sup>28</sup> Then, the blown horn does not signify the beginning of the Year of Jubilee, but instead it is blown during the Jubilee year. Others suggest that the Jubilee year was a full year, but started at the beginning of the agricultural year, in the fall, instead of during the Jewish ceremonial calendar that began in the

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25. The meaning and etymology of יְהִיבֶהֱמוֹ is uncertain, Hartley, *Leviticus*, 428. Kleinig points to the meaning coming from “the ‘horn’ that was sounded to inaugurate it,” John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 538. Interestingly, the Greek translators of the Septuagint translate it as ἀφέσεως (release). They might have been translating the word for the day according to his purpose; it was a day of release. Regardless, the technical meaning of it is certain, it was the year of release and becomes a proper name to refer to it, Hartley, *Leviticus*, 434.

26. Hartley rightly points out that seven is a sacred number to the people of Israel, seven sets of seven would be an especially sacred number for them. It is during this year that a greater sacred year was celebrated, the fiftieth year, Hartley, *Leviticus*, 434..

27. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 435.

28. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 538.

spring.<sup>29</sup> This would line up with the proclamation on the Day of Atonement, which would have been at the beginning of the agricultural year.<sup>30</sup>

After the trumpet was blown on the Day of Atonement, the fiftieth year was to be consecrated and liberty (דְּרוֹר) was to be proclaimed throughout the land (Lev 25:10). דְּרוֹר is a relatively uncommon word in the Old Testament, used only seven times.<sup>31</sup> It is a technical term that has three different interpretations: release, flow, and freedom. As can be seen, all three of these meanings are related.<sup>32</sup> In the Old Testament, it has come to almost exclusively point to freedom or liberty. The Septuagint translators translated דְּרוֹר in Lev 25:10 as ἄφεσις “release”.<sup>33</sup> It is a cognate from Akkadian, in which it is an edict of release that Old Babylonian kings would issue periodically.<sup>34</sup> Often, these kings would issue this edict of release at the beginning of their reign to bolster support for themselves, prevent social unrest, if economic reform was needed, among other factors.<sup>35</sup> In this chapter, freedom or liberty are appropriate ways to understand דְּרוֹר and link to the Old Babylonian edicts. When this freedom was proclaimed, people were allowed to return to their families’ ancestral land and it was returned to them as the land’s rightful possessors. The focus of this law was to keep ancestral land in the

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29. There are two major concerns with understanding that the year of Jubilee follows the last Sabbath year or starts during the fall of the 49th Sabbath year. First, two consecutive fallow years would be difficult for the agriculture in Israel. Second, it would require the 50-year cycle to fit into the 49-year numeric symbolism.

30. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2164. and Levine, *Leviticus*, 171.

31. Other times it is used: Jer 34:8, 15, 17; Ezek 46:17; Isa 61:1.

32. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2167.

33. This is the same root as their translation for יִבֵּל (see footnote on previous page).

34. Levine, *Leviticus*, 171–72.

35. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2167.

possession of a family more so than in the possession of a clan, though each family would rely on the larger clan to redeem the property if the need arose.<sup>36</sup>

In the Jubilee, the Israelites were released from whatever condition of slavery or hardship they were in and allowed to return to their families' ancestral inheritance. This would apply to all slaves, including those who became a "slave for life," and had their ears pierced with an awl into the door of the house (Deut 15:16-17).<sup>37</sup> However, this legislation did not apply to foreigners, it applied only to the Israelites which are included in the "for you" (Lev 25:13) and did not apply to the foreigners living in the land who were slaves (Lev 25:45-46).<sup>38</sup> According to Hartley, the goal of freeing slaves and releasing their ancestral land in the Jubilee was to maintain the solidarity of the clans by returning to a state of equality between citizens. This prevented the amassing of large plots of land by a few Israelites,<sup>39</sup> which would undoubtedly create an indebted, landless Israelite population.<sup>40</sup> In effect, the periodic Jubilee proclamation would return the land and people to God's appointed state of order from the state of disorder brought about by economic forces and hardship.<sup>41</sup>

If an Israelite sold their ancestral property, it was sold based on the land's potential produce proportional to the number of years to the Jubilee.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, more years meant a

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36. Levine, *Leviticus*, 168.

37. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 303.

38. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2171.

39. Unfortunately, this is exactly what happens in the land of Israel. See Isa 5:8.

40. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 443.

41. Robert S Kawashima, "The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity," *CBQ* 65.3 (2003): 387.

42. Contrary to the view of many theologians and scholars, Milgrom states that it is not appropriate to refer to the business transaction of the land as leasing or selling. It is not a lease, because the original landholder has the right to redeem the land at any time. It cannot be referred to as a sale, because it is never truly the buyer's land (Lev 25:23). Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2178.

higher price and fewer years meant a lower price (Lev 25:15-16). This command was for both the buyer and seller, the price needed to be appropriate to the number of years. This rule prevented both the buyer and seller from being cheated out of the resources the land provided.

This first major section concludes with a seemingly simple declaration, “I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:17). God declares two important truths that should motivate the Israelites to keep all the previous laws. First, God is declaring who he is to his people: he is the LORD. This is the LORD who promised the land to Abraham many generations previous (Gen 12:7), directly addressed the Israelites at Mt. Sinai as the one who brought them out of Egypt (Ex 20:2), and to Moses thereafter (Exod 20:18-22, Lev 25:1-2). Second, he adds to his declaration “your God,” as a divine promise of commitment to the people of Israel. He is not only the LORD, but he also has a relationship with his people. The LORD will continue to expand this phrase with other important theological declarations.<sup>43</sup>

### ***VERSES 18-38***

The next major section of Lev 25 addresses laws related to the land, vv. 18-38. In the opening verses of the section, vv. 18-22, God tells the people of Israel to give the land rest because he will take care of them. He will bless them through plentiful harvests and safe borders.<sup>44</sup> They will not have to worry about their resources because God will provide them and no raiders will take them away. This would be especially true in the Sabbath year, “If you wonder, ‘What will we eat in the seventh year if we don’t sow or gather our produce?’ I will appoint my blessing for you in the sixth year so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years” (Lev 25:20-21).

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43. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 248–49.

44. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 437.

God responds to their question before they even ask it.<sup>45</sup> The abundant harvest that lasted three years, all in one year, would be an especially miraculous event for subsistence farmers who normally lived with enough resources for one year at a time.<sup>46</sup> These fallow years would force the Israelites to rely on God as their provider.<sup>47</sup>

In vv. 23-28, the land redemption laws are given in more detail. First, God reveals, “The land is not to be permanently sold because it is mine, and you are only aliens and temporary residents on my land” (Lev 25:23). They are “not to do with it as they wish; [the land] could not be permanently alienated.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, they could not permanently sell the land, because it was not truly theirs. God holds the title to the land and it could not be sold.<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, this would protect the less powerful Israelites from their more powerful neighbors.<sup>50</sup> An interesting example of this in later Israelite history is King Ahab trying to buy Naboth’s vineyard (1 Kgs 21:1-24), which does not end well for Naboth or King Ahab.<sup>51</sup>

Since the land is the LORD’s, God has the power to give the original possessor of the land the power permanently to redeem the land (Lev 25:24, 26). If the original possessor sells

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45. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2179.

46. John Sietze Bergsma, “The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy,” *SwJT* 59.2 (2017): 157.

47. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 305. Rooker puts it well on the same page, “the provision of crops did not depend on man’s labor but upon God as the sustainer. Work is relative, for if needs are to be met in life, God must provide.”

48. Levine, *Leviticus*, 168.

49. Milgrom highlights that God gave the land to the people by lot (Num 33:50-66, Josh 14-19). He was in complete control concerning how the land was distributed. Because God gave them the land this way, he is the only one who can take it back, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2185. This makes the threats to take away the land in Lev 26 even more sobering. God has the power and right to take their land away from them.

50. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 437.

51. Levine makes the note that not even a king could force his subjects to sell their land because of this rule Levine, *Leviticus*, 270. It is also interesting to note that even ~550 years after these laws were given, some of those in the Northern kingdom were still obeying them, at least those laws that related to inheritance.

the land and is not able to redeem it himself, his nearest relative<sup>52</sup> can redeem the land and keep it in the clan. If that is not even possible, then the land will be returned in the Jubilee. In a sense, then God steps in as the redeemer of the land for the original possessor of the land. The purchase price to redeem the land is the number of years until the Jubilee (Lev 25:27).

In vv. 29-34, the Jubilee law is applied to houses in cities for Israelites and then specifically to the Levitical cities. If a house is contained in a city and someone sells it, that person only has a year to redeem the house. Its sale is permanent and it will not be returned in the Jubilee (Lev 25:29-30). One possible reason for this is that an Israelite would not need a house inside a city to support himself, compared to land for a farmer.<sup>53</sup> So, there would be no pressing need for him permanently to possess it. However, if the house was in a settlement without a wall, it was to be treated like the land and returned in the Jubilee (Lev 25:31). This rule did not apply to the Levitical cities. Houses in walled Levitical cities can be redeemed, even after a year (Lev 25:32), and were to be released in the Jubilee back to their original Levite possessors (Lev 25:33). Also, the Levites were not allowed to sell the pastureland around their city (Lev 25:34).

Verses 35-38 instruct the people of Israel on how to treat their Israelite brother that has sold all his land “and cannot sustain himself among you” (Lev 25:35). The Israelites were to support him and not to use his economic disadvantage to their economic advantage. Instead,

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52. Probably not primarily in the sense of geographically nearest as Count Olaf convinces Mr. Poe in *A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Bad Beginning* by Lemony Snicket, (New York: Scholastic, 2000), 15. This should be understood in the sense of nearest blood relative, which, interestingly enough, would probably have been geographically near as well (thereby not being completely disconnected from Count Olaf’s use of it). The book of Ruth concerns this very issue. In Ruth, Boaz, a kinsman-redeemer, is not only a near blood relative, but also a near geographic relative.

53. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 439.

they are to give him loans<sup>54</sup> as needed or sell their food to him but not to profit or gain interest from him.<sup>55</sup> Acting compassionately in this way to their fellow Israelites was based in their devotion to God, ultimately because their God acted compassionately towards them.<sup>56</sup> Acting this way would also prevent servitude in the economically disadvantaged before it was too late.<sup>57</sup>

Once again, this section on the laws concerning the land is ended by a declaration, “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” (Lev 25:38). In this particular declaration, God emphasizes land, not only that he brought them out of the land of Egypt, but also that he gave them the land of Canaan. This emphasizes that the land of Canaan is God’s to give.<sup>58</sup> This declaration motivates the people to follow his laws concerning the land because the one who truly owns the land gives it to them freely (Lev 25:23).

