

Sabbatical Year – the *Shemita*

God introduced time during the creation week. In that perfect world, He established myriads of clocks that would guide the affairs of man. On the fourth day the sun and moon became the basis for the *signs, seasons, days* and *years*. The intricate purpose of those clocks in a world without sin is not elaborated on. Clearly, it was in His divine intention that Adam and Eve have routines in their lives that would relate to those time periods.

Many expositors¹ claim that these were established as time pieces to justify events, feasts and activities which God later set into motion after sin's introduction. In fact, their description is often elaborate, viewing Genesis 1:14 as if God brought into existence a perfect world structurally prepared for sin. Though sin's intrusion was anticipated, there is nothing in the Biblical account to suggest God modified His flawless creation plan. Only the moral choice of man could blemish the precincts of His handiwork.

Divinity also designed a unique cycle unrelated to the sun and moon. A time period of seven days would be divided into two main parts: six days of work and one day of rest.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God **ended his work** which he had made; and he **rested** on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God **blessed** the seventh day, and **sanctified** it: because that in it he had **rested** from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:1-3).

Several unique things are noted regarding this particular day:

1. It was the seventh, the last day of God's new time period of seven evenings and mornings.
2. It was set apart from work which was associated with the previous six days.
3. It was a day of rest – *shabath* – it states in this original decree that *God rested*.
4. Intriguingly, God honored this time by:
 - a. **Blessing** the “time” (*barak*)
 - b. **Sanctifying** the “time” (*qadesh*)

Different than all other clocks at creation, this one was decreed as sacred (holy). Any man entering the portals of the seventh day enters sacred time. The verb for rested (*shavat*) infers that an *end has come* -- something has ceased. The context simply reveals that God's work has come to an end. It is quite emphatic, in fact. No residual work remained. Many scholars conclude that out of this has come the similar noun *shabbat* or Sabbath rest. Exodus 20:8 connects the observance of the Sabbath with God's resting during that seventh day of the creation week. “God rested” – therefore, “thou shalt not do any work.”

Man's requirement to “keep” that Sabbath is found in many places in the Old and New Testaments. Instruction regarding this is given more space in the fourth commandment in the Decalogue than any other of the nine decrees. Only the Sabbath time was blessed or set apart and sanctified. *Qadesh* distinguishes the time from the common, here compared with the six working days. It is holy and associated with worship and time with God. It elevates time to an *exclusive* period with God. It represents a pure relational day when

man focuses on God without work interruptions. By this, God's sovereignty over His creation is not only remembered but now His sovereignty over "time" is honored.

When sin came, and it likely did within months after creation, based upon Great Week of Time studies,² the significance of the Sabbath was not done away with but was actually seen later embellished and expanded. There is a vast block of time from the loss of Paradise by Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:23a) to the post-deluge era of Israel when they left Egypt. During this space of approximately 2500 years nothing is said regarding the sacred Sabbath rest. God's law and the Sabbath requirements were apparently known to the ancient pre-deluge inhabitants: "Every man in God's world is under the laws of His government. God has placed the Sabbath in the bosom of the Decalogue, and has made it the criterion of obedience. Through it we may learn of His power, as displayed in His works and His Word. But today the world is following the example of those that lived *before the flood*. Now, as then, men choose to follow their own inclinations, rather than to obey the commandments of God. The inhabitants of the antediluvian world glorified themselves instead of commemorating the glorious works of creation. They did not obey the law of God; they did not honor the Sabbath. Had they done this, they would have recognized their duty to their Creator. This was the original and supreme object of the command, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.'"³

When God finally had a corporate body that left Egypt, heading towards the Promised Land, God riveted the importance of the Sabbath into Israel's understanding through the manna miracle during the first 50 days before Sinai. Thirty days into the wilderness of Sin, that Bread of Life was given as a gift (Exodus 16). Then came Sinai and the Sabbath commandment written on tables of stone. God did not lead this group of people to simply "remember" His creative acts, but quickly made the Sabbath a redemptive symbol, representing the restoration rest of man's final deliverance.

- It became a perpetual **sign** of the everlasting covenant between man and God. "Speak thou also unto the children of Israel, saying, Verily my sabbaths ye shall keep: for it *is* a sign between me and you throughout your generations; that *ye* may know that I *am* the LORD that doth sanctify you.... It *is* a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Exodus 31:13, 17).
- It became a reminder of the deliverance from Egypt: "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day" (Deuteronomy 5:15).

