

Sabbatical Year – the *Shemita*

Introduction

God introduced many time clocks during the creation week.

- Fourth day – the sun and moon became the basis for signs, seasons, days and years (Genesis 1:14).
- What that meant in that perfect world is unclear.
 - Why would human life need signs?
 - What kinds of seasons existed?
 - Were the days 24-hour days?
 - Did the earth circle the sun at a different speed?

Though God's foreknowledge anticipated sin, there is nothing to suggest that the creation of this earth was modified to prepare for its intrusion.

- The seventh day was not created but appointed.
- *“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 principles were established in this last day of the creation week.

1. The “seventh” was the last period before a “first” began a new cycle.
2. It was set apart from the six work days that preceded it.
3. It was a day of rest (*shabath*) to honor God because He rested and was the Creator.
4. Man and God could uniquely share this time together.
5. God honored this intangible “time” by:
 - Blessing it – it was to benefit man
 - Sanctifying it – it was holy and wholly for Him

The word “rested” implies “an end has come” – something ceased.

- No residual work remains.
- When man rests on the seventh day – all residual work is completed or set aside.

In the Decalogue:

- More space is given to the fourth commandment than any other directive (Exodus 20:8-11, Deuteronomy 5:12-15).
- **Time (six days):** Common, secular **Time (seventh day):** Unique, holy

- *Not only is His sovereignty over creation remembered, His sovereignty over time is to be acknowledged.*

Once sin came into the world – the Sabbath took on new meaning. BUT:

- There is no record of the Sabbath rest during a 2500-year period – until the Jewish exodus.
- Neither is there a record of the Decalogue.
- The Bible does note: *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”* (Genesis 6:5).
- *“Wickedness”* and evil relate to behavior contrary to God’s wishes – *there was a known divine standard.*
- It later notes: *“and Noah walked with God”* (Genesis 6:9).
- Again revealing that parameters on behavior were known.

The Sabbath acted as a check on man’s unbridled selfish behavior.

- He was to stop “man”-related activity.
- And then participate in God-accepted activity.
- This check on man was unique, and required to maintain loyalty to God.

Expositor White captured the significance of this when she said: “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.’”¹

The Re-introduction of the Sabbath Rest

Why did God wait till He had a chosen people before making explicit the meaning of the Sabbath?

- That is not clear.
- BUT – when it was re-explained and set in stone, it was with the admonition to *“Remember the Sabbath”* related to the creation.
- The link with its original purpose was confirmed and validated.

“Hallowed by the Creator's rest and blessing, the Sabbath was kept by Adam in his innocence in holy Eden; by Adam, fallen yet repentant, when he was driven from his happy estate. It was kept by all the patriarchs, from Abel to righteous Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob. When the chosen people were in bondage in Egypt, many, in the midst of prevailing idolatry, lost their knowledge of God's law; but when the Lord delivered Israel, He

¹ White, Ellen G.; *The Signs of the Times*, March 31, 1898.

proclaimed His law in awful grandeur to the assembled multitude, that they might know His will and fear and obey Him forever.”²

When did God first confirm that Creation link?

- Between the Red Sea and Mt. Sinai He provided manna to a complaining multitude (Exodus 16:18-26)
- It reminded Israel of His creative power.
- It reminded them also of that sacred seventh.

Egypt became a symbol for wickedness – this earth.

- Deliverance from Egypt was celebrated by the Passover.
- Then God added a wonderful new reason to keep the Sabbath.
- *“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).
 - It not only honored the Creation past
 - But now is to honor the recreation future
 - Man’s deliverance was now tied to the Sabbath.

The Sabbath is a prophecy of what man might become through Jesus Christ.

- Thus, it became a unique identifier of loyalty to Him.
- *“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.... Wherefore the children of Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. 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, 16-17).

In the Sabbath, God is seen as a liberator, an emancipator.