### **VERSES 39-55**

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54. Notice, this law did not command the Israelites to give handouts, but instead loan their resources to their needy neighbor. In other places, such as Deut 15:1-6, God gave laws that forgave those loans as well after seven years. With this in mind, it was probably likely that many of these loans would have been either partially or completely unpaid depending on the economic misfortune of the needy neighbor. However, this was not to be a factor in their lending, see Deut 15:7-11. It seems like God wanted his people, “to spread the wealth” to prevent poverty of his chosen people. Undoubtedly, lending this freely would give God glory because his people would trust him to provide either by economic means or fellow citizens. Plus, the generosity of the people would be seen by surrounding nations, which might cause the nations to praise the God that has a generous people.

55. In Ezek 18:11-13, lending with interest is included in a list of detestable sins that lead to death. It is also listed in Ezek 22:12 as one of the sins that demonstrated they forgot God, which resulted in their punishment. It is interesting to note that sexually perverse sins are included in these lists, which many today might still consider wrong. Another example, in Neh 5, the people of Israel were suffering under the Israelites nobles and officials, who were charging interest. Nehemiah rebukes the nobles and officials for this and demands they stop. In his commentary on Leviticus, Milgrom writes that taking interest is immoral and punishable by God, but only for the Israelites. He points to Prov 19:17 and Ps 112:5 to show that loans are not considered wrong though, just profiting off of them, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2210.

56. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 440.

57. Levine, *Leviticus*, 178.

58. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2122.

The final major section, vv. 39-55, are connected to the landless Israelite in vv. 35-38, specifically what happens, “if your brother among you becomes destitute and sells himself to you,” Lev 25:39. This section is broken up into two parts based on whether the one who buys him is either an Israelite or foreigner. Regardless of the buyer, the Israelite selling himself into slavery is not to be treated as a slave, but as a hired worker until the Year of Jubilee. In the Jubilee, his whole family and he are to return to their ancestral land as free people. However, if a non-Israelite slave is purchased, they are not to be released in the Jubilee. They can be an Israelite’s property and passed down as an inheritance to the next generation (Lev 25:45-46). Israelites are not to treat each other this way though.

If an Israelite sells himself to a foreigner, he may be redeemed, just as the land can be redeemed. Anyone can redeem him; he could even redeem himself if he was able. The price of redemption is the amount of time until the Jubilee, like the land (Lev 25:15, 50). If no one can redeem him, he is released in the Jubilee when God acts as his redeemer.<sup>59</sup> “Each Jubilee, Yahweh acts again as Israel’s great redeemer.”<sup>60</sup> The Israelite is not to become permanent property because “the Israelites are my servants. They are my servants that I brought out of the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:55). God’s people are not to be owned as slaves, because they are his already. God wants his people to redeem each other as God

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59. Later, in Neh 5, the Jewish community in Judea works hard to buy back all the Jewish slaves who were in foreigner’s possession. However, the nobles and officials seemed to be selling more Israelites into slavery to foreigners, since the Israelites couldn’t payback the loans they were charged. They were clearly disregarding God’s laws in this chapter regarding how they should treat other Israelites suffering from economic distress.

60. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 442.



redeemed them, which connects back to Exod 20:2.<sup>61</sup> If nothing else, he will bring them out in the Jubilee as he brought out their ancestors previously.<sup>62</sup>

### Major Themes of Leviticus 25

There are many overarching themes in Lev 25, which many modern theologians and scholars will apply today in many different ways. Before looking at the applications of the theologians and scholars, it will be helpful to look at the major themes in the chapter.

One major theme is the theology of the land presented in this chapter. This theology is uniquely expressed in the laws of this chapter in the Bible. This is the only chapter in the Pentateuch on the subject of land ownership<sup>63</sup> and the land is the common denominator throughout the entire chapter, mentioned 20 times.<sup>64</sup> The land, the people of Israel, and God are all interconnected in the Biblical worldview.<sup>65</sup> God redeemed the people from Egypt for the land (Lev 25:38).

This theological understanding of the land is spelled out against the backdrop of a program of reform that was implemented occasionally by kings in ancient Mesopotamia. When a new king came onto his throne, he, quite often, proclaimed a kind of amnesty for his kingdom, called a *misarum*. It involved the cancellation of debts, the liberation of slaves, the restoration of the land, and the rectification of economic injustices. At Sinai the Lord, the King of Israel, instituted something similar to that for his people.<sup>66</sup>

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61. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2241.

62. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 442.

63. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 300.

64. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2151.

65. This can be seen throughout the Pentateuch, such as in the promise to Abraham in Gen 17:8. God promises to Abraham that God will give Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan as their possession and he will be their God. For an Israelite, God intended their identity to be wrapped up in the land of Canaan.

66. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 551.

God used an institution familiar to the people at that time to connect his people to the gift of the land he gave to them. By proclaiming liberty (רְרִיבֵי) he was letting his people return to the land he gave them and acting as their redeemer once again to bring them back to what he promised them.<sup>67</sup> It is not their land though. God is their king and the land is the royal estate that he gave to his servants.<sup>68</sup> God reminds them of their humble status before him on his land: “You are only aliens and temporary residents on my land” (Lev 25:23). He also reminds them of their special status on the same land by prohibiting permanent slavery of an Israelite (Lev 25:39-40), while allowing it for a foreigner (Lev 25:45-46). Because of both their humble status and special status before him, they are to follow his laws and not treat each other harshly.

Another major theme in Lev 25 is the role of God’s relationship to his people as the motivating reason for them to follow his laws, despite their difficulty. Three times he reminds them that “I am the LORD your God” (Lev 25:17, 38, 55), once at the end of each section of laws. As mentioned previously, this declaration both reminds the people of who he is, the LORD who fulfills his promises, and his commitment to their relationship, “I am your God.” But in both vv. 38 and 55, the declaration also includes the deliverance from Egypt, potentially connecting back to the preamble to the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:2). In the preamble, God proclaims his saving acts before telling them his commands, to motivate them to obey his commands. God motivates the people with a proclamation of his saving acts (gospel). This is especially true in verse 55, which reminds the people of the recent memory that should encourage them to be “fair and gracious to those that have fallen on hard times,” and effectively

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67. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 551.

68. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 551–52.

love their neighbor as themselves.<sup>69</sup> Also, in verse 55, God is reminding the people that they are now his servants; they were the possession of Egypt but are now the possession of God.<sup>70</sup>

Therefore, to treat another Israelite harshly was an attack on God<sup>71</sup> and was not going to be taken lightly.

A third major theme that runs throughout this chapter is redemption. Since the land is God's, it is not to be sold permanently. Instead, its produce is to be sold until the next Jubilee. If the original possessor of the land can redeem the land, he always has the right to redeem it (Lev 25:24). If he is not able to redeem it, a close relative can redeem it, or God redeems and returns it in the Jubilee. The sound of the horn on the Day of Atonement effectively became the voice of God sounding the return of the people to the land that he gave to them.<sup>72</sup> The trumpet blast will be a picture used by Isaiah as a signal for the people of Israel in the diaspora to gather and return to worship God (Isa 27:13). It is the sound of God's redemption and deliverance. This was not limited to the land, but also the people who lived on the land. They too were not to be sold permanently but could be redeemed. Someone could redeem himself or the nearest of kin. "It was not at all a stretch to consider God as 'nearest of kin' for all impoverished Israelites when the trumpet sounded at the time of Jubilee."<sup>73</sup> The trumpet blast became an important sign of God's redemption of his people. This trumpet blast happened on the Day of Atonement so that

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69. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 300.

70. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 551.

71. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 553.

72. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 552.

73. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 307.

God's means to redeem his people and uphold social and economic justice are connected to the worship of him.<sup>74</sup>

Another theme in this chapter is that God wants his people to trust in his providence. This is most obviously seen and attached to God's command to give the land rest both during the Sabbath year (Lev 25:4) and the Jubilee year (Lev 25:11). God addresses the potential food shortage concerns in vv. 18-22 for this very reason. He addresses it by blending the hard work of his people in the sixth year with the miraculous abundance of produce, which would last for multiple years. God is blending his people's hard work with trust in him.<sup>75</sup> Rooker writes, "Taking a year off from work... would force the Israelite to reflect upon the Lord as provider of all. The provision of crops did not depend on man's labor but upon God as the sustainer. Work is relative, for if the needs are to be met in life, God must provide."<sup>76</sup> God teaches his people to depend on him because the result of their hard work ultimately depends on God providing.<sup>77</sup> This is not the only place God's providence needs to be trusted in this chapter. The freedom proclaimed in the Jubilee would also need both the rich and poor to trust in God's providence. The rich would need to trust in God's providence, remembering their blessings come from him so they would not worry about the economic difficulty incurred when they free their Israelite servants as well as release the land that is not their ancestral possession. The landless, indebted

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74. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 552.

75. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 443.

76. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 305.

77. This is a good reminder for Christians today. Our work does not guarantee any particular result. Our success is completely dependent on God's blessings. Imagine how a Christian's life would change if they lived this way. They would work hard with the time and energy they have, but they would not need to be anxious about their success because they would trust that God would provide as he sees fit.

Israelite would need to trust in either God as they await his redemption from their situation by the hand of a relative or God himself in the Jubilee.<sup>78</sup>

Another major theme in this chapter is how God addresses debt among the Israelites. He gives his people the ability to sell the production value of their land to another to prevent indebtedness (Lev 25:14). If they sell all their land and are unable to take care of themselves, then, other Israelites are to help support him, which might include giving interest-free loans to help (Lev 25:35). If that does not work, then the indebted Israelite can sell himself into slavery but he is not to be treated harshly (Lev 25:39). Milgrom points out that debt forgiveness is not directly addressed in Lev 25, but land redemption and its release. However, it would not help to be released from servitude in the Jubilee Year if there is still a significant debt to be paid. It would only result in the land being sold again.<sup>79</sup> So, even though debt forgiveness is not mentioned directly here as it is in Deut 15, it is still in the background of these laws.<sup>80</sup> This is because debt would have been associated with the land. For example, an Israelite would borrow to help with the harvest in some way. If the harvest failed and the Israelite was not able to pay back his debt, then he would need to borrow again for the next harvest. This would create a

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78. There are many reasons outside the control of an Israelite that would result in a landless, indebted status such as drought, rain in the wrong season, or bad seed. These might look as though they are punishments from God. However, God could be using those situations in the life of an Israelite to direct their eyes back to the providence of God in their desperate condition, among many other reasons.

79. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2174.

80. There is much debate over the debt forgiveness laws in the Pentateuch. Many scholars, including Milgrom, address this issue by separating the text into different sources and then attempting to understand the purpose of the different sources in making these laws, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2158. Many times, this results in the different sources of the Pentateuch having competing worldviews, demonstrated in the final laws that now exist in tension with each other. Another solution, put forth by Milgrom, is that the Sabbath and Jubilee years did not signal the forgiveness of a debt, but instead gave a year off from paying the loan. Otherwise, the incentive to give out loans is taken away from the Israelites. My response, which assumes Moses as the writer of all the Pentateuch, is recorded in Deut 15:7-11, which is mentioned in a previous footnote. God commands his people to be generous towards their fellow Israelites. Moses reminds the Israelites to remember that God blesses them, so they are to give freely because everything they have comes from God. Once again, this is a good reminder for God's people today.

negative cycle of unavoidable debt accumulation. Eventually, the loan would need to be repaid and the land would be sold, then the family if necessary.<sup>81</sup> One could see how it wouldn't take very long for a couple of fortunate families during a difficult time to take advantage of their less fortunate neighbors and drive their neighbor into debt. This could be the first steps in creating a landless, slave class in Israel. God prevented this by creating these laws to make sure his people were not entrapped permanently in debt.<sup>82</sup> They always had a means out, whether that be every seven years (Deut 15:1-6) or in the Jubilee (Lev 25).

