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JUBILEE PART 1

The Bible expresses its chronology not only in sequences of years, but also in sequences of sabbath years and jubilees. This enables us to make a cross-check of our chronology, and when we find apparent problems, to refine it. If our chronology is right, we should find some significant correlations between sabbath years & jubilees on the one hand and important events in the history of the Old Covenant on the other.

Every seventh year was to be a sabbath year (a year of rest for the soil), and every 50th year was to be a jubilee (also a year of sabbath rest for the land). There are two interpretive problems that confront us as we begin this study. First, is the jubilee an extra year stuck in between the 49th year (the last sabbath of the period) and the first year of the next period, so that jubilees come every 50 years; or is the jubilee the same as the first year of the next cycle, so that the jubilee comes every 49 years? The second question is: When does the cycle begin? And does it begin more than once?

Which Year Was the Jubilee?

Let's examine the first question. Some expositors believe that the jubilee is the same as the seventh sabbath year, so that the 49th year is also the jubilee, and we have only one year of rest for the land at that time. Most expositors believe that the jubilee is the 50th year, coming after the seventh sabbath year in a jubilee cycle (the 49th year). This means we have two sabbath years in a row. In this case, the majority is right. Leviticus 25:8-12 clearly distinguishes between the 49th and 50th years.

The majority also believe that the 50th year interrupts the cycle of sabbath years, so that we start the sabbath cycle over in the 51st year. This means that jubilees come every fifty years. The minority believes that the sabbath years just keep rolling along, and that the 50th year is simultaneously the first year of the next sabbath period. I think the minority is right in this. Consider:

1. Pentecost came 50 days after the sabbath that falls during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread; that is, Pentecost comes on an 8th day, a 50th day, the first day of a new week (Lev. 23:15-16). It is not an "intercalary day" that postpones the beginning of the new week.
2. More broadly, the Bible has a lot to say about 8th day events; circumcision is performed then; newborn animals are given to God then; etc. When we correlate the 8th day with the 7day week, we don't regard the 8th day as "intercalary," but simply as the first day of the following week. We don't see the 8th

From these analogies I think we can be pretty sure that the 50th year was also the 1st year of a new sabbatical cycle. The Jubilees fell every 49 years, coinciding with the first year of the new Jubilee period.

Also, Daniel's 70 weeks of years come to 490 years, which is 10 jubilees if my interpretation is correct. Of course, the text of the Bible does not make this point, but any Jewish reader would have pondered it.

There are ways we can check my interpretation. First, if 1 (and _____ are correct that the jubilee comes every 49th year, and the sabbath years are uninterrupted, we should find some significant dates attached to sabbath end jubilee years; if the other view is correct, we will find the same. In fact, a comparison of the two systems shows that both systems provide occasional correlations. I feel that the 49-year view is preferable because it means that the foundation of the Temple was laid in a sabbath year and the Temple was completed in a sabbath year, followed by a jubilee. It also means that the Ark was taken into captivity in the year following a Jubilee, ironically.

Second, my interpretation squares better with 2 Chronicles 36:21, which says that the land enjoyed 70 years of sabbath rest while the nation was in captivity, because the people had not observed 70 sabbaths (cp. Jer. 25:11; Lev. 26:34, 43). If we count the number of sabbaths and jubilees back from the destruction of Jerusalem, on my system, we come to the time of the building of Solomon's temple. The other system takes us farther back, to the middle of Saul's reign. It seems more sensible that the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple closes the period from Solomon to Nebuchadnezzar, and does not draw from the previous period. Of course, it is possible that the 70 missing sabbath years are scattered here and there throughout Israelite history from the time of the conquest; but given the connection to the Temple in 2 Chronicles 38, I think it more likely that the missing 70 sabbath years (and jubilees) covers the Temple period from Solomon to Nebuchadnezzar.

When Did the Jubilees Start?

Now, when did the sabbath years and jubilees start? For there to be a sabbath of the land, Israel has to occupy the land. This did not happen until the conquest. The people were not allowed to occupy their lands until the conquest was completed (Dt. 3:18-20).

