

Sabbatical Years

Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove. (Ex 23:10-11)

And the LORD spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘When you come into the land which I give you, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard. What grows of its own accord of your harvest you shall not reap, nor gather the grapes of your untended vine, for it is a year of rest for the land. And the sabbath produce of the land shall be food for you: for you, your male and female servants, your hired man, and the stranger who dwells with you, for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land — all its produce shall be for food... The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.’” (Lev 25:1-7,23)

We usually talk about the Shabbat on this night, but we’ll talk about the sabbatical years tonight, so we can have a little understanding of the seventh year, and the seven sevens until the Year of Jubilee, which has never been celebrated in Israel. Very seldom were the sabbatical years kept. Even now they just sell the land to someone else for a year, and then buy it back after the year is over, so that they can still benefit from the produce of the land without “breaking the Law” by farming it themselves. They get around the Law in that way.

The sabbatical year was a year in which all farming land was given rest from agricultural activity. The land was given rest, so as not to sap all of the strength out of the land, as is done today. Then you get produce from it, but there is no nourishment in it. That’s why people are getting cancer. They think they’re eating good food, because it looks good on the outside. They drink pasteurized milk products and think they’re getting a lot of calcium, but they aren’t, and so they get osteoporosis and wonder why. We have to have natural fresh raw milk from our own animals.

The land was supposed to be given its rest on every seventh year throughout Israel's history, but due to the insurgency of necessity they wouldn't do it. So therefore, we have to face and overcome the same obstacles. However they fell, we have to overcome, and not give way to the insurgency of necessity and violate our Father's laws.

Release of Debts

There was also to be a release for debtors and the public reading of the Law every seven years. Of course, we get to read it all the time. Our Father's holy people, as long as they kept themselves holy to Him, had no fear of shortage of food during the sabbatical years. Only when they didn't keep themselves holy, then they would have a bad conscience, and our Father wouldn't provide for them. He would bless every sixth year with double the normal produce so that His people could store up food for use on the Sabbath year and even the following year until the new crop came in.

In addition there would be enough natural growth during the Sabbath year for any who might have a shortage. The trees would keep on bearing fruit, but you were not supposed to gather and store it, but you could pick it off the trees and eat it. For the poor farmers who couldn't store up enough in advance, Israel always made up for one another's lacks. It says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." There would be enough for the flocks and herds (Lev 25:6,7,12,18-22).

If God's people disobeyed Him and did not give the land its rest one year in seven, He would force them to let it rest by driving them off the land. So that's what happened. You can see it in Lev 26:34-43 and 2 Chr 36:20-21 and Jer 34:13-22. All of these things are the reason our Master said, "I am going to take the kingdom away from you [natural Israel] and give it to a nation who *will* produce the fruit of it." He had to take it away, so that there would be a people who would keep the sabbatical year, for example, and all the other things Israel was supposed to fulfill. Someone has to fulfill it. Our Father didn't just say it, so that it would never be fulfilled. He gave that instruction to His people in

order for them to fulfill it, but they haven't done it as a people. So it is being given to a nation, a twelve-tribed nation, who will produce the fruit of it.

At the end of every seven years, the Israelites were to forgive any debts owed to them by fellow Israelites. We're going to face that, too; we're going to have a lot of that going on. Someone will loan the tribe of Reuben \$100,000 with seven years to pay it back, and they can't do it, so we forgive them. But if they deliberately hold out until the seventh year, then of course they'll be forsaken by our Father, because they will have forsaken Him. They'll do the best they can, and if they don't, our Father knows. But we forgive anyway, because we think the best.

They were to consider themselves as one big family, where those who had money helped those who were in need. They were not to refuse anyone a loan, even if the year of release was approaching, they have to be willing to forgive the loan. Their brothers have a desperate need, otherwise they wouldn't be asking. They're not just trying to take advantage of their brothers. Or if they are, then our Father knows that. We have to understand that.

In the case of foreigners who owed debts to Israel, normal business procedures applied. We are not expected to forgive their debts. It's only our brothers, whom we love as ourselves, that our Father calls us to forgive in this way (Dt 15:1-11). In verse 4 it says there are to be no poor among you. Why was the kingdom taken away from them? Because they didn't meet the needs of the poor in their land. They didn't bear the fruit of love. So who did He give the kingdom to? The people who will do that, right?

Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need. (Acts 4:34-35)

Does Christianity do that? Of course not! There's no way they *can* do it. It's impossible for them to share everything with their "brothers and sisters." There are needy among them, aren't there? They don't share everything they have with one

another, do they? So are they the church? No. Are they Israel? No. Is that nation over there in the Middle East Israel? No. Are they God's people? No. God's people are only those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). And He'll take the kingdom away from us if we don't obey Him.

Mt 21:43 says He'll take the kingdom away from them and give it to a *nation* — not just a people, but a people who are formed into a nation that will bear the fruit of it. Mt 21:33-45 tells the whole story, and the Pharisees got the point in verse 45.

Release of Slaves

Israelites who were slaves of their fellow Israelites were also released on the seventh year. Foreigners who were slaves of Israel were not released; they did not have the privilege of Israelite slaves (Dt 15:12-18; Lev 25:44-46). This was ordained by our Father in heaven. He established the institution of slavery in Gen 9:25-26. It was a good system, with clear instructions to masters and slaves. Abraham was the first slave owner of Israel. He purchased slaves in Haran (Gen 12:5), and they functioned in a community together, just like the southern plantations. They loved one another. They worked together. They prospered together. Slaves were given rights, and could even take their master to court if they wanted to.

I'm not saying we should go back to slavery now, but it was a good institution. Anyone who says it was bad is like that person in 1 Tim 6:3-4. They have a problem with our Father, and even our Master Yahshua. You can read about how He spoke of masters and servants, in Mt 8:8-13, for example. What do you suppose was working in John Brown? Was it mercy and compassion toward the slaves? What about the freed slave he murdered in Harper's Ferry? No, it had to do with envy and strife and greed (1 Tim 6:4).

Our Father Owns the Land

Just as Yahweh's holy people and their animals rested one day in seven, so also the land was to rest one year in seven by ceasing agricultural activity during this year.

Yahweh's holy people had the opportunity to recognize and show forth as a sign to the nations in a special way that Yahweh was the rightful owner of the land. Even the native Americans knew that. They said the land belonged to the Great Spirit, not to them, and they saw themselves as keepers of the land.

The Israelites recognized that Yahweh was the rightful owner of the land, and they were the tenants (Mt 21:33-41), and could not treat His land as they wished. The rest from farming gave the land the opportunity to clear itself of pests and restore its natural power of production. Our Father wanted His people to be healthy and eat good organic food. But even the organic farmers of today don't let their land rest.

So that's just a little bit about the sabbatical years that we have to fulfill for them (Acts 26:7). The natural seed of Abraham couldn't do it, so we have to do it for them. Then in the next age, the land will be restored to them, that is, to those who trusted in our Master Yahshua when He returned, weeping over Him and mourning for Him as for an only child, the one whom they pierced (Zec 12:10; Rev 1:7). Then they will establish the twelve tribes in the land of Israel, fulfilling the promise to Abraham.

Obadiah — It's very clear that what you are talking about is extremely important to our Father. In Jer 34:13-22 when our Father spoke to them about not keeping the covenant, the first thing He talked about was that they were not obedient to the sabbatical year.

They don't even talk about these things in Christianity. I don't think I ever heard anything about these things until I came into the Community. It's something that's totally fallen by the wayside. It's not important, but it was very clear that when Nebuchadnezzar surrounded the city and judgment came upon them, somehow they knew that the land hadn't gotten its rest, they hadn't released their slaves every seven years.

And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. (2 Chr 36:20-21)

Our Father made up for the time Israel failed to keep the commandment to let the land rest and forgive the debts and release the slaves.

Obadiah — I see from this that we don't really know much about forgiveness yet. When you talk about forgiving the debts and thinking the best, that's when we really come to know what our Master said, "Give without expecting anything in return." We're just in training now. It's so wonderful how our Father teaches us His ways and His wisdom.

You told me one time in Germany that I should take selenium, and I started taking it, and on the package it said that the soil in Germany is so depleted of selenium that you can only get 50% of the minimum they recommend, so you have to take supplements to make up for the lack. It's all the result of greed and not understanding our Father's ways. In the end people just hurt themselves.