The last major theme that will be addressed here is God's desire for familial integrity in Israel. In the Jubilee, "Each of you is to return to his property and each of you to his clan" (Lev 25:10). Not only did the Jubilee allow the Israelites to return to their ancestral property, but it also allowed them to return to their clans. God connects the smaller family structure of clans in the Jubilee. "The Jubilee serves to foster the familial identity of the Israelite community, that throughout all generations they will not forget who they are, their family history, and especially what God has done for them...The Jubilee is thus one of many ways that biblical religion fosters the perpetuation of sacred memory and thus the identity of the people of God."<sup>83</sup> Bergsma tightly connects the land to the family and then to Israelite identity, which is wrapped up in the acts God has done for them (Exod 19:3-6, 20:2, Lev 25:17, 38, 55). For a family to have their land would make the commands to teach their children easier as the people looked around at what they did not make, but God gave to them (Deut 6:1-12). This would give the parents ample

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81. Levine, *Leviticus*, 169.

82. However, as pointed out earlier, this concern was ignored regularly. In Ezek 18:10-12, Ezekiel includes charging interest in the list of sins the people are punished for. In Neh 5, the leaders of the people in Judah were driving their fellow compatriots so far into debt that they sold their family to pay the debt. Nehemiah rebukes them for this evil.

83. Bergsma, "The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy," 162.

opportunity to teach their children about God’s deliverance, especially if they were just released on the Jubilee and returned to their ancestral inheritance.

Are the Jubilee and its associated laws practical or are they a utopian ideal?<sup>84</sup> Bergsma identifies that the laws were written for a “tribal agrarian subsistence economy,” which would have fit Israel before the monarchy as well as into the beginning of the monarchy. Thereby, they were meant to be applied and followed for Israel.<sup>85</sup> Milgrom also believes the Jubilee “was intended to be implemented and would have been implemented were it not for the typical and expected resistance from those who might be adversely affected: the rich and the political leaders in control.”<sup>86</sup> He also points to the exception of the houses in walled cities as proof the laws are meant to be kept. If the laws were for a utopian ideal, there would be no need for this minor exception to the law. Also, Ezekiel takes the freedom (רְוִיָּה) for granted in Ezek 46:17, he does not need to explain it for it to be understood. Milgrom also brings up an interesting situation in the kingdom of Tonga, which has laws very similar to the Jubilee laws. The kingdom regularly enforces these rules and it has resulted in the economic security of the people, which shows the laws are practical and enforceable.<sup>87</sup> However, many scholars, such as Morrow, view the Jubilee laws as unenforceable and utopian: “The concept of the Jubilee Year is an expression of biblical law at its most idealistic and utopian. Regardless as to when Lev 25 is dated, there is no reason

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84. This question does not address if the Year of Jubilee was actually kept, just whether the laws are practical to enforce. Ultimately, there is no record of the Year of Jubilee being observed. One reason many scholars believe the Jubilee was never implemented is because the Sabbath years were not observed in Israel, at least in pre-exilic times. Israel is taken into exile for this reason, among others (2 Chr 36:21). However, there seems to be some evidence that the Sabbath years were implemented after the exile, especially during the intertestamental period, Rooker, *Leviticus*, 302.

85. Bergsma, “The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy,” 158.

86. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2251.

87. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2247–48.

to think it was ever put into practice.”<sup>88</sup> Leiter supports this view as well, “The Hebrew Bible contains numerous legal rules that are problematic from a legislative standpoint, yet they have remained part of the biblical tradition.”<sup>89</sup> Therefore, they have taken on another purpose besides practical legislation.<sup>90</sup>

## INTERPRETATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THE YEAR OF JUBILEE LAW

### Overview

In this section, the different ways the Year of Jubilee law is interpreted and applied by modern scholars and theologians will be compiled and organized into different groups. They will be organized broadly into two interpretive groups: non-Christological and Christological. Then, they will be further organized based on the scholar or theologian’s interpretation of the purpose of the Jubilee laws. This will be gathered mainly from the scholar or theologian’s stated belief about what concerns or issues the Jubilee laws originally address. Occasionally, the interpretation is not directly stated.<sup>91</sup> In this case, the scholar or theologian’s application of the Jubilee law on a current issue will be used to identify to which secondary interpretive group he or she belongs.<sup>92</sup> For the non-Christological group, the scholars and interpreters fall into five different secondary groups: economic, ecological, social justice, teaches about God, and

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88. William Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 188.

89. David A Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee and the 21st Century,” *Brethr. Life Thought* 47.3–4 (2002): 175.

90. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 174.

91. Sometimes the purpose of a scholar or theologian is to apply the Jubilee law to their current context or situation. In this case, he or she assumes that the reader has previous knowledge of this law or briefly addresses the law for the purposes of supporting his or her point. The original interpretation is drawn from that author’s application for the sake of this thesis.

92. I am assuming that a scholar or theologian will not state an interpretation of the Jubilee law and then apply the law to a completely different issue. Therefore, I will group an author by their stated interpretation or application.



spiritual-ethical principles. For the Christological group, the scholars and interpreters fall into four different secondary groups: redemptive, redemptive-economic, eschatological, and eschatological-didactic. These categories are my attempt to organize many different specific interpretations and applications into groups to understand their interpretations and applications of the Jubilee law. After looking at the different interpretations, the application of the Jubilee law to different modern contexts by scholars and theologians will be given.

### **Non-Christological Interpretations and Applications of the Year of Jubilee law**

At the risk of stating the obvious, the difference between the non-Christological and Christological group is the presence of Christ as Savior in the interpretation or application of the Jubilee law. The first group does not have Christ as part of its interpretation or application. Instead, many of the interpretations and applications of the Jubilee law focus on material or physical issues, except Morrow's interpretation to be addressed later. The two main groups in this category of interpretation are related to economic and ecological concerns. The last category for the non-Christological section is spiritual-ethical principles, which serve as a catch-all for the scholars and theologians who identify one or more principles behind the laws to be applied today.

#### **Economic Interpretation**

One major interpretation and application of the Year of Jubilee is related to its view on economic and socioeconomic issues in ancient Israel. In general, the scholars and theologians in this category identify the effect of the Year of Jubilee on the economics of Israel, specifically the poor in the land. Often, the Jubilee law is associated with debt relief and the economic power of

families in Israel. One book commonly addressed in the literature concerning the Year of Jubilee is Yoder, author of *The Politics of Jesus*. In his view, the Year of Jubilee focuses primarily on debt forgiveness. In fact, in this case, he points to Jesus as an example and teacher. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus "includes the following request: 'remit us our debts as we ourselves have also remitted them to our debtors'... Those numerous versions are in error which translate: 'forgive us our offenses as we forgive those who have offended us.'"<sup>93</sup> He continues by writing, "Jesus is not simply recommending vaguely that we might pardon those who have bothered us or made us trouble, but tells us purely and simply to erase the debts of those who owe us money; which is to say, practice the jubilee."<sup>94</sup> He will continue by reinterpreting the parable of the Unmerciful Servant in Matt 18:23-35, not in light of the forgiveness of sins but instead in the literal sense of the forgiveness of debt in the context of the Year of Jubilee. In this case, the unmerciful servant is forgiven because it is the Year of Jubilee. When he refuses to forgive the debt of another servant, the forgiveness of the jubilee is denied to him.<sup>95</sup> Yoder understands Jesus' whole ministry through the lens of the Jubilee year, specifically debt forgiveness.

Other scholars and theologians share the same interpretation as Yoder, such as Olanisebe. "Since God does not want [disadvantaged] families to become perpetually poor, the institution of the Sabbatical and Jubilee years was mandated to facilitate the economic recovery and empowerment of such families."<sup>96</sup> Later he writes, "It is not the literal freeing of slaves, cancelation of debts and returning of land to its original owner that are important, but rather the

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93. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 66.

94. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 66.

95. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 67–69.

96. Samson Olanisebe, "Sabbatical and Jubilee Regulations as a Means of Economic Recovery," *JBQ* 46.3 (2018): 196.

broad principle of release and liberation from poverty and economic distress in general.”<sup>97</sup>

Kawashima has a unique understanding of the Year of Jubilee. He attributes the Jubilee laws to a priestly system of thought.<sup>98</sup> By these laws, the priests in Israel were addressing socio-economic issues in these laws. Since the priests didn’t have the abstract philosophical language to be able to create a term like ‘socioeconomic,’ they used concrete language they had to address this issue. That language was the purity and impurity rules.<sup>99</sup> “Impurity...becomes a concept of which one concretion takes the form of a socioeconomic problem.”<sup>100</sup> The nation of Israel “is a divinely ordained distribution of tribal lands.”<sup>101</sup> The original state in which the land was distributed is Israel’s state of purity. The proclamation of freedom in the Jubilee year returned the land and people to their original state of purity. The land became impure as poverty and debt required people to move from their ancestral land. However, in his interpretation, in the Year of Jubilee, debt was not forgiven but completely paid off. In the priestly writer’s logic, debts had to be paid as seen in the sacrificial system. So, this also applied to debts between people in the land. Therefore, in the Year of Jubilee debt forgiveness is not declared, but the amortization<sup>102</sup> of the debt. The land or person was sold, it was sold as part of a debt repayment plan.<sup>103</sup> “We should not, in other words, view the Jubilee as a last resort to God’s personal intervention qua<sup>104</sup>

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97. Olanisebe, “Sabbatical and Jubilee Regulations,” 198.

98. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 371.

99. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 387.

100. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 387.

101. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 387.

102. Amortization is the process of paying off a debt by making regular payments. It is not truly forgiven, the debt was paid back in full.

103. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 387–88.

104. For all those that do not speak Latin, “qua” means ‘in the character of.’

redeemer...for it is the strict program of amortization together with the prohibitions of interest and of permanent sale that purge the debt by paying it off.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, the land was returned to its appropriate cosmic order every 50 years.

LeFebvre’s economic interpretation of the Jubilee year is directly tied to the atonement given to Israel on the Day of Atonement. “Whatever else might be gained from a study of the Jubilee Year, this lesson must always be cherished above all: Jubilee teaches us that the atonement secures real redemption, not only from sin but also from the effects of sin including its economic effects.”<sup>106</sup> He specifically points at sin as the cause of economic problems, “sin is the core problem which corrupts economics.”<sup>107</sup> With this in mind, any solution to economic problems needs to consider the moral failures of all involved as well as issues in politics and the markets. He has other lessons that can be learned from the Jubilee as well, which all address the economic impact of the Jubilee year.<sup>108</sup> His final thought summarizes his stance well, “There are many ideals and inspiring phrases of liberty that can be borrowed from Scripture. However, to distill biblical wisdom and leave behind biblical theology is to leave behind the greater part. It benefits the economic and social liberty of a nation when the ministry of atonement is flourishing in its midst.”<sup>109</sup> Since theology and economics are tightly connected, then a country does well to make sure the church succeeds and that will benefit its economy.