In prophecy, "Egypt" symbolizes the "wicked world," a wilderness through which man passes with trials during his journey to the Promised Land, heaven. As for ancient Israel, so for us today, the Sabbath connects the promises of deliverance from sin **and** from this world to that heavenly Canaan. It unfolds the hope of man morally restored and the reality of a new home in heaven.

In the Sabbath, God is seen as an emancipator and a liberator.⁴ This bonds the people of the covenant with the God of the covenant. The Sabbath is a "time link" between sinful man and redeemer Jesus. It is set aside to celebrate the hope of restoration in a mini-heaven atmosphere.

The Sabbath became also a humanitarian ordinance, affording laborers a day of rest: “But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates” (Exodus 20:10). “But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou. And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and *that* the LORD thy God brought thee out thence through a mighty hand and by a stretched out arm: therefore the LORD thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day” (Deuteronomy 5:14-15). “Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (Exodus 23:12).

The original holiness of the seventh-day rest was adapted to sinful man. It became a textbook of time for man to observe and reflect on the dynamics of deliverance and restoration – Egypt to Canaan, sinful nature to moral perfection. Through God’s agencies of type and antitype, the issues of that journey were clarified and ennobled. Through the Sabbath, time was provided to give solemn honor to God for His promises of cleansing and a sinless future. That Sabbath remains a sacred moment in each life to restore and celebrate the man–God relationship the blood of the Lamb provides.

“If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, [from] doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking *thine own* words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*” (Isaiah 58:13-14).

God Introduced Another Sabbath

The expected march from Egypt to Canaan was to have been brief. It was 50 days to Sinai. There, at the base of that mountain of granite rock, Israel spent several years. That is when the camp was organized. There, the tabernacle was built with its symbolic furnishings and ordinances. It was then that God’s law, statutes and judgments were given. God is a Being of precision, order and holiness. The government was directed by God Himself. Everything from worship to physical hygiene had a directive, emanating from His divine government!

There was another set of decrees that God gave to Moses. Special Sabbaths were to be observed **when** they entered the Promised Land. As they moved from a wandering people to an established nation, those Sabbaths were to be symbolic of important principles related to citizenry of the heavenly Canaan. In fact, their observance was so important that God would bring a curse on Israel if they remained unhonored. They were to represent an even higher image of when all things would become new.

The first new Sabbath He gave was called the *Shemita*. Every seventh year was to be a special sacred year. The next new Sabbath was called the *Yovel*. The year **after** seven Shemitas – or the 50th year – was called also a Jubilee year. Ten Jubilees would bring the key waymarks to God’s covenant restorative promises to completion. After 490 Shemitas

or ten Yovels (ten represents completion in prophecy), deliverance would come to God's people – if they obeyed.

These two Sabbatical clocks ran under restricted conditions:

1. God must have a special people He could call *tsaba* or a “host.”
2. God's people must be in a typological Promised Land.
3. There would be a corporate body in full compliance to His sacred directives.

Here are several of those directives:

Book of Leviticus: “And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD. Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; But in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: *for* it is a year of rest unto the land. And the sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, And for thy cattle, and for the beast that *are* in thy land, shall all the increase thereof be meat” (Leviticus 25:1-7).

Book of Exodus: “And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh *year* thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, *and* with thy oliveyard” (Exodus 23:10-11).

Book of Deuteronomy: “At the end of *every* seven years thou shalt make a release. And this *is* the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth *ought* unto his neighbour shall release *it*; he shall not exact *it* of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Of a foreigner thou mayest exact *it again*: but *that* which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee *for* an inheritance to possess it: Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee” (Deuteronomy 15:1-6)

“If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, *and* if thou turn unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul. For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off. It *is* not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither *is* it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it?” (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).

Israel disobeyed those Sabbatical commands. Intriguingly, God waited 490 Shemitas or ten Jubilees before the promised curse came. Then the prophesied Babylonian captivity.

Book of Chronicles: “And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: *for* as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil threescore and ten years” (II Chronicles 36:20-21).

