



# JUBILEE!

**By Malcolm H. Watts**

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The Lord Jesus regularly attended the synagogue on Sabbath days. Luke tells us that, after the close of his first Judean ministry, he went back to his home-town of Nazareth to be present at the morning service. The worship proceeded as normal, with psalm-singing, a reading from the Law, and the offering up of prayers; and then our Lord stood up, indicating that he wished to read the Scriptures.

and it could hardly have been more appropriate: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...' (Isa 61). The last line was the climax of the whole. It declared that Messiah had come 'to preach the acceptable year of the Lord' (Luke 4:19).

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A synagogue official - probably the Chazan - handed him the scroll of Isaiah. Our Lord appears to have unrolled the scroll to the place which had been marked. Then he read the passage appointed for that service. It was from Isaiah, chapter 61,

The allusion is almost certainly to the year of Jubilee, described for us in Leviticus 25. That year would have come immediately to mind because it was generally known as 'the great year'. As a divine institution, the Jews recognized it as the 'year of the

Lord'; but it was also an 'acceptable' year because God regarded it as a suitable time to grant favours. One of these was the freeing of Hebrew slaves, which explains why the Jubilee was called 'the year

The year of Jubilee was appointed by God. The law pertaining to it began as follows: 'Thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee, seven times seven years,...And ye shall hallow the fiftieth

## **“It was in every way a remarkable appointment”**

of liberty' (Ezek 46:17). In the light of the prophet Isaiah's imagery - 'deliverance' and 'liberty' etc - there seems to be a very definite reference to Jubilee year.

In the Jewish calendar, Jubilee occurred after seven weeks of years and therefore every fifty years. It was in every way a remarkable appointment, designed to foreshadow the blessings of this day of grace and the glorious period of Gospel deliverance. Hence, looking forward to our times, the same prophet speaks of 'the year of (God's) redeemed' and he equates the 'acceptable time' with the 'day of salvation' (Is 63:4; 49:8). The apostle Paul confirms that this time of grace has now arrived. 'Behold', he says, 'now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation' (2 Cor 6:2).

Since the year of Jubilee was typical of this present age, it will be profitable to examine more closely Scripture's description of it. Before doing that, however, one or two preliminary observations should be made:

year...' (Lev 25:8,10); and, in the same way, God has ordained that there should be a gospel age and he even moved Old Testament prophets to predict it, saying, 'Behold, the days come, saith the Lord...' (Jer 31:31).

Now Jubilee began immediately after one of the most important of Israel's ceremonial occasions - 'the day of atonement' (Lev 25:9). On that day, the High Priest offered a sin offering and then entered with the blood into the Holy of Holies, there to appear before the throne of God (See: Lev 16). It was all intended to typify and foreshadow Christ's atoning work (Heb 9:11-14), one result of which is, of course, a Jubilee-like period of blessing for men and women everywhere.

Of further interest to us is the fact that the beginning of Jubilee coincided with the opening of a new year. It was 'on the tenth day of the seventh month': that is, the tenth day of Tishri which was actually the first month of the civil year (Lev 25:9). This is significant in view of the fact that, in this day of grace and through the

effective ministry of the Holy Spirit, sinners begin to 'live' and enjoy 'newness of life'. 'Behold', writes the apostle, 'all things are become new' (2 Cor 5:17).

A requirement in the law regulating the Jubilee was that a trumpet had to be blown to announce its arrival. God said through Moses: 'Then shalt thou cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound' (Lev 25:9 Note: 'Jubilee' seems to be derived from a Hebrew word meaning 'ram's horn' or 'trumpet'). The blowing of a trumpet is elsewhere figurative, representing the preaching of God's Word and, more particularly, the preaching of the Gospel (Is 27:13; 58:1; Hos 8:1; 1 Cor 14:8) and it is apparently to the sound of the Jubilee trumpet that the Psalmist refers when he says, 'Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound' (Ps 89:15). Think of the parallel for a moment. What powerful preaching introduced this present Gospel age! Why, Paul could say of those first preachers, 'their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world' (Rom 10:18).

This detail deserves a further comment. God's Jubilee blessings were to be proclaimed without reservation and without restriction. The trumpet was to be blown - the proclamation was to be made -

'throughout all your land' (Lev 25:9,10).

Why was the announcement made everywhere? It was because the blessing was available to everyone. It is the same with the Gospel. Ministers are sent to proclaim it freely. They should feel no embarrassment at all about this. They should feel not in the least inhibited. What did our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ say? 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature' (Mk 16:16).

'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations' (Lk 24:47).

There can be no doubt that Jubilee was special: in fact, it was said to be sacred. God said, 'Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year' (Lev 25:10). He meant that it was to be 'set apart' for the purpose which he had in mind, so that men and women could claim his gracious benefits. They could do that during the year of Jubilee - but only during that year. Now, in these times, God has once again appointed a season of mercy and once again he has fixed its limits. How long it will continue, who can tell? We do know, however, that some will foolishly let the season pass and will try to be saved when it is too late. One day 'the door' will be 'shut' (Matt 25:10). The Lord Jesus solemnly said, 'Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter

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in, and shall not be able' (Lk 13:25).