- Thus, it is a sign of the covenant.
- It unites God’s law with His grace that cleanses.
- God was enthroned between the cherubim (Psalms 80:1, 99:1).
 - When blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat seven times on Atonement Day (Leviticus 16:15-16)
 - It brought cleansing:
 - God
 - Blood
 - Law } Suddenly came together
- Christ provides yet today the link between God’s standard and His throne.

² White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, p. 453.

- “And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled [it] on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words” (Exodus 24:8; cf. Hebrews 9:19).
- The Sabbath brings honor to that covenant restoration theme.

New Sabbaths were Given to Israel

The march from Egypt to Canaan was to have been fairly brief (a few months).

- At Sinai the structure of the Theocracy was established.
- Camp order and worship rites were all implemented.
- Then 40 years of wandering because of rebellion.

God then introduced a special plan for a **Sabbatical year** called in Hebrew the **Shemita**.

- This was to be observed **only after** they entered the Promise Land (just like the feasts).
- It would be a celebration **in Canaan**.
- Every seventh year was to be a Sabbath “unto the Lord” (Leviticus 25:1-7).

From a *wandering people* to the *nation of Israel*, it afforded God the chance for His people to recognize special principles of His kingdom.

- Citizenry of the earthly Canaan would represent
 - Citizenry of the heavenly Canaan
- Only through a sacred seventh year could God fully reveal the holiness of that final deliverance.

God didn’t stop this special instruction here.

- Ten represents a complete number in God’s prophetic plan.
- When seven *Shemitas* were completed (49 years), the next year would also be a Sabbath – called the *Yovel*.

The *Yovel* was called a Jubilee Year – a Sabbath of Sabbaths.

When ten of these 49 Jubilee cycles are complete, we have 490 years, which show up later in God’s restoration plan in Daniel 9.

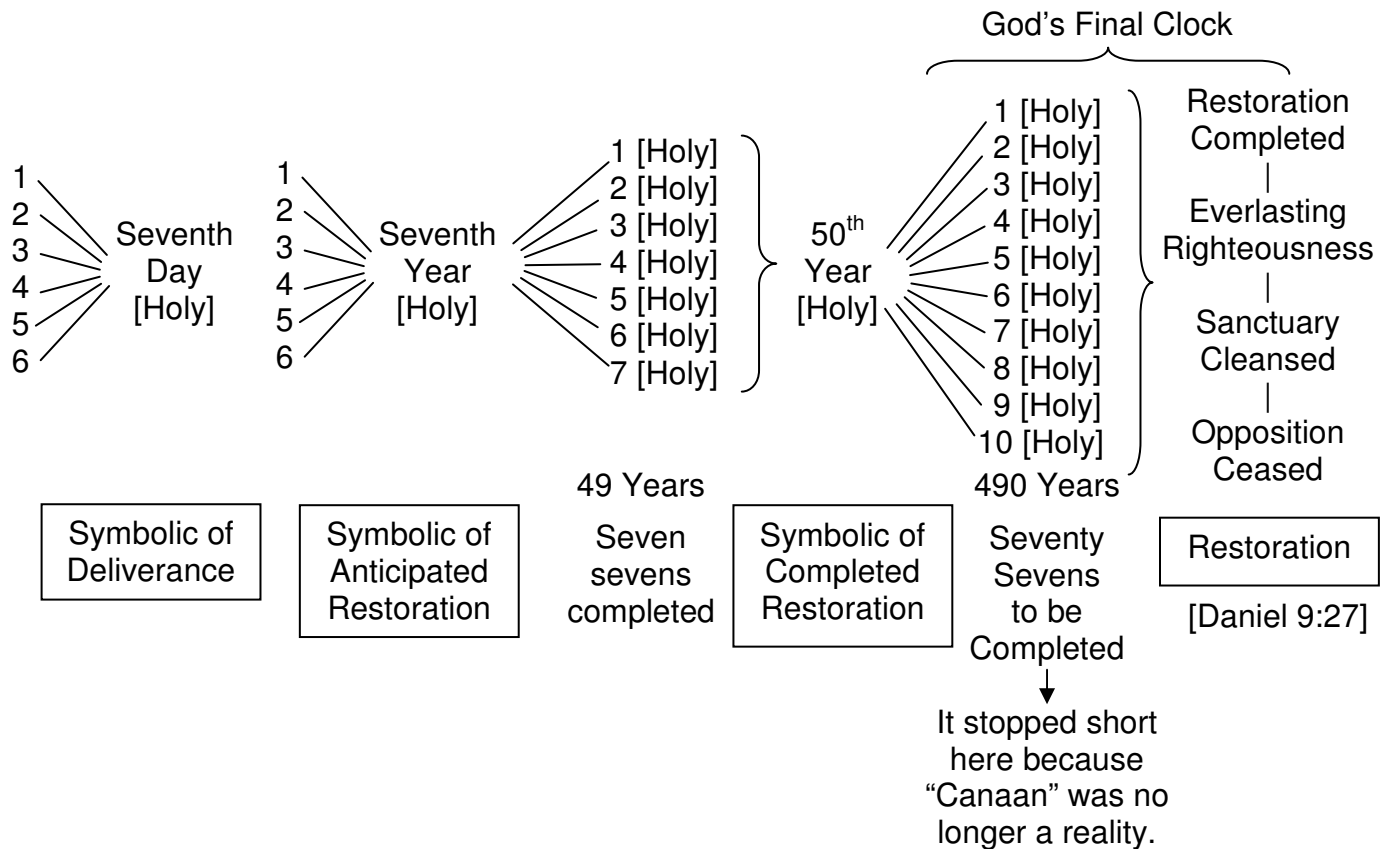
Why did God need more Sabbaths?