Baruch — The things we heard tonight tie in so much to what we heard last Shabbat about being a sign, and all the things our Father desires to make as a guidepost. We heard about the Shabbat as a *sign*, and about the sabbatical years as a *sign*, because our Father wants so much to show the nations what is pleasing to Him.

I was reading tonight that the purpose of the entire Law was Ex 19:6, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation..." Our Father desired that so much, so in order to make for Himself a kingdom of priests and a holy nation He gave them the Shabbat and many other weighty things for them to put into practice, like giving the land its rest, that would make them a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. It wouldn't be right that the land would be completely depleted if it belonged to our Father's people. Their land should be the best, most wonderfully producing nutritious soil, right? Of course! So our Father gave them the sabbatical year that it would be that way, but they just wouldn't obey Him.

He gave them many other instructions, so that they would remain clean and holy and set apart amongst all the nations, but they wouldn't obey Him. So we could do the same thing. We can obey and be hewn out of the mountain and become the holy people, the kingdom of priests and holy nation He wants us to be, or we can disregard the things we hear. We can say, "Well, maybe it's not so important. Why should we let the land rest? No other farmers are doing that." Or we can say, "It's amazing that our Father loves us so much that He gives us this wise instruction!"

That instruction will make us into His people if we love being His people, and if we yearn with that hope and longing to become the holy

nation of Israel, then we'll long for His word, we'll long to obey it, we'll look for ways to take everything we hear and put it into practice. Like when I hear this tonight, I think, "Wow! I wonder whether the Basin Farm can rest the land on the seventh year." That's the heart our Father desires, and *that* people will become a sign. They will keep the Sabbath; they will keep the sabbatical years. I want us to be that people. I'm thankful we could hear this.

David Zerubbabel — We've experienced the emotion sometimes in places where we have a café or a store, and we close the doors on Friday afternoon at 3pm, on the best day of the week for earning money, and we hang up our sign, "Shabbat Shalom!" It's a training ground for keeping the Sabbath year. You can see how the sign that our Father wants to put before the nations is a people who are like Mt 6:33-34 — they're not anxious for what they're going to wear or eat; they're seeking first His kingdom.

Our training ground is to not have our shops open on the Sabbath, for one day in seven. But it's all building up for the time when our nation is actually agricultural to a far greater degree than it is now, and the nations are going to drop their jaws and say, "Now wait a minute. You're not planting this year..." They're going to watch us, knowing that everything we're doing in a lot of places economically is going to depend on those crops, and not just the crops, but our businesses and cottage industries. "No, we're not going to be in business this year. We're going to rest and we're going to celebrate, and we're going to praise our Father, and we're going to do whatever we do in the Sabbath year."

No one will have an excuse for not sending out walkers in that year!

David Zerubbabel — Right. That's going to be an amazing sign that not just on the seventh day, but on the seventh year we're going to trust our Father.

And if that weren't enough, we'll also forgive one another's debts. We're going to see that there will be some who are as you can read about in Lev 25, who let that feeling come over them, "Oh, no. He's asking me for a loan, and next year is the seventh year, and hmmm..." But the one who opens his hand willingly and gives to his needy brother, he's going to be blessed. Our Father will cause him to increase, even though he suffered loss, like the apostle Paul said, "Well, why don't you just suffer loss?" It was the heart, the ethic of Shaul, that truly priestly ethic. We'll learn that it's better to suffer loss and think the best about your brother. Our Father will always bless the one who gives everything. And the one who maybe

took advantage of his brother because he thought, “Well, the Sabbath year is coming, and we have more pressing needs. I’m not going to pay them back...” He may think he got some advantage by having his debt forgiven, but he’s going to go to poverty. He’s not going to prosper.

It’s going to be a sign to all of Israel, and it’s going to be a sign to the nations as they watch us. It’s going to be the most amazing sign. Economics is the place where all the flesh comes out — anxiety over food and clothing. It’s the proving ground our Father is using to prepare us in small ways now. The ways of our Father are amazing. And we have to train up our children in the way they should go — like in the kingdom ethics. If we put that into our children, then they won’t be unprincipled in their dealings with other children or with the nations. They won’t grow up to say, “Well, I just found this tool on the ground, and I know they sell them at Home Depot, so I’m going to go to Home Depot and cash it in, and they’ll give me a new one.” They won’t have that in them, because they will understand our Father’s way, that He’s not one to seek dishonest gain (1 Sam 8:3; Pr 11:1).

