

Redemption

Redemption of Land and Enslaved Relatives



SESSION 3

SESSION 1 **Redemption From Enslavement**

SESSION 2 **Passover and the Redemption of the Firstborn**

SESSION 3 **Redemption of Land and Enslaved Relatives**

As God redeemed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, he now instructs them to redeem one another by repossessing enslaved family members or land that has been sold outside of the family.

Story Context

After being redeemed from slavery in Egypt, the Israelites are now camped at Mount Sinai, where God makes a covenant agreement with them, promising that blessing for everyone will come through trusting and following him. The book of Leviticus records some of God's instructions for how he is calling Israel to live in order to keep that agreement, and today's reading details specific regulations about redeeming land and people.

God plans to give each tribe and family within Israel a piece of the promised land that they can hand down through the generations so that everyone will be able to plant crops and provide for their families. God explains that people can sell their land—or even sell themselves as bondslaves—if they end up in desperate situations (Lev. 25:19-28). But he also guarantees their right of redemption, an option to purchase their property or freedom back. When people cannot afford to

do that, a relative, called a “kinsman redeemer,” is to make the required payment for them.

The Israelites first hearing these words from God likely had raw memories of brutalities suffered under Egyptian enslavement. God wants the Israelites’ new life with him to be nothing like their enslavement, and he wants to keep them from engaging in similar oppression toward one another. So his instructions prohibit any situation where an Israelite could be held in perpetual poverty or servitude.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern slavery laws are foreign to our modern experience. But throughout history, impoverished people from many cultures have practiced some form of debt slavery, the ability to sell oneself or a family member in order to pay debts or simply survive.

On one hand, debt slavery practices allowed desperate people to acquire essential needs for themselves and their families. On the other hand, powerful people often exploited such vulnerability for profit, locking the poor into endless servitude.

Slavery in the ancient world was common, a basic reality in social systems everywhere. But God gives Israel directives that aim at restoring freedom, limiting the possibilities for injustice, and preventing harm. The people could not hold one another as perpetual “servants” or “slaves” (Hebrew: ‘eved) because God rescued them from bondage to Pharaoh, specifically to become his own beloved “servants” or “slaves” (‘eved, Lev. 25:42, 55). No longer serving a life-consuming tyrant, they can now serve the life-giving creator.

Word Definition: Go’el

For ancient Israelites following God’s law, a relative could act as a go’el, meaning “**kinsman redeemer**” or “**re-processor**” (from the Hebrew verb ga’al). This person would pay a redemption price to return either close relatives or their land back into the family’s possession. One famous example of a go’el in Scripture is Boaz, Naomi’s relative who buys back her land and marries her widowed daughter-in-law Ruth, redeeming the family’s inheritance and lineage (Ruth 4).

Leviticus 25:19-28

¹⁹ Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. ²⁰ You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?” ²¹ I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. ²² While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

²³ “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. ²⁴ Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

²⁵ “If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold. ²⁶ If, however, there is no one to redeem it for them but later on they prosper and acquire

sufficient means to redeem it themselves, ²⁷ they are to determine the value for the years since they sold it and refund the balance to the one to whom they sold it; they can then go back to their own property. ²⁸ But if they do not acquire the means to repay, what was sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and they can then go back to their property.

This passage continues God's instructions about the Year of Jubilee and the redemption of property in ancient Israel.