Why did He permit a pagan king to destroy Jerusalem, kill thousands and take the inhabitants of Judah captive over a lack of the *Shemita* observance? (II Chronicles 36:20-21).

Are those Sabbaths of any special value to us today?

- There is something vital we must discover.
- There must be something more than a liturgical Jewish worship in that Sabbath year.

First, there is this pattern – it *is* symbolic of God’s redemptive, forward-moving clocks:



Seven is the number of holiness

Ten is the number of completion

How does this process fit into God’s scheme of redemption?

Why were each of these steps dovetailed into the other?

Were the *Shemita* clocks to go on indefinitely?

Were the Jubilees to recycle without a *predicted* end?

The Story Begins with the Babylonian Captivity

In Nebuchadnezzar’s first year of reign, Jeremiah prophesied warnings because Judah had:

- “Not harkened, nor inclined your ear to hear” (Jeremiah 25:4).
- And did not turn “from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land” (Jeremiah 25:5).

God will use Nebuchadnezzar as His “servant” (Jeremiah 25:9).

- And “this whole land shall be a desolation.”

- They will serve this Babylonian king 70 years (25:11).
- Deliverance would come at the end of 70 years (29:13).

What was God’s wrath against His people over?

- It related to improper land use (Jeremiah 25:5).
- It related to idolatry (Jeremiah 25:6).
- The great records, called the Chronicles, *refines* our understanding.

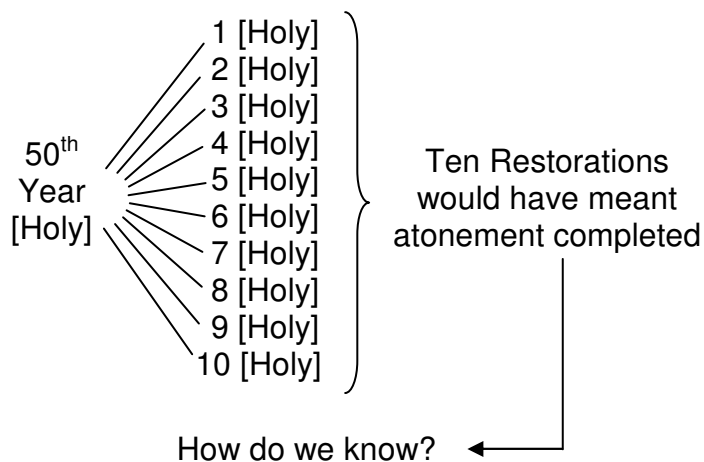
“And them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon; where they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Persia: To fulfil the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths: [for] as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath,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