As noted in the Chronicles of the Jews, this related to Jeremiah’s day above: “The year was not well observed before the **Captivity** (cf. II Paralipomenon 36:21 and Leviticus 26:34, 35, 43). After the return, the people covenanted to let the land lie fallow and to exact no debt in the seventh year (II Esdras 10:31), and thereafter it was regularly kept. The occurrence of a sabbatical year is mentioned in I Machabees 6:49 and 6:53, and its observance is several times referred to by Josephus (*Jewish Wars* 1:2:4; *Antiquities* XI:8:5-6; XIII:8:1; XIV:16:2).⁵

What was so important about the Shemita that God permitted a pagan king, Nebuchadnezzar, to desolate the land, kill thousands of Israelites and decimate Jerusalem? The “seventh” in Scripture always relates to something sacred. Why would the seventh year be so sacred that its dishonor brought murder and mayhem to those people and their land?

That’s a question that urgently requires an answer. There is more to those Sabbaths than liturgical value. This is why this document has been presented. Those Sabbaths had as much “holy” value as the seventh day. There is also growing evidence that a clock with one pending Shemita and one pending Jubilee was stopped at the Cross before a cycle was completed. At the end of a “tarrying time” alluded to in Habakkuk 2:2-3, Hebrews 10:36-37 and Revelation 10:6, the cycle will be completed – then the deliverance of God’s people will occur – at a Jubilee.

“And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make *it* plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision *is* yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Habakkuk 2:2-3).

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:36-37).

“And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer” (Revelation 10:6).

Remember those clocks only tick under the three conditions noted on page 12. Right at the end of time those circumstances will once again be established.

The Jewish Encyclopedia’s Executive Committee of their Editorial Board noted: “The septennate or seventh year and the laws regarding the jubilee were so important, like the Decalogue, they were ascribed to the legislation of Mount Sinai.”⁶

What were the general reasons given for the Sabbatical year?

1. Land was to lie fallow and all agriculture work suspended – it would be at rest. Work that man did to sustain himself was to cease totally.
2. The voluntary crops were to be for “common use.” What was not used by people, the domestic and wild animals could eat (Exodus 23:10-11, Leviticus 25:1-7). Thus, the poor would be served.

3. Supernatural crops would be experienced in preparation for this time. Thus, God's power and sovereignty of the land would be revealed to sustain them. It would be His sovereignty and power manifested.
4. All debts to a fellow Israelite were to be forgiven, showing what community would be like without obligation.
5. During the Feast of Tabernacles of that seventh year, the law was read so everyone "might know and fear the Lord" (Deuteronomy 31:10-13), giving a corporate reminder of God's character and what man was to become.

Since the sabbatical year was preceded by six sowings and six harvests (Exodus 23:10), it began with autumn, the time of sowing, coinciding with the civil year, which began with the month of Tishri (September–October).

Why would a death curse or captivity in a foreign land come to those resisting this Sabbath year? Either God was acting too harshly – or – there is a hidden truth of utmost importance that we must discover.

It All Begins with the Land

When God conveys a requirement that is to be obeyed, it is always based on a redemptive purpose. Those "super-Sabbaths" – the Shemita and Yovel – had an elevated design, a divine intension to simulate what heaven will be like in a most profound and unique way. In the Promised Land where sin still existed, those Sabbath years were devoted to observing and experiencing principles of God's eternal kingdom where sin does not exist.

God introduced the details of those new Sabbaths in Leviticus 25. Verses 1 to 34 outline God's directives regarding the land. Verses 35 to 55 detail the importance of these Sabbaths for the people – who represent the final perfect harvest of the redeemed.

Early in God's appointment of leaders, Abraham was chosen to **leave** Ur and **journey to** Canaan – the Promised Land. God's first instructions were generic and country/land oriented: "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee*" (Genesis 12:1 – emphasis added).

This *land* became a metaphor for the heavenly home, especially the New Jerusalem. Even during occupation, it remained symbolic of that better land. Paul captured the deep spiritual significance of this: "By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith. By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. *For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God*" (Hebrews 11:7-10 – NIV).

As Abraham and his heirs, including Israel, would claim that place of promise, they would always be "strangers and pilgrims" waiting for their heavenly home.

As Abram neared his end, he purchased burial land in Canaan (Genesis 23). Then he instructed his servants to never permit Isaac to leave that promised land (Genesis 24:5-8). That land was to remain as a "set aside" for God's people. But Jacob had to flee from the

land of promise because of deception. In the Abrahamic covenant God promised “unto thy seed will I give this land” (Genesis 12:7). Thus, when Jacob fled, there would have to be a return. This promise was given to Jacob during the dream of “Jacob’s ladder” (Genesis 28:12-15): “I am with thee, ... and will bring thee again unto this land” (Genesis 28:15).