Bekor ben Keli — I was thankful to hear about ownership. A lot of times, it’s easy to have this mentality that when you’re told to do something you have freedom to do it how you want to do it. But really we’re here to be caretakers and do things the way He wants them done. If you have the mentality that the land is yours and you can do whatever you want to do with it, then that’s the wrong way to look at things. Our Abba wants that we would rest on the seventh year, and that goes into all aspects of our life. We’re here to fulfill what’s on our Abba’s heart. We need to base our decisions on what’s on His heart, not what we want to do. It spoke to me that we’re caretakers.

Wonderful! You’ve got *ears*! Whoever has ears, let him hear what the Spirit has to say to the Edah.

Natan — I was picturing a little tree growing here now, when you talked about how our Master told the Jews that the kingdom was being taken away from them and given to a nation that would produce the fruit of it. Our Master talked a lot about fruit and trees and the earth and seeds. He said, “You’ll know a tree by its fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will know them by their fruits.” I’m thankful to hear this now, because this little tree is growing, and the fruit doesn’t come out until it’s mature. You don’t see

how good that tree really is until then. But like David said, if we start being raised and trained in how to forgive, then when we come to that time, there will be good fruit. There will be forgiveness. We'll stop what we're doing freely and with joy. It will actually happen. The good fruit that our Master talked about so long ago, it will be growing. I'm just thankful to hear that, and I want to see that good fruit on the tree, and be His nation.

Netsak — What spoke to me is that our confidence comes from being consumed with meeting other people's needs and not worrying about our own needs being met. And that's why the person that lends money to someone right before the seventh year is thankful that he can meet that person's need. That's why he's not worried about whether he's going to get paid back. He's thankful he can meet someone else's need, and that's eternal life. I'm thankful that we're learning how to live our lives being zealous for good deeds, not so that we'll have everything we want. I want to be that way, that I would live every day to meet my brothers' and sisters' needs.

Zahav — When we heard about being tenants upon the land, being stewards, I thought that the only reason we wouldn't keep that Sabbath year and let our fields rest is because somehow we thought the food we were receiving and the things we have were just the work of our own hands. And so if we didn't work that year, then how were we going to eat and survive? If I earn this money with my own hands, and I give it to my brother, do I have the ability to make more for myself and to provide for those around me? But if I keep myself oriented on the fact that everything we have comes from our Father, then it's not going to be an issue anymore, because we're just giving away what our Father loaned to us in the first place, and we're all our Father's sons. I'm thankful we have a meal to eat tonight. I'm thankful that I don't know where it came from. I just know that our Father provided it. I don't know who paid for it, or who went shopping for it. I don't know any of those things. I just know that everything comes from our Father. Then all these other things aren't even an issue.

Our Father took the kingdom away from the Jews, but now He's giving it back! Right there, Zahav and Baruch are both Jews! Isn't that amazing? You're going to help gather the Jews in the last days, and the Châmites and the Shemites and the Yaphethites. It's going to be a marvelous demonstration of all the races and all the kinds of people in the world gathered together without any separation. The barriers are knocked down.

Yael shel Natan — It encouraged me what we heard about how these things that we hear are what sets us apart as a separate nation, as our Father's people. That's why it has to be in every single one of us that what we care about and love the most would be our nation. It's not "I, me, mine," but it's *US*. If that's in all of us, in our character, that that's what we care about, then we're going to do all of these things from our heart, because we're willing. That's what we love is our Father's nation. That's what is going to set us apart as a people. I'm thankful for the things we hear. I want to take them to heart and obey them, because it's what sets us apart.

Keli — You can see that everything that was written in the Law was really our Father's heart. And what's really in our Father's heart is love for mankind. When we sing the song, "Abiding in the Vine," it speaks of "producing the fruit of love," that we could all have the produce, which is love. You can relate it to agriculture or whatever we do, every aspect of our life, from growing food to preparing food to building our homes, etc. The produce that accomplishes those things has got to be love.

So you can see that greed can come in very easily when you start dealing in the physical realm, but our Father wants a spiritual people. So that's why the New Covenant is here, so that we can produce the fruit of love, because we abide in the Vine. And then we can set all things straight that our Father wanted, and we can have a people who are actually not just talking about love and peace, because love is always talked about, but we can demonstrate it in the way we live. Our social life together can demonstrate what was actually in our Father's heart.