Idolatry led to other gods – that, in turn, led them away from the *Shemita* or Sabbatical Year.

- This was symbolically expressed “so the land could not enjoy her Sabbaths.”
- *Something urgently important is being conveyed.*

Seventy years in Babylonian captivity under heathen kings:

- One year for each *Shemita* missed (70).
- How many years did that cover? 490.
- That is *ten Jubilees*.



Daniel 9 tells us:

- Daniel’s people, representing all of God’s people – spiritual Israel (12:1).³
- Are given another chance of 490 years, 70 *Shemitas*, 10 Jubilees.

Around 100 B.C. the Dead Sea Scrolls of 11Q13 were written. Here is the document from column 2 of that find:

³ Keil, C. F.; Delitzsch, F.; *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Henderson Publishers, Massachusetts), vol. 9, pp. 718-719.



DEAD SEA SCROLLS TEXTS⁴



The Coming of Melchizedek

11Q13 – Col. 2

And concerning what Scripture says, "*In this year of Jubilee you shall return, everyone of you, to your property*" (Lev. 25;13) And what is also written; "*And this is the manner of the remission; every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because God's remission has been proclaimed*" (Deut.15;2) the interpretation is that *it applies to the Last Days* and concerns the captives, just as Isaiah said: "*To proclaim the Jubilee to the captives*" (Isa. 61;1) (...) just as (...) and from the inheritance of Melchizedek, for (... Melchizedek) , who will return them to what is rightfully theirs. He will proclaim to them the Jubilee, thereby releasing them from the debt of all their sins. He shall proclaim this decree in the first week of the jubilee period that follows nine jubilee periods.

Then the "Day of Atonement" shall follow after the tenth jubilee period, when he shall atone for all the Sons of Light, and the people who are predestined to Melchizedek. (...) upon them (...) For ***this is the time decreed for the "Year of Melchizedek's favor,"*** and by his might he will judge God's holy ones and so *establish a righteous kingdom*, as it is written about him in the Songs of David; "*A godlike being has taken his place in the council of God; in the midst of divine beings he holds judgment.*"

(Ps. 82;1). Scripture also says about him; "*Over it take your seat in the highest heaven; A divine being will judge the peoples*" (Ps. 7;7-8) Concerning what scripture says; "*How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality with the wicked?*" (Ps. 82:2), the interpretation applies to Belial and the spirits predestined to him, because all of them have rebelled, turning from God's precepts and so becoming utterly wicked. ***Therefore Melchizedek will thoroughly prosecute the vengeance required by God's statutes.*** Also, he will deliver all ***the captives***

⁴ <http://www.webcom.com/gnosis/library/commelc.htm>

from the power of Belial, and from the power of all the spirits destined to him. Allied with him will be all the "*righteous divine beings*" (Isa. 61;3).

(The ...) is that whi(ch ...all) the divine beings. The visitation is the Day of Salvation that He has decreed through Isaiah the prophet concerning all the captives, inasmuch as Scripture says, "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion "Your divine being reigns."*" (Isa. 52;7). This scriptures interpretation: "*the mountains*" are the prophets, they who were sent to proclaim God's truth and to prophesy to all Israel. "***The messengers***" is the **Anointed** of the spirit, of whom Daniel spoke; "***After the sixty-two weeks, an Anointed shall be cut off***" (Dan. 9;26) The "*messenger who brings good news, who announces Salvation*" is the one of whom it is written; "*to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, the day of the vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn*" (Isa. 61;2).