105. Kawashima, “The Jubilee Year and the Return of Cosmic Purity,” 388.

106. Michael LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics in the Biblical Year of Jubilee,” *Bull. Ecclesial Theol.* 2.1 (2015): 47.

107. LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics,” 49.

108. He lists seven different lessons that can be learned from the year of Jubilee.

109. LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics,” 51.

These are the main economic interpretations of the Jubilee year laws. The main way in which this interpretation is applied to a modern context is by making sure systems are in place to help the economically disadvantaged get out of their situation and stay self-supporting.<sup>110</sup> One way this happens is by securing how economic stability is secured, “The Jubilee represents a system of regulations that ensured the society’s core means of wealth – agricultural property – remained widely held across the whole society and through generations.”<sup>111</sup> In this way, families could continue to use the resources they had to be self-sufficient and out of poverty. Olanisebe sees the importance of re-establishing the traditional extended family-based system to prevent poverty. In the Jubilee law, extended family was relied upon to prevent poverty. Without that support system, economic hardship follows, as seen in Nigeria.<sup>112</sup> These are a couple of ways in which the Jubilee Year law is applied to modern socioeconomic concerns.

### Ecological Interpretation

Scholars and theologians interpret the purpose of the Jubilee year more broadly than economic issues. For them, the Jubilee law addresses not only economic concerns but ecological. This term, as it will be used in this paper, addresses the larger and broader interrelation of people to each other as well as people to the environment. In the case of ancient Israel, the ecological view relates the people of Israel to the land of Canaan as well as the Israelites to their fellow Israelite brothers. Very broadly, this law protects the people and the land from greed. Greed would have been shown in how an Israelite treated their land as well as their poorer Israelite brother. So, the Jubilee law was given to prevent the land of Israel from being overworked and, thereby, harming

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110. Olanisebe, “Sabbatical and Jubilee Regulations,” 201.

111. LeFebvre, “Theology and Economics,” 50.

112. Olanisebe, “Sabbatical and Jubilee Regulations,” 199–200.

the land's health. In turn, this rest would have given the laborers of the land time to rest and recover from their work. Also, according to this interpretation, the law was created to prevent those who had more economic power from purchasing all the land from their poorer neighbors, allowing the land to amass in the hands of a few wealthy Israelites and creating a landless population. Also, the Jubilee law would have protected family integrity by returning families to ancestral land and each other.

Padilla understands the Jubilee law in this way: the Year of Jubilee demonstrates “There is no place for merely ‘environmental’ ecology that focuses on the problems of the natural environment but ignores human beings. There is a place only for holistic ecology that takes into account every aspect of human life in its relationship with nature.”<sup>113</sup> For him, the Jubilee applies to both people and the land they inhabit. The Year of Jubilee protects both the weak from exploitation by the powerful<sup>114</sup> as well as natural resources.<sup>115</sup> Kinsler, in the same way, states, “The Jubilee was concerned with basic ecological and economic realities—the care of the land and those who worked the land, debts, slavery, and the distribution of the land.”<sup>116</sup> Lazonby states the same interpretation that the Jubilee laws demonstrated both a concern for the people suffering from economic oppression and care for the land by giving it regular, periodic rest.<sup>117</sup> Schifferdecker also writes that the Jubilee is about giving the land and people rest. Neither is meant to produce endlessly, but to have periodic rest. But it is also more than that, it is about

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113. C René Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee in Today’s World (Leviticus 25),” *Mission Stud.* 13.1–2 (1996): 16.

114. Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee,” 21.

115. Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee,” 15.

116. F Ross Kinsler, “Leviticus 25,” *Int* 53.4 (1999): 396.

117. David Lazonby, “Applying the Jubilee to Contemporary Socio-Economic and Environmental Issues,” *J. Eur. Baptist Stud.* 16.3 (2016): 35–37.

returning home to the land God gave. This would prevent permanent poverty by an Israelite.<sup>118</sup>

Baker, in his study of the Jubilee, identifies three major components of the Jubilee law: rest, freedom, and restoration. The land is the focus of rest, to prevent harming the land.<sup>119</sup> People are the focus of freedom and restoration. In both, the law protects the weaker against the exploitation of those more powerful than they.<sup>120</sup> Bergsma, who believes the Jubilee laws were intended to be enacted, states that the Jubilee law was mainly concerned with family unity, but also protecting the land for the sake of the family unity and Israelites from the exploitation of the powerful.<sup>121</sup> Finally, Milgrom, in his commentary, interprets the Jubilee law as focused on both ecological and economic concerns. This is especially seen in his application of the Year of Jubilee law in a modern context.<sup>122</sup>

The application of the ecological interpretation of the Jubilee year is broader than the category itself. This is understandable depending on the concerns of the scholar or theologian. Padilla suggests the Jubilee law “demands true solidarity with the poor...The God who relates to his people by means of the covenant is the God of liberation, the God who hears the cry of the oppressed, the God who loves justice. Recognition of the true God includes, therefore, the practice of economic justice.”<sup>123</sup> As far as the land is concerned, “Crop rotation, the refusal to use chemical pesticides, and the development of organic agriculture may be initial steps in the contemporary practice of the ecological responsibility indicated by the sabbatical rest of the

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118. Kathryn M Schifferdecker, “Sabbath and Creation,” *WW* 36.3 (2016): 212–14.

119. David L Baker, “The Jubilee and the Millennium: Holy Years in the Bible and Their Relevance Today,” *Themelios* 24.1 (1998): 56.

120. Baker, “The Jubilee and the Millennium,” 58–61.

121. Bergsma, “The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy,” 161–62.

122. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27*, 2271.

123. Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee,” 25.

earth.”<sup>124</sup> Kinsler does not state any specific applications but states generally, “The call to justice, solidarity with the poor and oppressed, the practice of freedom, and the care of creation must be critical for all of us as we come to the end of a millennium and the beginning of another.”<sup>125</sup>

Schifferdecker and Bergsma also apply the Jubilee law more broadly, “Matter matters to God and it should matter to us. Bodies matter. Soil matters. God cares about such things.”<sup>126</sup> She continues by pointing to the rest the Sabbath and Jubilee bring to people as a means by which God addresses the ‘appetite’ of people for more resources. It also gives the rest that nature and our neighbor desperately need.<sup>127</sup> Bergsma, as stated before, believes the Jubilee law mainly protects family integrity. His broad application of the law to today is that “Christians should advocate for social policies that promote mutual responsibility within the extended family, the maintenance of the integrity of the extended family, and property ownership as a means to foster trans-generational memory and identity.”<sup>128</sup>

Some scholars and theologians are more specific in their application. Lazonby applies the Jubilee law to six different concerns: over-farming, climate change, international debt, modern-day slavery, land expropriation, and wealth accumulation. The first two relate to the land and are the result of not giving the land the rest it needs. The last four relate to people. For modern-day slavery, he addresses the issues of human trafficking and exploiting poor people as if they are modern slaves. In land expropriation, he addresses the problem with rich nations

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124. Padilla, “The Relevance of the Jubilee,” 15.

125. Kinsler, “Leviticus 25,” 399.

126. Schifferdecker, “Sabbath and Creation,” 215.

127. Schifferdecker, “Sabbath and Creation,” 217.

128. Bergsma, “The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy,” 164.



buying land from poorer nations permanently. The richer nations can abuse this land and prevent the development of the land by citizens of the poorer country, resulting in continued poverty. He suggests making the land leasable for a period and then returned, like in the Jubilee year.

Finally, wealth is accumulating in the hands of a few people. He suggests a progressive global tax to redistribute wealth.<sup>129</sup> Baker similarly applies the Jubilee law. He believes people need to restrain themselves from abusing the environment and care for the natural world.<sup>130</sup> He also applies it to the physical needs of people. For him, the church should be more involved in freeing people from oppression and suffering in the world.<sup>131</sup> “Christians today should be taking the lead in working for improvements in the social and political spheres, bringing freedom to those who are deprived and oppressed.”<sup>132</sup>

Many of the authors also applied the Jubilee law to the need for debt forgiveness on an international level. Olanisebe describes a movement often mentioned in this literature:

A Group known as the Jubilee 2000 movement, which was formed in the mid-1990s, was inspired by the biblical text in Leviticus 25:10. People from over sixty countries organized local and national campaigns on debt forgiveness for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC). Basing themselves on the application of the idea behind the Sabbatical and Jubilee year, the movement called on the developed nations to forgive the debts of more underprivileged countries as the year 2000 approached.<sup>133</sup>

These nations then could dedicate their resources, otherwise spent on paying their debt, to support and care for their people.<sup>134</sup> This would improve the overall ecology of the nation.

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129. Lazonby, “Applying the Jubilee,” 43–50.

130. Baker, “The Jubilee and the Millennium,” 56–57.

131. It should be noted; he does not limit it to economic suffering, but also applies it to spiritual suffering under sin. His point is that the church should attend to the physical needs of the oppressed more than they have in the past. This does not mean forsaking one for the other, in either direction.

132. Baker, “The Jubilee and the Millennium,” 59.

133. Olanisebe, “Sabbatical and Jubilee Regulations,” 199.

134. For more reading, see Milgrom 2270-71, Padilla, Lazonby, and Baker.

### Political Interpretation

Another interpretation some scholars and theologians make of the Jubilee law is related to politics. The previous two categories of interpretation could easily be grouped into this category and the following authors could be grouped with the previous two categories. In the articles of Ahn and Barry, the Jubilee is applied directly to political issues. Ahn writes, “The purpose of this paper is to respond to the current political (d)evolvment with a new theological appropriation of the biblical concept of ‘jubilee.’ I argue in this paper that Christian churches and communities should adopt a new theopolitical paradigm modeled after jubilee in engaging the political process to promote justice and peace for many undocumented people.”<sup>135</sup> For him, the Jubilee has an important political implication based on a key thought, “No humans should be kept under permanent indebted, enslaved, or illegal status.”<sup>136</sup> Barry sees the Jubilee as an important theme for understanding Scripture.<sup>137</sup> He further expands on this hermeneutical view by applying it to other parts of Scripture from Exodus to Revelation. He does this not to “provide an exhaustive history,” but rather, “to interpret the past as a guide for the present and a hope for the future.”<sup>138</sup>

For both authors, the Year of Jubilee is applied to political issues. For Ahn, he applies the Jubilee to undocumented immigrants to the United States and the debt they acquire to the

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135. Ilsup Ahn, “Proclaiming the Jubilee Year for Undocumented Migrants: Anti-Immigration Biopolitics and a Christian Theopolitical Response,” *Polit. Theol.* 18.3 (2017): 249.