Key Point:

- **Verse 19:** The land will yield its fruit, and the people will eat their fill and live safely in the land. This is a promise tied to trusting God's sabbath-year and jubilee laws.
- **Verses 20-22:** The people ask what they will eat in the **seventh (Sabbath) year** when they do not plant or harvest. God assures them that He will command a **blessing** in the sixth year so the land produces enough crops for **three years** (covering the sixth, seventh, and eighth years until the new harvest comes in).
- **Verses 23-24:** A foundational principle is stated: **The land belongs to God**, not to the people. The Israelites are only "foreigners and strangers" (tenants) on God's land. Therefore, land cannot be sold permanently. All land sales are essentially long-term leases, and the land must be returned to its original family/clan in the Year of Jubilee.
- **Verses 25-28:** Rules for **redeeming (buying back) family land** that has been sold because of poverty:
 - If a relative (kinsman-redeemer) becomes able, he must **redeem** (buy back) the land for his poor relative.
 - If there is **no one** to redeem it, but the original owner himself becomes prosperous again, he can **calculate the years** since the land was sold, figure out the remaining value until the next Jubilee, and **buy it back** himself at a fair price.
 - If he cannot redeem it before the Jubilee, the land automatically **returns** to the original owner in the Year of Jubilee without payment.

Main Themes:

- **God's ownership** of the land and His care for His people.
- **Economic justice** and prevention of permanent poverty or loss of family inheritance.
- **Faith in God's provision** during the Sabbath year.
- **Redemption** as a central biblical concept (both practical and later pointing to spiritual redemption).

In short, these verses emphasize that land in Israel was never permanently sold — it was a sacred trust from God that had to be returned to families every 50 years in

the Jubilee, with provisions for earlier redemption to keep families from losing their ancestral inheritance forever.

Leviticus 25:47-55

⁴⁷ “If a foreigner residing among you becomes rich and any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to the foreigner or to a member of the foreigner’s clan, ⁴⁸ they retain the right of redemption after they have sold themselves. One of their relatives may redeem them: ⁴⁹ An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in their clan may redeem them. Or if they prosper, they may redeem themselves. ⁵⁰ They and their buyer are to count the time from the year they sold themselves up to the Year of Jubilee. The price for their release is to be based on the rate paid to a hired worker for that number of years. ⁵¹ If many years remain, they must pay for their redemption a larger share of the price paid for them. ⁵² If only a few years remain until the Year of Jubilee, they are to compute that and pay for their redemption accordingly. ⁵³ They are to be treated as workers hired from year to year; you must see to it that those to whom they owe service do not rule over them ruthlessly.

⁵⁴ “Even if someone is not redeemed in any of these ways, they and their children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee, ⁵⁵ for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

This passage deals with the laws concerning **Israelite debt-slavery and redemption**, specifically when an Israelite becomes poor and sells himself (or is sold) to a **foreigner or temporary resident** living among the Israelites.

Key Points:

- **The Situation (v. 47):** If a fellow Israelite becomes poor and sells himself to a foreigner (or a non-Israelite settler) living in the land, he enters a form of servitude under that foreigner.
- **Redemption Rights (v. 48-49):** The Israelite in servitude still has the right to be **redeemed** (bought back). Redemption can be done by:
 - One of his relatives (a brother, uncle, cousin, or any blood relative from his clan).
 - Or by the man himself, if he later prospers and can afford it.
- **How the Redemption Price is Calculated (v. 50-52):** The price is determined fairly based on the number of years remaining until the **Year of Jubilee**.
 - It is calculated like a hired worker’s wages — not as the price of a permanent slave.
 - The longer the time until Jubilee, the higher the redemption price; the shorter the time, the lower the price.
- **Treatment in Servitude (v. 53):** While serving the foreigner, the Israelite must **not be ruled over ruthlessly**. He is to be treated as a hired worker, not as a permanent slave.

- **Release in the Year of Jubilee (v. 54):** If he is not redeemed earlier, he and his children **must be released automatically** in the Year of Jubilee and return to his own clan and property.
- **Fundamental Principle (v. 55):** God declares: “**The Israelites belong to me as servants**. They are my servants whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God.” This is the theological foundation: Israelites are ultimately God’s servants, so they cannot be permanently enslaved to other people.