This scripture's interpretation: he is to instruct them about all the periods of history for eternity (... and in the statutes) of the truth. (...) (.... dominion) that passes from Belial and returns to the Sons of Light (....) (...) by the judgment of God, just as it is written concerning him; "*who says to Zion "Your divine being reigns"*" (Isa. 52;7) "*Zion*" is the congregation of all the sons of righteousness, who uphold the covenant and turn from walking in the way of the people. "*Your divine being*" is Melchizedek, who will deliver them from the power of Belial. Concerning what scripture says, "*Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; in the seventh month ...*" (Lev. 25;9). (See Appendix VI.)

What does this tell us? This group of conservative Jewish people (we assume the Essenes) concluded that the time periods of Daniel 9 are relative to:

1. The last days
2. When Melchizedek returns
3. Proclamation of a Jubilee (that follows nine others).
4. Judgment of the wicked and Belial (Satan) then occurs.
5. Associated with Him at that time will be righteous "divine" beings.
6. All this will be announced by an anointed messenger after 62 weeks.
7. This messenger and prophecy concern periods of history related to the first Advent but culminates at the end of all things.
8. Then the trumpet will sound in the seventh month.

Most scholars view this document as referring to the *very end of time*, when Daniel 9 timing prophecies finally come to an end.

- This is not dispensationalism.
- It is textual exegesis of the expressions and references used.
- Intriguingly, a book with earmarks of spiritualism, called the Uranta Book, agrees with this also.
- Satan (belial) knows when his time is short.

The 490-year prophecy appears to have a final application at the very end when a tenth Jubilee occurs.

- “*Whatever is to come has been already, and God summons each event back in its turn*” (Ecclesiastes 3:15 – NEB).
- This would fit the tarrying time concept when a waiting period ends at the time Jesus announces “time will no longer be delayed” (Revelation 10:6b; cf. Habakkuk 2:2-3).
- He makes this announcement in the context of Sabbath language – it is as if He is announcing “let’s move forward to the *Shemita* Sabbath and finally the *Yovel* Sabbath so long awaited.”
- What follows in this Revelation 10 message?
- Two three-and-a-half-year prophecies related to the time of trouble (Revelation 11:2-3), representing *two events* during a *single time period*.
- That period contextually is the final time remaining on the clock (the last year – a *Shemita*) – then Jesus returns (Revelation 11:12).

Thus, the *Shemita* Sabbath would bring a time the *land begins to rest* – or in the very end – *becomes desolate*. This would coincide with the first four Trumpets and the sixth Seal.

- The weight of evidence suggests that from Trumpet One into Jacob’s Trouble and deliverance is one year.

The *Yovel* Sabbath would be the time when complete liberty of God’s people becomes a final reality. The afternoon of the 49th Day of Atonement (or seventh *Shemita* cycle) the Jubilee began.

- It would be the ultimate time when God’s corporate body is complete and holy.
- Let’s explore this issue deeper.

Salvic Meaning of the Land Rest

The *first key* to how the Sabbath year and Jubilee were to be *unique periods* came from *three* guidelines related to their observance (Leviticus 25:1-7; Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 15:1-6, 31:10-13).

1. God ***must have*** a special people or “host” to make it effective.
2. God’s people must be *in* the Promised Land – to associate it with a land at rest.
3. The Sabbath relates to “*land use*” directives.