What Jacob said when he awoke was crucial information to God’s people through all time: “Surely, the Lord is in this place and I knew it not.” “This is none other but the house of God, and this is the *gate of heaven*” (Genesis 28:16-17). Canaan was more than the promised land, it was to be the gate to heaven where the eternal land of promise is.

This symbol of promise became a graphic reminder of God’s covenant. The land of promise was to be where God dwelled with His people. As He met with Adam and Eve, walking with them in the Garden (Genesis 3:8), He would forever meet with them in the Canaan land. “And he said, Certainly *I will be with thee*; and this *shall be* a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Exodus 3:12 – emphasis added).

The Promise to Israel – Conditional

While they were en route to Canaan, God tied, once again, covenant promises to the land. When they entered Palestine, He would give rains in season, abundant crops and, at certain times before His super-Sabbath clocks, the land would miraculously flourish. This was embellished when God said:

“For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there” (Deuteronomy 12:9-11a).

Canaan was called:

1. Israel’s inheritance
2. Place of rest
3. Gate to heaven

There was a caveat. All covenants have two parties. Each fulfills their legal part to complete the agreement or transaction. God promises – man fulfills his obligatory part – a satisfying outcome occurs. With the promises came a warning: If you disobey my commands, you will be driven out of the land: “And it shall come to pass, *that* as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you, and to bring you to nought; and ye shall be plucked from off the land whither thou goest to possess it. And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods, which neither thou nor thy fathers have known, *even* wood and stone. And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest: but the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life: In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it were even! and at even

thou shalt say, Would God it were morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see” (Deuteronomy 28:63-67).

Deeper than ever, this revisits the solemn importance of those sacred times. Not only were they symbolic of the heavenly restoration, but they were an amazing end-time prophecy.

Super-Sabbaths – a “Gateway to Heaven”

In the land of promise, God stipulated that (Leviticus 25:1-7):

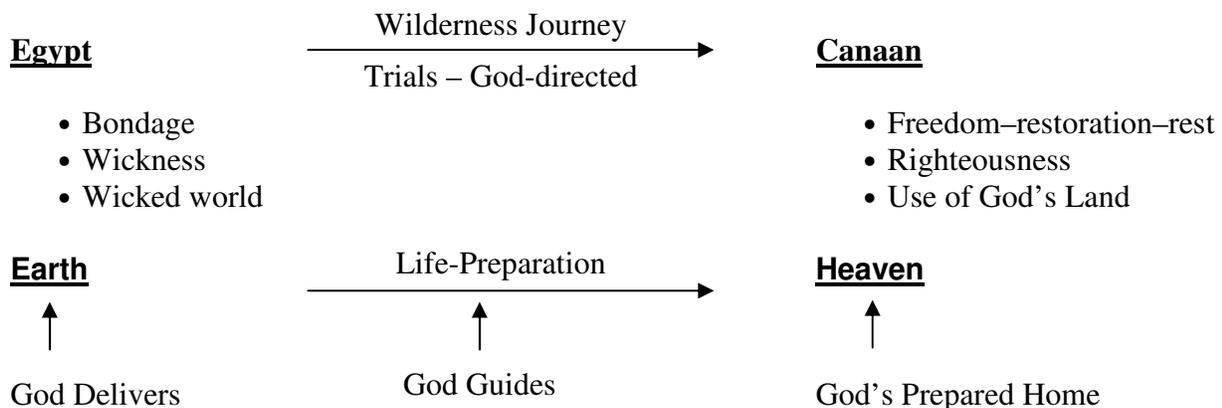
1. During the seventh year, the land was to rest.
2. No crops could be planted – no harvest made.
3. Permanent vines (i.e., grapes) and trees (ie., olive) were to remain unpruned – and
4. All the people – everyone – could glean from the fields, vines and trees.
5. The land became, in essence, a borderless place.
6. All Israeli debts were to be forgiven (Deuteronomy 15:1).

This was a significant test to the Jewish agrarian society. To let the fields go unattended and permit the populace to trespass one’s own land seemed wasteful and full of risk. The preparation for food, extending into the eighth year happened only through God’s harvest miracles on the sixth.