136. Ahn, “Proclaiming the Jubilee Year for Undocumented Migrants,” 249.

137. S. Barry, “The Year of Jubilee: A Hermeneutic for Social and Moral Transformation in South Africa,” *SkrifligIn Luce Verbi* 45.4 (2011): 869.

138. Barry, “The Year of Jubilee,” 870.

country when they immigrate into it. Essentially, this debt is invisible and unable to be paid back, unless they leave the United States. This keeps those undocumented immigrants in constant debt to the nation and liable to be punished.<sup>139</sup> For him, the Jubilee provides a means to solve the problem of undocumented migrant workers by forgiving them of this debt and allowing them to be citizens, instead of punishing them.<sup>140</sup> Churches and faith communities should be struggling for their undocumented neighbors so that the debt is forgiven.<sup>141</sup> For Barry, he generally applies the Jubilee law to the concerns of South Africa. He writes, “An Internet search has revealed very little recent (post-2000) academic writing, and no evidence that black theologians have written on this topic; considered here as of fundamental importance in postapartheid democratic South Africa. The intention of this article is to promote and encourage that debate in the South African context.”<sup>142</sup> He applies the Jubilee to the church in South Africa to encourage change in the country, by using the church’s resources<sup>143</sup> to start the change the world needs.<sup>144</sup>

### Spiritual-Ethical Principles Interpretation

This final category of interpreting the Year of Jubilee law groups the authors that interpret the law with a focus on the principles the law teaches that are spiritual or ethical. They do not see a

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139. Ahn, “Proclaiming the Jubilee Year for Undocumented Migrants,” 260–61.

140. Ahn, “Proclaiming the Jubilee Year for Undocumented Migrants,” 264.

141. Ahn, “Proclaiming the Jubilee Year for Undocumented Migrants,” 266.

142. Barry, “The Year of Jubilee,” 894.

143. The churches resources are: prophetic ministry, evangelical ministry, pastoral ministry, teaching ministry, liturgical and sacramental life, ministry of presence, healing ministry, people, and commitment to social justice.

144. Barry, “The Year of Jubilee,” 895–96.

way to apply the Year of Jubilee law to a modern context, so it needs to be interpreted and applied in another way because the law is important for people today. So, principles are developed that exist behind the law and then applied to today. Often, this means focusing on specific parts of the Jubilee law.

Harbin's article is a response to the social justice interpretation of the Jubilee law. He does not believe the law can be interpreted in this way or as a foundation for social justice issues.<sup>145</sup> Instead, he asserts that principles can be learned from the Jubilee law. "Valid analogies require that we look for clear expression of the character of God as well as the nature of mankind which the Year of Jubilee illustrates, and use those characteristics as the principles on which we build any model of social justice. Valid character traits will also be evidenced elsewhere throughout Scripture."<sup>146</sup> So, for a principle to be derived from the Jubilee law, it needs to be obvious from the law as well as seen in the New Testament. The three main principles behind the Jubilee law are, first, that God is sovereign and, therefore, people are to be good stewards of their possessions in accordance with God's will. Second, God gives gifts to those who do not deserve them. Since this is the case, it should create humility in the possessor and encourage them to be wise with their possessions. Third, "The bottom line is that I will be held responsible for how I manage the assents given to me with the key operative terms 'justice'

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145. Michael A Harbin, "Jubilee and Social Justice," *JETS* 54.4 (2011): 695–97.; he asserts three reasons it cannot be used as the foundation for social justice. First, the Jubilee law did not deal with debt forgiveness. The debt was paid off by the sale of the land. Therefore, there was no debt, but only the periodic returning of land to the ancestral families. Second, the relationship with God is foundation of the Jubilee Year law and social justice in the first place. Third, in order to follow the Jubilee law, people need to recognize God as sovereign over all. The land is God's and he gives it according to his purposes. Effectively, social justice is not addressed in this law in any way.

146. Harbin, "Jubilee and Social Justice," 698.; this interpretation can be appreciated by Lutheran theologians who let Scripture interpret Scripture.

and ‘righteousness.’”<sup>147</sup> So, the Jubilee teaches that people should treat each other fairly and compassionately, especially to help each other through difficult times.

John Bright in *The Authority of the Old Testament* gives an interpretation of the Jubilee law that focuses not on the law but on the theology of the law. First, he addresses the original purpose of the law, “to prevent the amassing of large estates in the hands of a few, while poor peasants were crowded from their lands.”<sup>148</sup> However, he identifies that there is a theology behind the law. The entire chapter has a definite theological concern: the land is God and everything is on loan from him, God watches every business dealing and wants them to be carried out fairly, and God wants people to be gracious with the less fortunate among them. For him, this theology of the law can be interpreted from the law and is still relevant today.<sup>149</sup>

Leiter does not view the Year of Jubilee and its law as practical or enforceable, but instead a utopian ideal. Therefore, the Jubilee must have a different purpose, for which it was included in the Bible. “Such laws do not function effectively as an enforceable legislation but tend to take on other functions that serve the society that created them in the first place. Such functions normally fall under the realm of the symbolic and didactic.”<sup>150</sup> The symbolic purpose of the Jubilee law is that the Jubilee law codifies the values of a group’s belief or values into the national law to send a message. His example is the Eighteenth amendment. “From a practical standpoint the Eighteenth Amendment was a legislative nightmare that was eventually abolished. On the other hand, it served as an important symbol for those groups who were morally opposed

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147. Harbin, “Jubilee and Social Justice,” 699.

148. John Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1967), 153.

149. Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, 153.

150. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 175.

to the consumption of alcohol.”<sup>151</sup> The Jubilee law was a symbol for the community to show that everyone had a right to land and work the land. The law was a symbol for those that sympathized with the poor and advocated for an egalitarian society.<sup>152</sup> The didactic purpose of the Jubilee law is to teach the people what is right and wrong, what is morally appropriate and what is not. The law demonstrates what behavior a society condemns and approves.<sup>153</sup> So, for the Israelites, they teach “the community that equitable distribution of the land should indeed occur. They furthermore instruct the people that when land must change hands due to dire economic circumstances, it must be done in a fair and decent way.”<sup>154</sup> Also, it teaches, “perpetual servanthood is prohibited and that at some time the buyer is obligated to return the servant back to his or her family.”<sup>155</sup>

For both Morrow and Panpe, the Jubilee law teaches about God and how people are to live connected with God. For Panpe, his purpose in his article is to evaluate Nigeria as a country in its 50 years of independence, their jubilee of freedom. He connects this thought to the Jubilee year in Israel and focuses specifically on the freedom from oppression and slavery of the Jubilee law.<sup>156</sup> His other interpretation of the Jubilee is seen in his application of the year to Nigeria in their Jubilee celebration. Essentially, the most important point is acknowledging that God is the provider and sustainer. All his other applications for Nigeria’s situation flow from this main

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151. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 176.

152. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 178–79.

153. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 177.

154. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 178.

155. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 179.

156. Manasseh H Panpe, “The Ethical Relevance of the Jubilee,” *BTSK Insight* 7.1 (2010): 44.

interpretation of the purpose of the Jubilee law.<sup>157</sup> In a similar way to Panpe, Morrow sees the law addressing two significant thoughts both connected to God, especially because the Year of Jubilee is idealistic and utopian. “Most likely, Leviticus 25 provided an important expression of two significant theological ideas that Israel needed to commit to...The first is connected to the belief that the true owner of the land is YHWH. The second is the importance of the Sabbath as an institution for hallowing time.”<sup>158</sup> Both are wrapped up in each other as the land is redistributed in a year that is to be hallowed, the Jubilee year. The people were to learn these two truths from the law.<sup>159</sup>

For all these authors, since their interpretation explores the underlying principle in the law, their application of the Jubilee law is the application of the underlying principle. Bright states that the theology of the law is still applicable today, but the law is not. So, people today should act according to the theology of the law. For the Jubilee, this specifically means that everything is on loan from God because he owns it, God wants every business dealing carried out fairly, and God wants gracious action toward the less fortunate.<sup>160</sup> For Harbin, since God is sovereign and graciously gives gifts, people must learn to use their gifts wisely and humbly. One way this is accomplished is by using the gifts God gives compassionately and fairly, concerning those who are in need. He does not specifically apply the principles, instead, recognizes the modern context differs from the Israelite context. Therefore, more work needs to be done to understand how it can be applied today.<sup>161</sup> Bright would understand the application of the

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157. Panpe, “The Ethical Relevance of the Jubilee,” 44–46.

158. Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law*, 188.

159. Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law*, 188–89.

160. Bright, *The Authority of the Old Testament*, 153.

161. Harbin, “Jubilee and Social Justice,” 698–99.

Jubilee law similarly, though he does not give specifics. For Leiter, since the law serves a symbolic and didactic purpose, it brings hope to social reformers struggling with obstacles to their work. He applies this specifically to the international debt crisis addressed previously under the ecological interpretation.<sup>162</sup> He also states, “By way of educational and symbolic inferences, the Jubilee legal rules convey a message to the world that visions of hope and promise, when taken seriously, can transform unjust situations and conditions into a just and righteous reality.”<sup>163</sup> The law is meant to create hope and promise for the future to create change. Morrow also applies the Jubilee in the same way, the Jubilee creates hope that the future can change.<sup>164</sup> In a way, both Morrow and Leiter see the Jubilee as an institution that directs the eyes of the struggling forward to a better future. For Panpe, with the main principle of the Jubilee law focusing on God as sovereign, he applies the Jubilee law to the actions of Nigerians. Nigeria should strive to provide as God has done for them, shun greed and corruption, encourage peaceful living between different religions, encourage forgiveness, and a love for both God and one’s neighbor. Ultimately, they should pattern their actions after Christ.<sup>165</sup>

### **Christological Interpretation and application of the Jubilee law<sup>166</sup>**

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162. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 180–81.

163. Leiter, “The Year of Jubilee,” 182.

164. Morrow, *An Introduction to Biblical Law*, 189.

165. Panpe, “The Ethical Relevance of the Jubilee,” 45–50.

166. It is interesting to note the change in the types of sources cited from the non-Christological interpretation to the Christological interpretation. In the former, many of the sources are mostly articles and some books. In the later, many are books and less article. This could be due to my bias revealed in the source selection. It could also reveal the difference in the general interpretation or application of the Year of Jubilee in different sources.



Once again, at the risk of stating the obvious, the Christological interpretation of the Jubilee law has Christ either the focus or an important part of the interpretation of the Jubilee law. This general interpretation and application can be broken down into four smaller categories of interpretation. The first two categories both have Christ's work of redemption, which ushers in the messianic era of history,<sup>167</sup> as their focus. The first focuses on Christ's work of forgiveness as the fulfillment of the Jubilee, the second category includes this work of forgiveness and the underlying spiritual principles in the law. The third and fourth categories focus on the eschatological fulfillment of the Jubilee in Christ when he will come back to release people from sin. The fourth category, like the second previously mentioned, elaborates on the eschatological fulfillment by connecting it to spiritual principles in the law. If a scholar or theologian makes a connection between the Jubilee law and Christ, often it is through the Jubilee language in Isaiah 61 and then Christ's Nazareth sermon in Luke 4, where Jesus declares he is the fulfillment of Isaiah 61.<sup>168</sup> Often, the application of the Jubilee Year in this interpretive group is general and focused primarily on Christians.<sup>169</sup>

### Redemptive Interpretation

The focus in this interpretation of the Jubilee law is exclusively on Christ's work of forgiveness. This will separate it from the following interpretation, which not only focuses on Christ's redemptive work but also includes some spiritual principles that Christians today should follow.