Repeatedly, **God’s *Shemita*** instruction uses the Sabbath as a metaphor tied to *land directives*: “*shall the land keep a Sabbath,*” “*a Sabbath of rest to the land,*” “*the Sabbath of the land shall be meat for you.*”

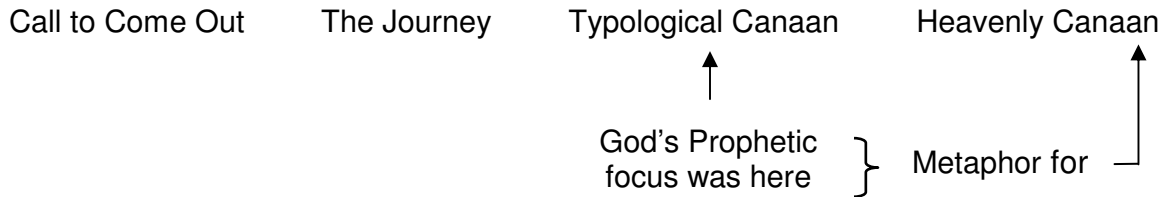
- The Executive Committee of the Jewish encyclopedia noted: “The septennate or seventh year and the laws regarding the Jubilee were so important, like the Decalogue, they were ascribed to the legislation of Mount Sinai.”⁵
- Those Sabbaths would not, however, be observed for 40 years (a full generation) – because of the three restrictive points noted above.

⁵ jewishencyclopedia.com – “*Shemita*.”

We get an introductory meaning to these Sabbaths by looking at Abraham:

- He was chosen to **leave** Ur and **journey** to Canaan, the Promised Land.
- “Get thee out of thy country ... unto a land” (Genesis 12:1).

Paul later said: “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).



Jacob, after his ladder dream between earthly Canaan and heavenly Canaan, said:

- “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven” (Genesis 28:16-17).
- Canaan was more than a geographic promise – it was to be the “gate to heaven,” where eternal promises awaited.

The “land” became a prophetic reminder of the covenant promise:

- When Israel would arrive at their “inheritance” – Canaan
- A new and deeper significance was to come to the “land of promise,” which was begun with Abraham.
- God wanted *special time* in that land where the “Land of Promise”
 - Would not have any work or secular activity
 - Would get them as close to the typology of the heavenly Canaan as possible

Thus – the *Shemita* land Sabbath and the *Yovel* Sabbath.

- Israel had 40 years to prepare for that wonderful time and experience.
- When they arrived, God stipulated that during the seventh year (Leviticus 25:1-7):
 1. The land was to rest.
 2. No crops could be planted – no harvest made.
 3. Permanent vines (i.e., grapes) and trees (i.e., 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).
 7. At *Yovel* slaves were released and purchased land was returned to original tribal owner/families.

God miraculously provided excess crops on the sixth (man's day), so the seventh (God's day) and at *Yovel* (God's super Sabbath), the eighth, there would be enough food for all.

- The people were reminded that the land was really His.
- They saw the provisions He provided miraculously.
- Property and plants were accessible to everyone.

Suddenly, everyone was equal, at peace and free.

In the great prayer of Christ, recorded in John 17, He asked regarding His people (He is now one with them):

- That they might be one (vss 20-23)
- That they might be gifted to enter the heavenly Canaan (vs 24) (they were figuratively no longer in the world – vs 11).

The *Shemita* and *Yovel*

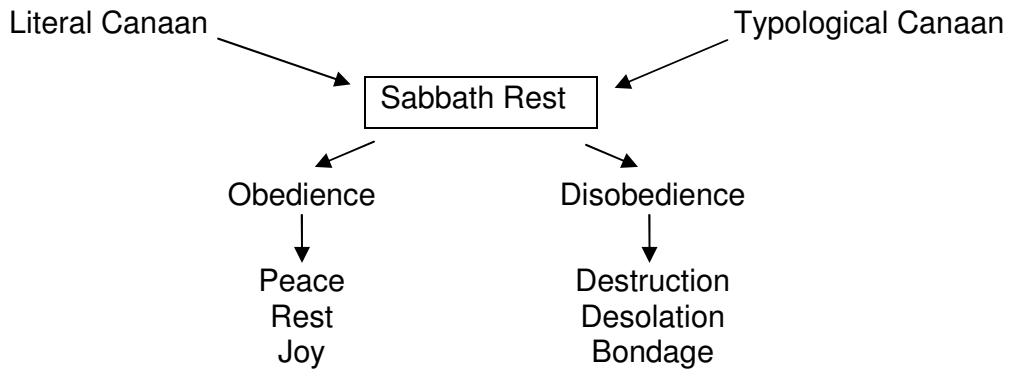
1. Tested man's dependence on God
2. Put a check on his aggressiveness to attain and achieve
3. Revealed the importance of how sacred God's laws are
4. Added a new dimension to the Sabbath
5. Became a metaphor of the heavenly Canaan
6. Represented the ultimate bonding with heaven and each other