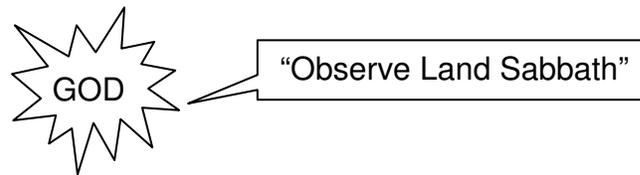
To strengthen faith in this plan, God noted: “Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years. And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat *yet* of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat *of the old store*” (Leviticus 25:18-22).

That is stunning. God would provide a miracle during the sixth year so the Sabbath year could be observed as He directed. On the sixth would be a great harvest in preparation for the seventh. Then, a very important concept was riveted home: “The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land *is* mine; for ye *are* strangers and sojourners with me.... I *am* the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, *and* to be your God” (Leviticus 25:23, 38).

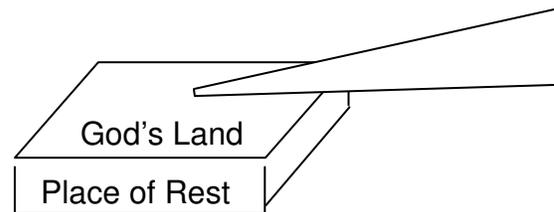
God establishes His authority and gives in this directive supreme reasons for obedience.



The Jubilee year was another high Sabbath. It followed the seventh Sabbatical year when, on that Day of Atonement, the shofar was sounded. All Hebrew slaves were freed and leased and land was returned to the original owner (it could not be sold – Leviticus 25:23). It was tribally protected, just like the great symbol of the 144,000 in Revelation 7.



Land was
Trially Divided



Gateway to Heaven
(Jubilee honored the day
when deliverance would be
complete – at the end of
ten Jubilees)
144,000 are tribally divided.

Higher Purpose

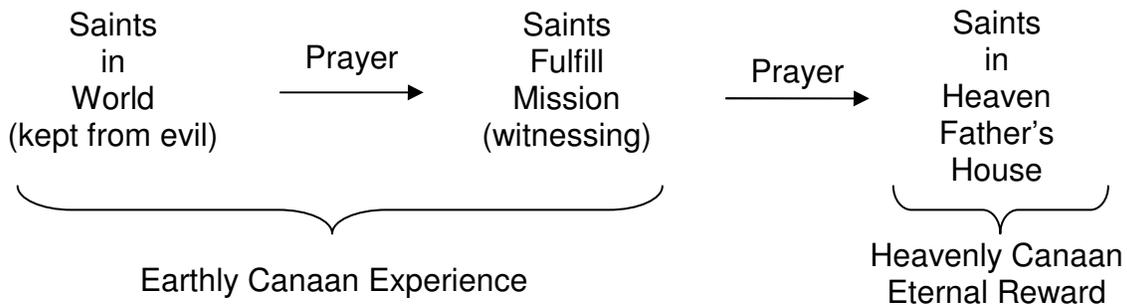
God reminds His people that the land is His. During the preparation year (the sixth), man could watch the unfolding of a miracle of life. Like the birth of a child, there was a revitalization of the land and the harvest was enough to cover the seventh and eighth years when planting was done again at the Jubilee, into the harvest of the ninth.

Since access was given to the whole populace, *everyone was equal*. There was no land owner, landlord or fences to keep one out. Suddenly, like heaven, all people would be at peace and rest with no artificial subjection. The poor ate as the rich. The outcast associated with the highest classes.

These laws prevented hoarding of land, wealth and slavery of God's people – all of which would be gained at the expense of others. Lands assigned to tribes were to be kept within those tribes. This amazing system kept in check man's attachment to the land/world. It never permitted bondage beyond a predefined time limit. Thus, in God's appointed times, liberty would come and all would be one with Him. This symbolized the end-point to His wonderful redemptive plan. It would fulfill Christ's restoration prayer: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (John 17:20-23).

Then Christ prayed a geographic wish: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

He pleads with the Father that in His future glory, where He will be (His Father's house – John 14:1-3), the redeemed can share that place with Him. They are in the world (17:11). At first He prays that they remain but be kept from evil (17:15). They have yet a mission (17:18). But then He prays that they will “be with me where I am.” Where is that? He said that He was figuratively no longer in the world (17:11). His work was completed (17:4).