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167. By this, I mean the time between Christ's first coming and his second coming.

168. There is overlap between the redemptive and eschatological categories of interpretation. Therefore, there is flexibility in understanding which category an author may be categorized in. Often, it may feel an author could fit into both the redemptive and eschatological category.

169. This is in contrast to the previous general non-Christological interpretations, which tended to be more specific in their application. Also, their applications were broadly applied to all people and not limited in scope to Christians.

Lessing and Steinmann in *Prepare the Way of the LORD* write, “The Jubilee release in Lev 25 points toward Isa 61:1-13, where the Suffering Servant declares that Yahweh anointed him to enact an extraordinary and ongoing Jubilee.”<sup>170</sup> In Luke 4, Jesus announces he is that Servant and come to enact the Jubilee. Radner expresses a similar thought, sin ruins the order that God has instituted for the world. So, Jesus comes to bring forgiveness and restoration. He does it by offering himself.<sup>171</sup> Also, Kleinig in his commentary states that the reason Luke records Jesus’ Nazareth sermon is that it is the core of his teaching. He came to release creation from death, sin, and Satan and restore creation to God.<sup>172</sup> “Just as the Jubilee issued from the Day of Atonement in ancient Israel, so their release from sin and all the powers of darkness is the result of Christ’s sacrificial death (Acts 10:39-43; 13:26-39). They are released from all debts to God.”<sup>173</sup>

The application of the Jubilee law for these authors has two main points. One, the sin of people is forgiven.<sup>174</sup> Two, people should forgive the sins of others as God forgave them. In this way, they are practicing the Jubilee by releasing each other from their debts.<sup>175</sup>

### Redemptive and Spiritual Principles Interpretation

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170. Lessing and Steinmann, *Prepare the Way of the LORD*, 111.

171. Ephraim Radner, *Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 269.

172. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 554.

173. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 555.

174. Kleinig continues by writing about the effect of the forgiveness of sins – eternal life in heaven. However, he is not included in the eschatological interpretation category because his main interpretation of the Jubilee focuses on redemption, instead the eschatological effect of the Jubilee.

175. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 555.

The focus of this interpretation is not only Christ's work of attaining forgiveness but then it further sees that the Jubilee laws have an impact on the Christian life. The impact included is not limited to the forgiveness of sins, but how the law can guide a Christian's life.

Rooker, in his commentary, writes that both the Sabbath and Jubilee years become types for the later acts of God. Jesus will especially use Isa 61:1-3 as the pattern for his ministry and the liberty or freedom he came to proclaim, the main thought in Lev 25:10.<sup>176</sup> "The liberty announced would include not only spiritual forgiveness but also the remission of debt."<sup>177</sup> Also, he states that the purpose of the law was to provide "both a spiritual and social control for the Israelites."<sup>178</sup> This took both the form of restraining greed and reminding the people of their total dependence on God as well as God's ownership of the land.

He recognizes that the application of the law for the Israelites should be different than Christians today. Christians should recognize their possessions come from God. They should trust he will care for them. Also, "it is the believer's responsibility to trust, be obedient, and seek the rule of God in every arena of life (Matt 6:25-34)."<sup>179</sup> Rooker does not specifically apply the Jubilee law but applies the law generally.

### Eschatological Interpretation

The focus in the eschatological interpretation is the scholar or theologian's emphasis not on Christ's work of salvation as the fulfillment of the Jubilee but instead his second coming as the

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176. Lev 25:10 and Isa 61:1 are both connected by a uncommon Hebrew word for liberty or freedom: **קָרוֹר**. More than that, "the favorable year of the LORD," in Isa 61:2 makes the connection stronger, R. Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, Conc (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2014), 263.

177. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 311.

178. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 311.

179. Rooker, *Leviticus*, 312.

fulfillment. The second coming of Christ is connected to his final liberation of his people from sin and its effects as well as their return home to him.

Shead states that the purpose of the Jubilee, as well as the Sabbath years and redemption laws, were “a partial realizing in the present of God’s future blessing.”<sup>180</sup> He continues, “By definition the sabbatical laws are markedly eschatological in flavor. The jubilee, in particular, is the ultimate ‘sacrament of the eschaton.’ Everything is intensified: the long wait, the extreme bondage, the triumphant note of atonement...by the time of the latter prophets it is the jubilee that tends to occupy the stage at climactic moments of eschatological imagination.”<sup>181</sup> The Jubilee is then connected to Christ through the LXX translation of  $\text{קָרָן}$  as  $\alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in Lev 25:10.

The peculiar stress of  $\alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in Leviticus 25 shifted the law’s organizing center away from the particular acts to the general principle of release; second, the unprecedented choice of  $\alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in Isaiah 58:6 completes the lexical circle that the LXX has drawn around the whole gamut of septennial and jubilee-related activities. By inflating their symbolic value the LXX has aided the transformation of the ‘ $\alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  legislation’ from debt-relief law to prophecy of the return from exile to a vision of the final triumph of God’s Messiah.<sup>182</sup>

His main idea is that the LXX translation of  $\alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$  connects the thought of Jubilee debt-release to the ultimate release by the messiah. Seiss in *Gospel in Leviticus* interprets the Jubilee in the same way. It is ultimately fulfilled when Christ comes back. “It was only after the High-priest had finished all the services of that solemn day that the silver trumpet sounded for the Jubilee. This Day of Atonement only began with the Savior’s sufferings and death...The proper Jubilee,

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180. Andrew G Shead, “An Old Testament Theology of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee,” *RTR* 61.1 (2002): 31.

181. Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 31.

182. Shead, “An Old Testament Theology,” 32.

therefore, is yet to come...Jesus must first appear the second time, before our final release and salvation shall be complete.”<sup>183</sup>

Shead does not apply the eschatological interpretation today. Ultimately, it does affect today, as Christians look forward to its coming. Seiss does apply the interpretation to today: people are to work as they wait for the final Jubilee. Just as the Israelites worked for six years and then enjoy the abundance of God’s blessing, so too are Christians to work hard as they look forward to enjoying the abundance of God.<sup>184</sup>

#### Eschatological and Spiritual Principles Interpretation

Much like the interpretation of the redemptive and spiritual principles, this category of interpretation is eschatological, but the scholars and theologians also view principles behind the law that should be applied today. Similar to the interpretation of the redemptive and spiritual principles, the authors do not make a specific application, but a general application to today.

In his article, Bruno responds to the different ways the Jubilee is applied to the modern-day. He writes, “The Jubilee points toward an eschatological freedom for God’s people accomplished through an anointed agent.”<sup>185</sup> Much like the interpretation of Seiss and Shead, this anointed agent is Christ revealed in Luke 4. Just like Seiss and Shead, Bruno writes, “the fulfillment of the Jubilee through Jesus’ ministry was an inauguration, not a completion, of the eschatological Jubilee.”<sup>186</sup> It is not limited to the forgiveness of sin, but also releasing people

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183. Joseph A. Seiss, *Gospel in Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1981), 390.

184. Seiss, *Gospel in Leviticus*, 396–98.

185. Christopher R Bruno, “‘Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...But How?: The OT Background and Lukan Fulfillment of the Ethics of Jubilee,” *JETS* 53.1 (2010): 95.

186. Bruno, “‘Jesus Is Our Jubilee’...But How?,” 98.

from economic suffering, especially seen in Acts 2:44-45.<sup>187</sup> Kaiser in *Toward Old Testament Ethics* also sees both a need to interpret the Jubilee year in light of Christ's final release from sin for his people as well as the principles behind the law that still apply today.<sup>188</sup> Also, Hartley, in his commentary, writes that the Jubilee is used as a type for Jesus's ministry, but it is also used as a type to point forward to the coming kingdom when his people are free from sin. This law also encourages helping those struggling as well as cares for the land. It breaks greed and covetousness, as people recognize the origin of their possessions.<sup>189</sup> Wenham also interprets the Jubilee as the inspiration for the coming messianic age where God will restore all things. Christ only inaugurated this age at his first coming. Christians can also learn three other lessons from the Jubilee law. First, it promoted social justice<sup>190</sup> and family unity by preventing land from collecting in the hands of a few rich Israelites. Second, concern for a just society should be connected to the true worship of God. Third, God will provide for the needs of his people. Therefore, they are free to love each other by providing for those who are needy.<sup>191</sup>

Wright uses a threefold interpretation to understand the Jubilee law and its application: typological, eschatological, and paradigmatic.<sup>192</sup> In the typological understanding, one interprets

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187. Bruno, "Jesus Is Our Jubilee'...But How?," 98–99.

188. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 217–20.

189. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 446–48.

190. In my understanding, Wenham is using 'social justice' in the sense that it protected families from being taken advantage of in difficult times, not in the sense that it promoted social equality as often used today.

191. Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 323–24.

192. This is similar to an interpretive model in Hill and Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 60-61. They write about three different ways the New Testament understands Old Testament law: typological, allegorical, and didactic. In the typological, "Old Testament persons, events, and things 'foreshadow' the corresponding New Testament entities." An example would be the Passover lamb foreshadowing Christ's sacrifice. In the allegorical, "the biblical text is understood figuratively or symbolically." An example of this would be Paul's use of Deut 25:4 in showing the apostolic privilege to be paid to preach the gospel. In the didactic, the Old Testament law is interpreted according to "the instructional value of the Old Testament for today's readers." Paul states as much in

a law's inherent promise as to its fulfillment in the New Testament era. Jesus's Nazareth sermon shows he is the fulfillment of the Jubilee in the New Testament era. In the eschatological interpretation, the promise finds its full fulfillment at God's final coming. When Christ comes back to release his people from sin, the eschatological promise will be fulfilled. This interpretation also gives his people hope to apply the principles of Jubilee today. In the paradigmatic interpretation, "We are seeking to identify and articulate those principles upon which it was based, the objectives it was aiming to achieve, its rationale, motivation and practical outworkings. Once we have done that, then we are in a position to ask how such a paradigm impacts the context in which we ourselves live."<sup>193</sup> So, the Jubilee law protects the opportunity and ability of people to provide for themselves, keep family units together by managing debt, recognize God as sovereign, trust in his providence, know his redemption in the past, and practice forgiveness of the debt of others.<sup>194</sup>

The application of the interpretation of the eschatological and spiritual principles of the Jubilee law in these authors is very general. As seen with Wenham, Kaiser, and Hartley, the Jubilee teaches God's people how to act. Bruno connects the spiritual aspect to the economic aspect of the Jubilee law. He ends his article by writing: "Both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants such as myself have all too often failed to proclaim the Jubilee in the way that the NT teaches: striving for an economic and social justice that points to the reality of forgiven sin and the reconciliation of God, his people, and the world."<sup>195</sup> Wright lays out the most detailed

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Rom 15:4 and 1 Cor 10:11. They also write that the underlying principles of Old Testament law are still applicable to believers today.