Conditional Promise and Loss

The *Shemita* Sabbath and *Yovel* sacredness were so important and such holy events that God warned:

- The people would be destroyed
- And the land made desolate
- IF – they dishonored His Sabbath commands (Deuteronomy 28:63-67)
 - *"I will make your cities waste"* (Leviticus 26:31, 33)
 - *"Bring your sanctuaries into desolation"* (Leviticus 26:31)
 - *"Bring your land into desolation"* (Leviticus 26:32-33)

God had prophetically warned through Jeremiah that this would occur (25:11).



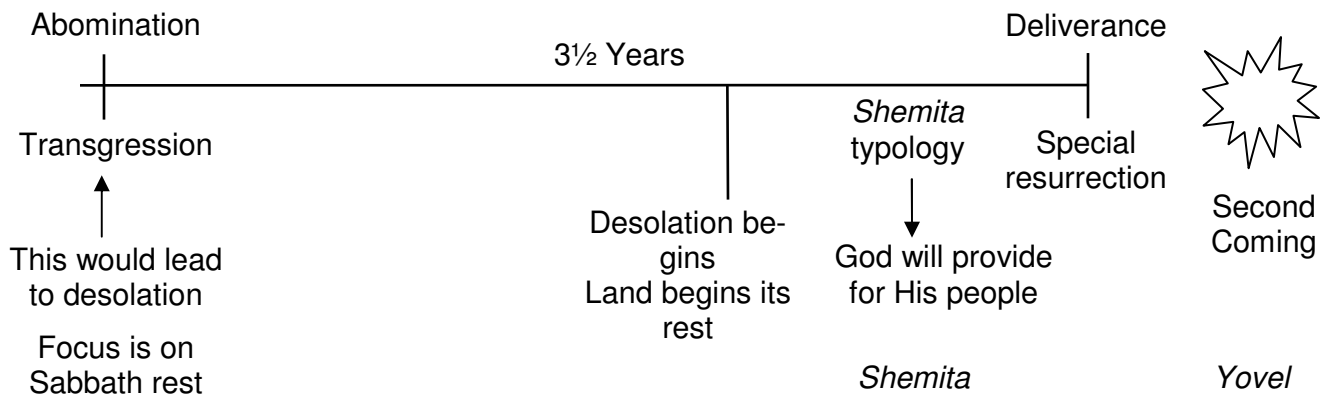
- As long as it lay desolate, the land would rest and enjoy her Sabbaths (Leviticus 26:34-35).
- Land rest [*eres – Shabbath (Shabbat)*] is a metaphor for all Sabbath rest.

Daniel talks of a sin (transgression) that leads to desolation and an abomination that leads to desolation.

- Both represent mockery of the seventh-day Sabbath at the end of time.
- What happened to Judah over the sabbatical year is symbolic for what will occur to those dishonoring the Sabbath day at the end.

A **special three-and-a-half-year period** lies ahead to bring honor back to that Sabbath, put away sin and reconcile all issues related to iniquity.

- It is during that 42 months that the *Shemita* will once again have significance – this time with special prophetic meaning.
- It is right after that *Shemita* that the *Yovel* will have its final significance.



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