And so you can see that after seven years, if you can't forgive your brother a debt, then you don't have love. Love is not there. And if you can't let that land rest that's producing the food for your people, because our Father knows that it's good for that land to rest, so that it will have something for the next seven years for His people, then you don't have love. And so everything is based on love. Old Israel totally missed it, because they weren't producing the fruit of love. We have the opportunity to latch onto it.

ha-êmeq — It wasn't that our Father took pleasure in turning away from them as if He didn't like them and so when He saw them acting up, He said, "Forget you! I'm going to get somebody who'll do it the way I want it done!" That's not at all the way our Father's heart was.

You can see how our Master Yahshua looked over Jerusalem, and He cried. It says in the Bible that He cried as He sat there and watched

Jerusalem. He realized that they weren't going to accept Him. He could see their greed, and He cried and said, "Oh, how I wanted to gather you just like a momma chicken gathers her baby chickens!" That's an extreme way of saying, "I love you! BUT, if you're not going to produce the fruit of the kingdom, I'm going to turn away from you to someone who is going to produce that fruit." And He just had to turn away from them and say to another people, "Will you produce the fruit of the kingdom?"

He loved them, but He had to turn away from them. I can relate so well to this, because if I sit and cry about you [using the person next to her as an example] because I've done everything I can for you, but you don't respond, then at some point I have to say, "Will you produce the fruit of the kingdom?" And if not, I have to turn away and invest myself in someone who will.

It's like what the Apostle Paul wrote. Normally, when this child sees me turn away from him and reach over to this other child and say, "Come on..." Then the first child suddenly says, "Me! Me! Me!" because he's jealous. "I'll do it! I'll do it now!" Because that's the jealousy at work. Paul hoped to provoke in the Jews a jealousy that makes them want to produce the fruit. "I want to be them."

But there's a real turning of our Father to someone else. But then in the same way, as Paul says, He could also turn away from us if we don't produce the fruit. So we can't just say, "Ha, ha! They didn't produce the fruit. Now we're the ones." We have to continue; we have to stir up the fire; we can't just think we're the ones and then sit back and get fat. We have to continue to be those who hear the commandments and get stirred up and want to keep them, and say to each other, "I'm so happy to be with you all! I love you!"

If the fire gets kindled again and all the other things just burn up when you hear the word of God, His precepts and His judgments... What commandments and precepts do we have! There's no other nation on earth that has such a wise God! And it just fills you with zeal. If that same zeal consumes our children, we'll be a nation that produces the fruit. We'll really be that! He wants it! He's looking for a people who will produce the fruit of the kingdom. I'm so thankful how that stirs up in us when we hear the word of our Father. Not only Obadiah gets stirred up, but his sons get stirred up. And that's really wonderful! Because that same heart is going into another generation. Hakam stirred, then Chets Barur stirred, and now Marah's going to stir. And if she produces the fruit, our Father will look toward her. But at some point, if we turn away from Him, He has to turn

away from us, even people that we really love. But it has to be, because we've got to go forward to have that nation.

Baruch — The most amazing thing to me about what ha-êmeq just said is that our Father always wanted the fruit, so as much as it pained Him to do it, He had to turn away, because He needed the fruit so badly. Why? Because what's inside the fruit? The seeds! That's what our Father needs in order to take what was in His heart, represented in the Law, through the rest of the entire universe. He needed the seeds that will come from the people producing the fruit. It's so nice! The seeds are inside the fruit!

So if we're the ones who are going to start producing the fruit of the kingdom, we'll have the seeds, and it's going to grow. And that's the exciting part!

It's so wonderful that we can love one another. You can't love someone you don't know. You have to know the person to love him. We can't love our Master if we don't know Him. We can't love one another if we don't know one another. There's no other place on earth that we can get to know each other more so than living together in community, like the first church did. And they don't do it anymore, because they're not the church anymore. But our Father's going to restore the community, and make it into a nation that can produce the fruit of the kingdom. So I'm thankful that we can get to know one another so we can love one another. You couldn't love your wife until you got to know her. That's one of the reasons we go on a waiting period, and then we're betrothed, just like we've come to know our Master, and we're betrothed to Him.