These laws were designed to try Israel. They would put to test man's dependence on heaven. They would create a check on man's aggressiveness to achieve and attain. The blessings promised did not include wealth, riches and a high place in this world. It was an assurance for sustenance. You will have enough to eat. BUT – the curse is so severe that it highlights the sacredness of the ordinance and laws for these high Sabbaths. The Promised Land would be lost if they disobeyed!

It is within this incredible context that the Hebrew word *shamen* is introduced. God will bring the land to *desolation* if they break these Sabbaths. Not only will the people be taken from the land, the land will become *desolate*. It will come under divine judgment and be destroyed. All of man's possessions and creations will be as nothing.

“And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savour of your sweet odours. And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it. And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste. Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye *be* in your enemies' land; *even* then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it” (Leviticus 26:31-35).

God's desolation curse is associated with the Sabbath; here, the high typological Sabbaths of the *Shemita* and *Yovel*. But there is another similar message to the seventh-day Sabbath. Jesus said the end of time would be related to an abomination that would lead to desolation (Matthew 24:15). That word is one of the most descriptive reactions of God against sin!

He then said to all students of His Word, go to Daniel to obtain deeper meaning. In Daniel 8:13 Gabriel speaks of a *transgression* that leads to *desolation*. Later, God's reactive term is used – the *abomination (shiqqus)* that leads to *desolation* (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, 12:11). That transgression (*b^epcsha*) casts truth to the ground (8:12). God's Sabbath is desecrated. It is substituted by a false Sabbath. It is an abomination that God says leads to desolation, utter ruin of planet earth.

Limits to God's Mercy

The curse warnings from God when the Sabbaths are ignored have been reviewed.

1. Break seventh-day Sabbath – a transgression that God calls an “abomination.” It will end in desolation.
2. Break Shemita or Sabbatical year – God’s wrath will bring a curse upon Israel (terror, no peace, no crops, wild beasts, pestilence). It, too, will end in desolation.

“I will make your cities waste” (Leviticus 26:31, 33).

“Bring your sanctuaries into desolation” (26:31)

“Bring your land into desolation” (26:32-33)

These all came true. It is a lesson to all people at the end of time who claim to be Christ’s and reject the seventh-day Sabbath.

Why the desolation and utter ruin?

“Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye [be] in your enemies' land; [even] then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it” (Leviticus 26:34-35).

The word “land” (*eres*) is used as a metaphor for Sabbath obedience. The earth is the Lord’s (Psalm 24:1). He is its king (Psalm 47:2) and its Lord (Psalm 97:5). The promised land of Palestine promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18 – first intimation) is called the Lord’s heritage (I Samuel 26:19). Thus, God in symbol is telling His people: When you are taken captive and the land decimated, My country will finally be at rest – void of rebellion against me – the atmosphere of the Sabbath rest will once again be over the land.

The Sabbath was God’s sign to the world as to who His people were and then, in turn, who He was. It stood/stands apart as a unique obligation unrelated to any other religion, church, cult or organization. The seventh-day identifies this body of believers. The Seventh year identified the power of the God over those believers. The Jubilee announced the principles of His government, like no other.

Because of Israel’s rejection of God, Jeremiah predicted that they would be taken into captivity. Their land would be made desolate (Jeremiah 25:11).

- The sins:
1. Serving other gods and works of their hands (25:6-7)
 2. Breaking the sacredness of the Shemita (II Chronicles 36:21)

- The duration:
1. 70 years – one year for each Shemita transgressed (36:21)
 2. Then the land could rest

That means that for 490 years of time (70 years captivity times 7 years in the Sabbatical year cycle) they had been in rebellion. This rebellion appears to have been counted from the time of Samson. God had an important work for Samson to do. He was a promised child to the childless wife of Manoah (Judges 13). Instead of the Sabbaths

bringing distinction to Samson's leadership as a judge in Israel, he associated with the heathen and brought degradation to God's name.

We get insight into God's reaction to this careless indifference from the poor who were neglected – a special charge to God's people during the Shemita year.

“Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail, Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and falsifying the balances by deceit? That we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; yea, and sell the refuse of the wheat?” (Amos 8:4-6).