Yet notwithstanding it is important to stress that the Jubilee was a full year. 'Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year...a jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you...' (Lev 25:10,11). How richly was grace displayed during these months! Thousands upon thousands came into blessing of God. In these Gospel days, God has similarly extended his period of mercy. Why? Because he wills that many precious souls should turn to Christ and be saved. 'The Lord is...longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet 3:9). The Lord Jesus did not quote the whole of Isaiah's prophecy because it was not necessary to his purpose to proceed any further. It is noteworthy, however, that Isaiah spoke of an 'acceptable year' but of a mere 'day of vengeance' (Is 61:2 cf 63:4) and it appears to suggest that God's pleasure is to save rather than to judge. 'He delighteth in mercy' (Mic 7:18).

At the Jubilee the people were wonderfully blessed; and their blessings strikingly resembled those which we receive in this Gospel age.

1. Debts of every kind were cancelled. Israelites who became poor and were unable to pay their debts might be compelled to sell themselves as servants, but in the Jubilee year they were freed from all their obligations. As one commentator puts it: 'The millstone of debt was to be

removed from their necks'. 'If thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee...he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubilee: and then shall he depart...' (Lev 25:39-41). This prefigures the blessings imparted by the Gospel. As men and women, we owe God perfect obedience and, on account of our non-payment, we now owe a debt of punishment to the divine justice (Matt 6:12; Rom 2:5; 6:23). The good news is that Christ has assumed his people's liabilities and, through his obedience and satisfaction, believers can be forgiven all their sins. 'We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace' (Eph 1:7).

2. Deliverance and freedom were obtained. Through reason of poverty, some people in Israel were subjected to service and even to bondage, but the year of Jubilee brought release. This applied to Israelite and non-Israelite alike (Lev 25:39-41,47,53-54). God required his priests, with the blast of their trumpets, to 'proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof' (Lev 25:10). This surely points to the liberty secured by Christ and received by faith (Read again: Lk 4:18,19). People everywhere are in bondage to the guilt and power of sin, the terrible and all-consuming wrath of God, the rigour and curse of the moral law, the fear of death and the grave, and the judgment which results in everlasting damnation (Jn

8:24,34; Rom 1:18; 3:19; Heb 2:15; Rev 20:12-15). Yet to every believer there is the promise of complete release. 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed' (Jn 8:36).

3. There was rest from burdensome labour. Even though a sabbatic year had just closed, the Jubilee brought exemption from toil. There was to be no agricultural work. The land was to lie fallow. God's law was quite specific about his. 'A Jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you: ye shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of thy vine undressed' (Lev 25:11). In this 'rest' we have an illustration of the 'rest' or 'peace' which the Saviour gives. The prophet Isaiah foretold it when he wrote of the Messiah, and said, 'his rest shall be glorious' (Is 11:10). Christ himself, however, spoke most plainly of it when addressing those who 'laboured' for salvation and who were 'heavy-laden' with guilt. He said: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest' (Matt 11:28 cf Heb 4:10).

4. Abundant blessings were made available. Since the land lay fallow in the sabbatical year as well as in the Jubilee year, the Lord granted heavy crops in preceding years to provide for all their needs. No one suffered any lack during the Jubilee. 'I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years' (Lev 25:21). It was as if the

curse had been removed. The land became amazingly fertile. This, too, finds fulfilment in the Gospel. Christ is said to have 'redeemed us from the curse of the law' in order that 'the blessing...might come' (Gal 3:13,14).

5. People were restored to the families. By reason of poverty, some may have been separated from their families, but when Jubilee arrived, there was both return and reunion. 'It shall be a jubilee unto you;...and ye shall return every man unto his family' (Lev 25:10; cf 25:39,40). In spiritual experience, the corresponding blessing is adoption - 'an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God' (The Shorter Catechism). Sin has brought estrangement from God and his Church (Eph 2:12; 4:17-19), but the moment a sinner receives Christ by faith, he is enrolled among God's dear children with the name and right of a son. 'As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name' (Jn 1:12; Gal 3:26).

6. Forfeited estates returned to their original owners. God was understood to be the great land-owner. He had determined who should have the land and he insisted on this restoration of property. So it was that, in the Jubilee, all who formerly possessed land, but who had forfeited it, received that land back again. 'In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man

unto his possession' (Lev 25:13; cf 25:10). This corresponds to 'Paradise Lost' and 'Paradise Regained'. Through sin, we lost our title-deeds to heaven (Rom 3:23), but the God of grace, through the redemptive work of his Son, is pleased to place them once again in hands of his believing people. Thus we have an assured hope of 'an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven' (1 Pet 1:4).

7. In God's safe-keeping, perfect peace was enjoyed. It was the promise of God. Whatever the Israelites might have to face

in the way of trouble or danger, the Lord assured them that they had no need to fear. He would take care of them. He would look after them. His words to them were: 'Ye shall dwell in the land in safety' (Lev 25:18). Such a promise belongs to believers in these times. 'Kept by the power of God', the Lord will 'deliver' and 'preserve' them, even to 'his heavenly kingdom' (1 Pet 1:5; 2 Tim 4:18). We believe in the eternal security of all those who have been chosen, redeemed, and called. We have it from the lips of our