We know when the occupation began. Caleb was 40 years old when the spies were sent into the land, which was the second year after the exodus (Num. 10:11-12; 13:17-20; Josh. 14:7). The exodus came in 2513. Caleb was 40 in 2514. Caleb was 65 when the conquest was

I submit that it was a jubilee, because every man went to his own possession. The law of the jubilee stated that in that year, each man's property reverted to him. Thus, I think we can safely take 2560 as a jubilee, and as the beginning of the first cycle of sabbath years.

There is another qualification, however, for a jubilee to take place. Leviticus 25:9 commands, "You shall then sound a ram's horn on the 10th day of the 7th month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land." This means that for a jubilee to take place, the day of atonement must be observed. For the day of atonement to be observed, the high priest must take the blood of a goat into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle it on the altar of the Mercy Seat (Lev. 16). Thus, if the tabernacle service is not in operation, years of jubilee cannot take place.

Such "jubilee interruptions" happened twice in Israel's history. In the year 2855 the Ark was captured by the Philistines, and though it was returned to Israel a few months later, it was not put back into temple until Solomon's day. God did not create new altar fire in connection with a temple until Solomon's Temple was consecrated in A.M. 3013. Thus, there were no jubilees for this 158-year period, though there would have been sabbath years.

The second interruption happened at the exile, consisting of 70 years between the destruction of Jerusalem and the reestablishment of Temple worship in the 6th year of Darius (A.M. 3425-3495).

The question raised is this: Did the jubilee periods continue to be calculated, though not observed, through the two periods of interruption, or did a new jubilee begin when the temple was rebuilt? We shall address this question as we come to it in our chronological survey.

From Joshua to Solomon

We have room in this issue to consider the first period, the period of the Sinaitic Covenant. The land was divided in 2559, and 2560 is a "jubilee" in the sense that it is year 1 of the first sabbatical cycle, and also the year in which the people went to their lands. I don't know if they let their land lie fallow that year, because this "jubilee" did not come after a 49-year period. It was, at the very least, a "spiritual jubilee."

Year 1 was 2560, so the first sabbath year was 2586. Then follow 2573, 2580, 2587, and 2594. In the year 2594 began the eight-year oppression of Cushan-Rishathaim of

came from the same land). There was no sabbath rest for the land that year, nor in the following sabbath year (2601). Possibly in that 8th year, or in the following, Othniel delivered Israel from Cushan-Rishathaim. The 40 years of Othniel's peace began in 2602, a year after the sabbath year 2601.

(For these dates, see Biblical Chronology 3:8. Back issues of Biblical Chronology can be obtained for \$10.00 from Biblical Horizons, Box 1096, Niceville, FL 32588.)

2908 was a sabbath, and 2609 a jubilee. The next sabbaths were 2615, 2622, 2629, and 2636. A year before the sabbath of 2643, Eglon of Moab conquered Israel and oppressed her for 18 years (in 2642). Israel did not enjoy the sabbaths of 2643, 2650, and 2657, nor did she experience the jubilee of 2658. This was the only jubilee missed during the period of the Judges.

I'm not going to write in all the sabbaths and jubilees from now on. You can take a piece of paper and do that. We do find that in 2680, Jabin the Canaanite began to oppress Israel in the Northern area. Jabin was defeated by Barak and Deborah in 2700, which comes right after the sabbath year 2699.

The Midianites oppressed the North beginning in 2740, and so the sabbath of 2741 was not enjoyed. Gideon delivered Israel in 2747, however, in time for the sabbath of 2748.

Gideon died in 2787, and his evil son Abimelech became Israel's first king. His death, and the deliverance of Israel from him, came in 2790, a sabbath year.

The Ammonites oppressed Israel in the Center and North beginning in 2835, but Jephthah defeated them and began his judgeship in 2853, a sabbath year.

The year 2854 was, ironically, a jubilee. It was Jephthah's second year, but Eli's last year as judge over the South. In the following year, 2855, the Ark was taken into captivity. Because the tabernacle was not put back together after the Ark was returned, the day of atonement could not be observed, and no jubilees could be announced for over 150 years.

Saul became Israel's first official king in 2910, right after a sabbath year (2908). Forty years later David became king, and forty years later, Solomon became king. Solomon laid the foundation for the Temple in 2993, a sabbath year. The Temple was completed in 3000, also a sabbath year. The next year, 3001, was a jubilee.