“*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noon day: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in” (Isaiah 58:6-12).*

The deliverance of God's people is the focus of redemption, the freeing of captives from sin, the power of Calvary's sacrifice and blood. Couched, intriguingly, in all of the restoration themes is a message of the importance of Sabbath loyalty. It represents so many themes tied to deliverance, freedom from sin, resting from worldly cares, newness and restoration. Breaking its sacred hours and bonds mocks redemption because it is the story in miniature of what He has been trying to do for mankind for 6000 years, ever since Eve ate of that forbidden fruit.

Amazingly, as Jeremiah rose up as the prophet of warning to apostate Israel, the promise of restoration was based on keeping the Sabbath: “And it shall come to pass, if ye diligently hearken unto me, saith the LORD, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; Then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: and this city shall remain for ever. And they shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places about Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the plain, and from the mountains, and from the south, bringing burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and meat offerings, and incense, and bringing sacrifices of praise, unto the house of the LORD. But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched” (Jeremiah 17:24-27).

Even when Israel's captives were freed, as God had promised, their loyalty to His laws was compromised (Nehemiah 5). They were unprepared for the first advent. These prophets and their many prophecies regarding Israel became future themes of restoration for His second advent. Everything will be repeated as of old, including desolation, fall of Babylon and the Messiah's return.

In those prophecies Gentiles – non-Jews – were also seen as part of those who receive God's inheritance.

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; If the prince give a gift unto any of his sons, the inheritance thereof shall be his sons'; it *shall be* their possession by inheritance. But if he give a gift of his inheritance to one of his servants, then it shall be his to the year of liberty; after it shall return to the prince: but his inheritance shall be his sons' for them. Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by oppression, to thrust them out of their possession; *but* he shall give his sons inheritance out of his own possession: that my people be not scattered every man from his possession” (Ezekiel 46:16-18).

“So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, *that* ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel” (Ezekiel 47:21-22).

This latter prophecy foresees and predicts inclusion of the Gentiles (aliens) in the coming kingdom, which Messiah will establish.

Likewise, Micah foretold the day of Israel's restoration in the land: “But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make [them] afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken *it*... In that day, saith the LORD, will I assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that I have afflicted; And I will make her that halted a remnant, and her that was cast far off a strong nation: and the LORD shall reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth, even for ever” (Micah 4:4, 6-7).

Thus, Paul could later note: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of [them], and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Hebrews 11:13-16).

Once again, the land was the “place of blessing.” The inheritances of one's “portion of land” kept their possession in the “country of blessings.” Yet, those ancient prophets and peoples who remained loyal to God saw themselves as strangers and pilgrims, looking forward in faith to a “better country.” Thus, the dwelling place of ultimate security is abiding with Christ: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

And – Christ abiding in us: “To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

There, Paul includes the Gentiles. God becomes the refuge, the dwelling place, the inheritance (cf. Psalm 91:1-2; 16:1-2, 5; 18:1-2; 27:31; 73:25-26, 28).

Great Metaphor of the Land, Laws and Jesus

With only a cursory scan of these “land laws” – the Shemita and Yovel – it would appear only to benefit the slave, the poor and serve as an administrative containment of tribal lands. There is a wonderful picture of Christ’s character and mission encapsulated in these special Sabbaths.

Jesus uses “land” symbolism as His connecting link to earth, bridging heaven to mankind. This is revealed in Jacob’s ladder vision in Genesis 28.

“There appeared before him a ladder, whose base rested on the earth and whose top reached into the highest heavens. God was above the ladder, and his glory shone through the open heaven and lighted up every round of the ladder. The angels were ascending and descending upon it. The plan of salvation was open to Jacob’s mind in this dream....

“Christ was the ladder that Jacob saw. Christ is the link that binds earth to Heaven, and connects finite man with the infinite God. This ladder reaches from the lowest degradation of earth and humanity to the highest heavens. We are to ascend the ladder that Jacob saw, but not by our own strength alone. It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance and reformation. We are not left to struggle on alone.”⁷

Jesus riveted this theme firmly into Nathaniel’s mind when He said: “And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). There’s more: When Jacob finished witnessing that vision, a sinner and a fugitive, he was afraid. Divinity had made contact with humanity. He cried: “Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not” (Genesis 28:16). Earth, the home of rebellion, is the place where God links heaven’s greatest gift to – Jesus Christ. There is a great redemptive truth Jacob said: “This is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:17).

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

“Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:7, 9).