193. Christopher J. H Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 197.

194. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 197, 205–10.

195. Bruno, "Jesus Is Our Jubilee' ...But How?," 101.

application of the Jubilee law but does not give more than guidelines in his paradigmatic interpretation section. Even though these scholars and theologians interpret the law as teaching spiritual principles, they do not specifically apply those principles.

### THE JUBILEE IN ISAIAH AND LUKE

Before analyzing the different interpretations and applications of the Year of Jubilee laws, it would be helpful to understand how Biblical authors understand the Year of Jubilee. Two Biblical authors, who at least allude to the Year of Jubilee and further expand upon its language, are Isaiah and Luke. Isaiah alludes to the Year of Jubilee in Isa 61:1-2. Luke records Jesus reading Isa 61:1-2a in Luke 4:16-20 at the beginning of Jesus's ministry.<sup>196</sup> Understanding how Isaiah and Luke use the allusion to the Year of Jubilee helps guide a modern understanding and application of this law.

There are three things to note about how commentators understand Isa 61:1-2.<sup>197</sup> First, many commentaries agree the language of Isa 61:1-2 connects to the Year of Jubilee.<sup>198</sup> However, not all commentators agree on this point.<sup>199</sup> Second, many commentators agree that the promised Messiah is referenced in some way<sup>200</sup> in Isa 61:1-2.<sup>201</sup> Third, Blenkinsopp, Childs,

196. As shown in previous sections, one connection between Christ and the Jubilee is Isaiah's allusion to the Jubilee in Isa 61, which Christ says is fulfilled in him.

197. The focus on the commentators shows that the interpretation of Isa 61 as referring to God's promised deliverance is not original to me. Instead, it is commonly held.

198. Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed., OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 505; Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 262.

199. Joseph Blenkinsopp, ed., *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., AB 19B (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 225.

200. In Childs treatment of Isa 61, he sees the reference to the Messiah being read into the text later by Christians. He does believe this is a fair reading of the text. Blenkinsopp would also see Christ in this text, but in a general sense. Christ is just one fulfillment of this verse. Lessing absolutely sees Christ in this text.



and Lessing all agree the writer of Isaiah 61 is connecting the work of the coming Messiah to God's promised restoration of Israel. This is true whether the promised restoration is eschatological or historical.<sup>202</sup> This shows that many commentators understand that Isaiah is using the picture of debt forgiveness, either in the Jubilee or in every seven years, to point to a larger truth. The truth is that God is going to deliver his people from their oppression in some way and the Messiah is going to be part of the process.

Luke records Jesus's interpretation of Isa 61 in Jesus's Nazareth sermon. Interestingly, Just, Lenski, and Marshall all connect the Year of Jubilee language in Isa 61:1-2 to Jesus's mission.<sup>203</sup> Stein does not connect Jesus's mission to the Year of Jubilee.<sup>204</sup> Regardless, Jesus interprets Isa 61:1-2 clearly and directly, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled" (Luke 4:21). Jesus, the promised Messiah, has come to fulfill the promise of delivery for his people from their debt, which is both fulfilled in his preaching and ultimately his death.<sup>205</sup> Since the commentators connect Isa 61:1-2 to the Jubilee, then they would be connecting Christ to the Jubilee. As Marshall states, "Concretely, the allusion is to the 'year of jubilee,' the year of

201. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 220–24; Childs, *Isaiah*, 505; Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 258–65.

202. Not surprisingly, Childs and Lessing make the connection between the promised restoration and the Year of Jubilee. Blenkinsopp connects the other debt forgiveness laws in Exod 21 and Deut 15 to the promised restoration. Either way, the laws connected to freeing those in debt, either every seven or 50 years, are connected to the promised restoration.

203. Arthur A. Just, *Luke*, ConcC (St. Louis: Concordia, 1996), 193; Richard C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 252; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 1st ed., NIGTC 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 178.

204. Stein writes concerning the Jubilee reference in Isa 61:1-2, "Although Isa 61:1-2 develops certain themes from the concept of the Jubilee year (cf. Lev 25:8-55), Luke did not seem to have been thinking of this here." Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 157.

205. Is the Year of Jubilee connected to Jesus's work of redemption on the cross or the eschatological nature of his work freeing people from their sin to live free. Ultimately, they are both intimately connected.

liberation among men appointed by Yahweh (Lev 25) and not made symbolic of his own saving acts.”<sup>206</sup>

Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Isa 61:1-2 and Isa 61:1-2 is connected to the Year of Jubilee, does that mean the Year of Jubilee is directly connected to Jesus? In other words, is Isaiah using the Year of Jubilee to give concrete expression to the abstract thought of deliverance<sup>207</sup> or is he unpacking the meaning of the Year of Jubilee already present in Leviticus? If the former is true, then Jesus declaring that he fulfilled Isa 61 does not necessarily have an impact on understanding the Year of Jubilee. However, if Isaiah is unpacking an already present meaning in the Year of Jubilee, then when Jesus connects himself to Isa 61:1-2 he is connecting himself to the meaning of the Year of Jubilee.<sup>208</sup>

In my opinion, Isaiah is unpacking an already present meaning in the Year of Jubilee. There are three reasons to understand it this way. First, in Lev 25, the thematic ideas in the laws associated with the Year of Jubilee are connected to Christ in the New Testament. For example, the rest in the Sabbath year is ultimately a picture of the rest Christ gives (Matt 11:28, Heb 4:1-11). Also, the redemption built into the Jubilee Year, if no one else can redeem, is connected to Christ as the sacrifice for all people (Rom 3:24, Eph 1:7). Finally, the freedom or release given in the Year of Jubilee, often translated ἄφεσις, is connected to the release from sin that Christ brought through his death and resurrection. “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, and repentance for forgiveness (ἄφεσις) of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). Second, the

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206. Marshall, *Luke*, 184.

207. In this case, the Year of Jubilee is an illustration, nothing more.

208. Regardless, this law should be better known among modern Christians because of the beauty forgiveness revealed in this concrete law.

Year of Jubilee was inaugurated on the Day of Atonement. The Day of Atonement is also closely connected with Jesus's work as high priest (Heb 9:12). Because of Jesus's work as high priest, his people receive the promise of an eternal inheritance (Heb 9:14). This language is similar to being released to the inheritance God gave his people. Finally, Jesus fulfills the words of Isa 61:1-2, which draw on language in the Year of Jubilee. These three reasons together indicate that the Year of Jubilee already had a meaning packed into it, which Isaiah draws out and Christ ultimately fulfills.

## ANALYZING THE INTERPRETATIONS

### **Evaluation**

The purpose of this paper was to identify and group different interpretations and applications of the Year of Jubilee laws. Now that all the interpretations and applications have been categorized, which matches the intention of the original text best?

#### Non-Christological Interpretations and Applications

Does the non-Christological interpretation and application match the original intent of the text the best? In light of the Jubilee Year's association with Isa 61, there is a strong reason to understand the Year of Jubilee as having a greater point than the issues and needs of this world. If that isn't enough, Jesus says in Luke 4 that this great point is fulfilled in him.

Also, it is important to note that much of the language used in Lev 25 is also used in the New Testament but with a focus on Christ. As mentioned previously, the rest during the Sabbath year is tightly connected to the Year of Jubilee in Lev 25. In the New Testament, the writer of the book of Hebrews picks up the idea of Sabbath rest, especially connected to the land of Israel,

and shows it is about the greater rest God gives, which is found through faith in God's promises of forgiveness through Christ (Heb 4:1-11). The themes connected to the Year of Jubilee all point to Christ. To understand the Year of Jubilee apart from Christ is interpreting and applying it apart from the original intention of the text.

### Christological Interpretations and Applications

Keeping the previous point in mind, the Christological interpretation and application better fit the original intent of the text. This is especially true in light of Isaiah's connection of the Year of Jubilee to a future deliverance, which Jesus declared he fulfilled. Also, the New Testament's use of the language and themes in the Year of Jubilee chapter point to the greater Christological truth in the law. Now, does the law refer to the work of Christ in its eschatological or redemptive sense? Either way, can one also pull spiritual principles from the law to apply as a guide for Christian living?

In regard to the first question, in the Year of Jubilee's close connection to the Day of Atonement, it would be best to understand the Jubilee as referring to Jesus's work in its eschatological sense. Heb 9 connects Christ's work of redemption to the sacrifice to cleanse the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement. During the Jubilee Year, on the Day of Atonement, a horn would be blown, and then the people were allowed to return to their inheritance. The cleansing of the tabernacle was closely connected to the freedom God gives the Israelites in the Jubilee. It would only be after the high priest's work that the people could return to their inheritance. Christ's work of redemption is connected to the Day of Atonement. It would be natural to understand the effect of that redemption, freedom from sin forever, better connected to the Year of Jubilee. Also, Isaiah connects the Jubilee Year to the future deliverance for God's

people. This can be especially seen by the servant's proclamation in Isa 61:2, "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance," which points to both the favor God will bring as well as the judgment in the last days.<sup>209</sup> When Jesus declares he is the fulfillment of Isa 61, he initiates "the new era which the Messiah shall usher in. It pleases the Lord because in it his plans of salvation are being carried out through Jesus."<sup>210</sup> Just also states, "With his first word, 'today,' Jesus announces the inauguration of the eschaton."<sup>211</sup> In a sense, Jesus's voice becomes the trumpet blast on the Day of Atonement, ushering in the new time of freedom from sin.<sup>212</sup> Therefore, it is best to understand the Year of Jubilee eschatologically.

Should the interpretation of the Year of Jubilee be limited only to the eschatological nature of Christ's work? No, even though the eschatological understanding of the Year of Jubilee is greater, there are still spiritual principles that can be learned from it.<sup>213</sup> This is especially true because many of the principles shown in the Year of Jubilee law are also in the New Testament.<sup>214</sup> For example, in Lev 25:35-37, the Israelites are commanded to not profit or

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209. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 225; Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 270.

210. Lenski, *Luke*, 252.

211. Just, *Luke*, 193.

212. With the understanding that Christ's connection to the Jubilee is eschatological, the connection between Christ's final coming with a trumpet blast in Matt 24:31, 1 Thess 4:16, and 1 Cor 15:52 is appropriate considering the Jubilee freedom was also proclaimed with a loud trumpet throughout the land. In the same way that the Israelites would have looked forward to that trumpet blast with joy, Christians should also look forward to the final trumpet blast with joy.

213. Luther himself draws spiritual principles from Mosaic laws. After all, he taught that Christians were freed from following the 3rd commandment by Christ. However, it still has a spiritual principle that applies to today that a Christian should want to hear and learn God's Word. A day of rest is the opportune time to hear God's Word. The Large Catechism I. 82-84 in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 397.