Overall Theme:

These verses emphasize **compassion, justice, and temporary servitude** among God’s people. Even when an Israelite falls into debt and serves a foreigner, the system is designed to prevent permanent slavery. Redemption is always possible, harsh treatment is forbidden, and freedom is guaranteed at the Jubilee. It reinforces that the Israelites’ true master is God alone.

This section continues the broader Jubilee laws (Leviticus 25), which promote economic reset, family restoration, and protection of the vulnerable every 50 years.

Year of Jubilee

The **Year of Jubilee** (also called the "Jubilee Year" or "Year of Release") is one of the most distinctive and radical economic and social laws in the Old Testament. It is described in detail in **Leviticus 25:8-55**, building on the concept of the **Sabbath Year** (every 7th year, when the land rests).

How the Jubilee Year Was Calculated

- Count **seven Sabbath years** ($7 \times 7 = 49$ years).
- The **50th year** is consecrated as the Year of Jubilee.
- It is announced by blowing a **ram’s horn (shofar or yobel)** loudly on the **Day of Atonement** (10th day of the 7th month), proclaiming **liberty throughout the land** to all its inhabitants (Leviticus 25:9-10).

Main Provisions of the Jubilee Laws

1. **Return of Land to Original Owners (Family Property Restoration)** Every Israelite family originally received a permanent inheritance of land when Israel entered Canaan. If someone became poor and sold (or leased) part or all of their land, it had to be **returned** to the original family or clan in the Jubilee Year. This prevented permanent loss of family land and stopped the creation of large estates or generational poverty. Land sales were not permanent; they were essentially leases priced according to the number of years remaining until the next Jubilee (the fewer years left, the lower the price — Leviticus 25:13-17, 23-28).
2. **Release of Israelite Servants/Slaves** If an Israelite became poor and sold himself into **indentured servitude** (debt bondage) to another Israelite, he and his family were to be **set free** in the Jubilee Year and return to their ancestral property (Leviticus 25:39-43, 54). They were to be treated as hired

workers, **not ruled over ruthlessly**, because all Israelites ultimately belonged to God as His servants (echoing the Exodus from Egypt). (Note: The previous passage you asked about — Leviticus 25:47-55 — specifically addresses redemption when an Israelite serves a *foreigner* living in the land.)

3. **Rest for the Land** Just like the Sabbath Year, no sowing, reaping, or regular harvesting was allowed in the Jubilee Year. People could eat only what grew naturally from the fields (Leviticus 25:11-12). This created a **double rest** for the land in years 49 and 50, which required faith in God’s provision (He promised a triple harvest in the 48th year to cover the two fallow years — Leviticus 25:18-22).
4. **Proclamation of Liberty** The core theme is **freedom and restoration**:
 - Liberty for people in bondage.
 - Restoration of family land and clan relationships.
 - A societal “reset” that limited extreme wealth inequality and protected the vulnerable.

Theological and Social Purpose

- **God owns the land** — Israelites were only tenants or stewards (Leviticus 25:23). They could not permanently alienate what ultimately belonged to God.
- **All Israelites are God’s servants** — No one could permanently enslave or impoverish another member of God’s covenant people.
- **Prevention of permanent poverty cycles** — The laws promoted justice, compassion, family stability, and trust in God rather than ruthless economic exploitation.
- **Holy rest and celebration** — The year was meant to be a time of rejoicing, homecoming, and renewed relationship with God and community.

Historical Note

There is **little to no clear evidence** in the historical books of the Bible that the full Jubilee laws were regularly observed in ancient Israel. Some scholars view it as an idealistic vision meant to shape Israel’s values, even if not perfectly implemented. The principles, however, influenced later Jewish thought and appear echoed in prophets like Isaiah (e.g., Isaiah 61:1-2, which Jesus quoted in Luke 4:18-19 as being fulfilled in His ministry).

Connection to the New Testament

The Jubilee imagery is powerful in the Gospels. Jesus’ announcement of “the year of the Lord’s favor” is widely understood as proclaiming a spiritual Jubilee — offering **forgiveness of sins** (debt), **freedom from bondage** to sin and death, and **restoration** to God’s family through His redemptive work.