In the days of the prophets and inter-testamental times, farms were a way of life. They were part of the inheritance that was passed on from generation to generation. In the Jubilee year land was returned to its original owner. The family inheritance was preserved in a direct line, and the purity of tribal ownership was retained.

That formed the educational basis for the “eternal inheritance” theme which God depicted through these special Sabbaths. God’s people would be part of a special family, given the ‘tribal name’ of “my God,” and claim the Jewish spiritual center metaphor “New Jerusalem” along with Christ’s “new name” (Revelation 3:12). The tie to land, ownership and inheritance were intertwined themes that were not only a Jewish reality but typologically created a foundation for the salvic fulfillment of His plans.

Within this framework, God decreed that “eternal rest” would be depicted by “land rest” or a Sabbath to the land. This metaphor became sacred. In fact, it was seen by God as one of His supreme educational tools. The seventh-day was stated to be a day of **rest**.

“But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thine ox, nor thine ass, nor any of thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates; that thy manservant and thy maidservant may rest as well as thou” (Deuteronomy 5:14).

Then the land rest was like a Sabbath rest and eternal rest when everything is restored, unified and totally dependent on divine intervention.

“For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But *when* ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and *when* he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there” (Deuteronomy 12:9-11a).

When Jesus came He announced: “Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). When Israel rejected the Sabbatical land rest and ignored the amazing land inheritance plan God had devised to remind them of His restorative grace, He permitted pagan forces to destroy their land, their spiritual center (Jerusalem and the Temple) and take them into a land where they wouldn’t need rest.

When Jesus spoke in the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth (Luke 4), He quoted Isaiah 61:1-2. The Messiah would bring “release,” symbolizing rest from sin and oppression. He declared that that day those things were fulfilled and declared an “acceptable year of the Lord.” That was a Jubilee year message. He inaugurated the gospel message of restoration and deliverance – a message of hope and rest with Jubilee Sabbath language.

The land was a gate to heaven. Jesus became the gate to God’s throne. The land was to rest. Jesus would bring rest. The Jubilee would provide a proper inheritance; Jesus’ death guaranteed our inheritance. The Shemita brought the end of all debts, Christ paid all our debts. The depth of meaning to these Sabbaths brought one down to the very core of the meaning of restoration and deliverance. Canaan, the Promised Land, was to be a perpetual lesson book of what someday would be heaven with its glorious verdure and rest, the “new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness” (Acts 3:31, II Peter 3:13).

Christ carried the land theme, the rest, the decreed Sabbaths beyond the typology of the past with the “woman at the well.” In her brief discomfort at Christ’s initial engagement, she said, “Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). The “land” – the geography – was the focus of reality. Jesus elevated the message: “The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father (John 4:21). The land was a type – now the issue is a person, the Messiah. Then Jesus said, “I that speak unto thee am he” (John 4:26).

Because those Sabbaths were so vital in God’s scheme of training and reminding, their themes were adopted into end-time prophecy. This is why in Daniel 9 there were 70 Shemitas, 10 Jubilees and then the sanctuary would be cleansed, everlasting righteousness established and all opposition terminated. That plan was cut short by the rejection of Christ. A tarrying time was introduced, and the final three and a half years will be completed right at the end of time. Then the final Shemita will begin with the land becoming desolate (progressively, as rebellion is matured). That is why there are so many 42 months/1260 days/time, times and dividing of times in apocalyptic prophecies! Then –

when all the land is at rest, the Jubilee will commence. Nothing will impede or distract from sacred time with Jesus. Then – the celebration of the marriage with the Lamb will begin.

From the land we are to raise our sights to Jesus, up the “ladder” to God and His throne. That is seen as another illustration when believers sold their land for the poor and the work of the gospel (Acts 4:34-37). The remnant believers will detach themselves from the “land” of this world and begin that journey, climbing higher and higher with Jesus Christ. That’s why He gave the shocking promise that those who give up their land, houses, even family “shall receive an hundredfold and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matthew 19:29) – from inheriting land to life. That is type to antitype, symbol to reality, physical to spiritual, temporal to eternal!

The Sabbaths are a “rest” to lead us from the land (earth) up the ladder (Jesus Christ) to God’s throne (the redemptive center of the universe). The “Old Testament saints delighted to be in the land; the New Testament saints delighted in being “in Christ.”⁸

“But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner *stone*; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:13-22).

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