214. When evaluating the principles the Old Testament Law teaches, it is helpful to see if the same principles are taught in the New Testament. This is especially true because many of the laws are fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:16) and not applicable to Christians. So, if someone wishes to seek principles, he or she would be careful to see if they are supported in the New Testament as well.

gain interest from a fellow Israelite in need. Instead, they are to lend and sell to the Israelite without profit. They are to share, as they are able, with those in need.<sup>215</sup> Paul encourages the Christians in Rome similarly, “Share with the saints in their needs” (Rom 12:13). Paul encourages Timothy to encourage the members in his church to act similarly, “Instruct [the rich] to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life,” (1 Tim 6:18-19).

More broadly, the Year of Jubilee law addresses the need to love each other and care for the physical needs of each other. This fits into the outline of the book presented earlier<sup>216</sup> as well as the thought of caring for each other while living in the land in the chapter. Once again, Paul addresses this thought in Romans, especially between believers, “Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters,” (Rom 12:10) and Christ tells his disciples, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another,” (John 13:34). The connection between God’s action of love and man’s response by loving each other can also be seen in Lev 25:38. Due to God’s deliverance of the people from the land of Egypt, they are to love each other.<sup>217</sup>

Under the banner of ‘loving your neighbor,’ a Christian would be well within his or her rights to view the non-Christological applications of the Year of Jubilee as his or her application of the Year of Jubilee’s principles of ‘love your neighbor.’ However, he or she should not claim

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215. This would be especially difficult, because if an Israelite lent to a poorer Israelite, it would be possible that the loan would never be paid back, due to the debt being forgiven in the near future. Effectively, they were giving from what they had, potentially knowing they might not be paid back.

216. As noted previously on page 4 of this thesis, the Year of Jubilee law is in the second half of the book with the section heading, ‘Love your neighbor.’ This is a response to the first half of the book, which is ‘Love the Lord your God.’ Rooker, *Leviticus*, 43.

217. Specifically in this section, they are to show love by not cheating each other.

everyone should operate the same way as if the Year of Jubilee law explicitly teaches the non-Christological applications.<sup>218</sup> It is interesting to note in the Bible the overall interest in helping each other economically as a way to show love.<sup>219</sup>

The Jubilee law should not only be applied to the principle of loving one's neighbor. It should also be related to the stewardship of resources, especially the world. In Lev 25, God reminds his people that the land is his and people live on it as temporary residents (Lev 25:23). David also testifies to this truth in Ps 24:1, "The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the LORD." God graciously gives from his creation. This should create a sense of humility and encourage wise stewardship until the final Jubilee trumpet (Matt 25:14-30). Often, in our circles, stewardship is limited to financial blessings or time. It should not be limited to just that, but pastors could preach more on wise stewardship of the earth as it arises in a sermon text or Bible class. This should not be a topic only addressed in the political sphere, because God addresses it in his Word.<sup>220</sup> This should be done carefully because God's Word does not specifically lay out how to apply it but only gives the principles for Christians to apply in their specific situation.

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218. For example, it would be fair for a Christian to say that he or she could show love to other nations by forgiving the debts of heavily indebted countries and then work to that end. However, they should not say the Year of Jubilee teaches that all Christians need to do that. It would be making the application of the Year of Jubilee into a principle.

219. This is true throughout the Pentateuch and in the New Testament. Jas 2:15-16 especially shows the connection of helping those in need with faith. Also, no one would debate that Jesus's ministry was heavily compassion based as gave sight to the blind, cast out demons, and healed the sick. In many cases, this would not only affect the health of the individual, but would also be a tremendous economic advantage to the one Jesus performed the miracle on. He was ultimately focused on teaching and preaching, but connected his ministry to the physical needs of his people as he brought a foretaste of heaven to Israel. Maybe this is an issue many of us, in our current materialistic and individualistic culture, need to reflect on and repent of.

220. Even creation eagerly waits to be set free from sin it has been subjected to, just as believers do (Rom 8:19-25).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to identify the different ways modern scholars and theologians interpret and apply the Year of Jubilee law in Lev 25. It has been seen that the interpretations can fall into two major categories, Christological and non-Christological interpretations. The Christological group can be further subdivided into Christological redemptive, redemptive and spiritual principles, eschatological, and eschatological and spiritual principles. The non-Christological group can be further subdivided into economic, ecological, political, and teaching spiritual-ethical principles.

Much more could be written about the Year of Jubilee law and its application to God's people today, enough for another paper. More could also be written concerning how properly to interpret the Old Testament law according to a Lutheran hermeneutic and how to make it applicable to God's people today. Then, the pages of Leviticus will be appreciated for their beautiful and concrete gospel pictures, which are worth a modern Christian knowing and understanding, instead of just seen as antiquated laws.<sup>221</sup> Furthermore, modern Christians could begin to see the connection between Mosaic laws, especially the Year of Jubilee, and other parts of Scripture.<sup>222</sup>

Finally, what is the overall Lutheran understanding of the Year of Jubilee? Overall, it resoundingly points to Christ. In the Concordia Commentary series, Kleinig, Lessing, and Just

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221. Connected to this, another place for more study would be the validity of looking and understanding the Old Testament Law in terms of civil, ceremonial, and moral. In my very brief experience teaching, these categories can be very helpful, but sometimes lead Christians to view the laws such as those connected to the Year of Jubilee as unnecessary to learn or of no application to their life. Therefore, these sections end up being identified as civil or ceremonial and no longer necessary to understand or learn. This is a shame, because not only do they have beautiful concrete pictures connected to Christ's work, but also they help us to understand the culture in which the Bible was written and lived.

222. Many places throughout Scripture connect to the Year of Jubilee in some way, sometimes in unexpected places. The verses following are a list of possible Year of Jubilee connections throughout Scripture. 1 Kings 21:1-24 is the account of Naboth's vineyard. In it, Naboth makes it very clear he is still following the laws of inheritance laid connected the Year of Jubilee and unwilling to sell his land permanently.



all interpret the Year of Jubilee as referring to Christ in some way. Lessing<sup>223</sup> and Just<sup>224</sup> most clearly state the Jubilee Year refers to Christ's ushering in the end-time. On the other hand, Kleinig sees it more in a redemptive sense.<sup>225</sup> Lenski, in his commentary on Luke, also has it pointing to Christ's work of preaching the gospel.<sup>226</sup> Kretzmann speaks similarly.<sup>227</sup> Paul Gerhard also sees the Year of Jubilee as pointing to Christ's ministry on earth.<sup>228</sup>

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223. Lessing, *Isaiah 56-66*, 270–73.

224. Just, *Luke*, 193.

225. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, 554–55.

226. Lenski, *Luke*, 252.

227. Paul Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible: The Old Testament* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1924), 1:232.

228. Johann Gerhard, *On the Law of God: On the Ceremonial and Forensic Laws*, ed. Benjamin T. G. Mayes and Hayes, trans. Richard J. Dinda, *Theological Commonplaces XV–XVI* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 2015), 269–70.

## APPENDIX 1. YEAR OF JUBILEE LAW CONNECTIONS IN THE REST OF SCRIPTURE

Many places in Scripture could be referring to the Year of Jubilee, or at least the laws associated with it. Following is a list of some verses I found in connection to the Year of Jubilee, some have already been mentioned in this thesis. Some of the verses previously referenced in this thesis will not be included here.

In 1 Kgs 21:1-24, Naboth makes it very clear that he will not give his land permanently to King Ahab. It seems that Naboth understands the land is not his, but God's (Lev 25:23). Unfortunately, this does not go well for Naboth, Jezebel creates a plan to take the land. Interestingly, the conspiracy involves accusing Naboth of cursing both God and the king, which is punishable by stoning (Lev 24:16).

In Jer 34:8, 14, King Zedekiah decides to proclaim freedom (דְּרוֹר) to all their slaves. Unfortunately, he rescinds his proclamation and everyone takes their slaves back. Even though דְּרוֹר is used in Lev 25:10 to refer to the Jubilee release, Jer 34:14 makes it clear the law King Zedekiah broke by rescinding his proclamation is releasing Hebrew slaves every seven years (Exod 21:2-6 and Deut 15:12-17).

In Ezek 46:17 there is a reference also to the Year of Jubilee, in which the land given by the prince will be given back to the prince in the Jubilee.

In Dan 9:24, Gabriel reveals to Daniel the answer to Daniel's prayer. It involves the future described in terms of seventy weeks. Another way to understand the seventy weeks is 490

years or ten Jubilee cycles, which may have an interesting implication for reading this difficult section of Scripture.

In Neh 5:8, it seems as though the rich in the post-exile Israelite community were taking advantage of the poor in the land, specifically charging interest to their fellow citizens. This was specifically forbidden in the associated Jubilee laws (Lev 25:36). Due to the interest, those in debt were sold as slaves to foreigners (Neh 5:8) by their fellow citizens. Other Israelites redeemed them, in keeping with Lev 25:39-43. Nehemiah condemns the practice of the rich and requires restitution for this practice.

Another interesting connection to the Year of Jubilee is the dates of the exile. Bergsma points out that there is a 50-year difference between 587-537, the date of the last deportation and the Edict of Cyrus.<sup>229</sup> Could God have purposefully had this in mind or is this just a coincidence? This could deserve some more thought.<sup>230</sup>

The sound of the trumpet blown on the Day of Atonement to signal the beginning of the Year of Jubilee and its subsequent release of Israelites back to their inheritance (Lev 25:9-10) could have an interesting connection throughout the Bible. In Isa 27:13, a trumpet will be blown and those in exile in both Egypt and Assyria will gather to worship God in Jerusalem. They will be released back to their land. In the New Testament, as addressed earlier in this thesis, the Jubilee trumpet could be a parallel to the final trumpet blast on Judgment Day as written in Matt 24:32, 1 Cor 15:52, and 1 Thess 4:16. For those Christians that fear the final trumpet blast as well as Judgment Day, connecting it to the Year of Jubilee release could be a comforting way to reframe what will happen on that day. God will release his people from slavery to their eternal

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229. Bergsma, "The Year of Jubilee and the Ancient Israelite Economy," 159.

230. Also, connected to this would be the use of 49 and 50 throughout Scripture. Pentecost is one that comes to my mind, which could be an edifying avenue of study and thought for God's people. Also, it would be interesting to see if Revelation, with its consistent use of seven, has any connections to the Year of Jubilee.

inheritance in heaven. As the people of Israel would have eagerly looked forward to that day, even though everything would change, people today can look forward to the final trumpet blast too. They are going home to enjoy their God-given rest (Heb 4).

Finally, Luke seems to use the Year of Jubilee as the lens through which to understand Jesus's ministry. With this in mind, it would be interesting to see if Luke has Jubilee features in the background of his books or if this is the only reference to the Year of Jubilee in Luke and Acts. My inclination is that Luke is using the Year of Jubilee as a theme throughout his book.

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