In short, the Year of Jubilee was God’s built-in mechanism for **economic reset, social justice, and covenant renewal** every 50 years — a profound picture of grace, liberty, and returning to what God originally intended. It continues to inspire themes of mercy, debt relief, and restoration in both Jewish and Christian thought today.

The Bible, in **Leviticus 25**, outlines detailed laws for the **redemption of land and enslaved (or indentured) relatives**. These rules are part of the broader **Year of Jubilee** system (every 50th year), designed to prevent permanent poverty, keep land within families and tribes, protect the vulnerable, and remind Israel that both the land and the people ultimately belong to God.

Here is a clear breakdown based on the key passages:

1. Redemption of Land (Leviticus 25:23-28)

- **Core Principle:** The land of Israel belongs to **God**, not to the people. Israelites were only "strangers and sojourners" (tenants) on it. Therefore, land could **not** be sold permanently ("in perpetuity"). Any "sale" was actually a temporary lease until the next Jubilee.
- **If a family member becomes poor and sells (leases) part of their ancestral land:**
 - The **nearest relative** (often called the **kinsman-redeemer** or "redeeming relative") has the **right and responsibility** to buy it back (redeem it) to keep it in the family.
 - If no relative steps in, the original owner can redeem it himself if he later prospers.
 - The redemption price is calculated fairly: based on the number of years remaining until the Jubilee (like prorated rent for the remaining "lease" years). The fewer years left, the lower the price.
- **If no one redeems it:** The buyer keeps the land until the **Year of Jubilee**. Then it automatically returns to the original family/clan, and the seller (or his descendants) returns to his property.
- **Special cases:**
 - Houses in **walled cities** had a one-year redemption window; after that, they became permanent (unlike farmland).
 - Levite property had stronger, ongoing redemption rights because Levites had no tribal land inheritance.

This system prevented generational land loss and massive wealth inequality by ensuring family inheritances stayed intact.

2. Redemption of Enslaved/Indentured Relatives (Leviticus 25:39-55)

This applies when an Israelite becomes so poor that he "sells himself" into **debt servitude** (indentured service, not permanent chattel slavery like in other ancient cultures).

- **To another Israelite** (Lev 25:39-43):
 - He must be treated as a **hired worker**, not a slave.
 - He cannot be ruled over "ruthlessly."
 - He (and his family) is automatically released in the **Year of Jubilee** and returns to his ancestral land.
 - Reason: Israelites are God's servants (freed from Egypt), so they cannot be permanently enslaved to each other.
- **To a foreigner or temporary resident** living in the land (Lev 25:47-55 — the passage you asked about earlier):

- The Israelite still retains the **right of redemption**.
- **Relatives** can redeem him: a brother, uncle, cousin, or any blood relative from his clan.
- He himself can redeem himself if he prospers later.
- The redemption price is calculated like a hired worker's wages for the remaining years until Jubilee.
- While serving, he must **not** be treated harshly.
- If not redeemed earlier, he and his children are **released automatically** in the Jubilee Year.
- **Key Verse (Lev 25:55):** "For the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the LORD your God."

The Role of the Kinsman-Redeemer (Go'el in Hebrew)

The "nearest relative" plays a central part in both land and person redemption. This concept appears in action in the **Book of Ruth**:

- Boaz acts as kinsman-redeemer by buying back Naomi's family land **and** marrying Ruth to preserve the family line and name.
- It shows the redeemer paying a price, taking on responsibility, and restoring what was lost.

Theological Meaning

- These laws reflect God's character: **justice, compassion, family preservation, and generosity**.
- They point to ultimate freedom and restoration (Jubilee as a "reset").
- In the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the perfect **Kinsman-Redeemer**. He is our relative (fully human), pays the ultimate price (His blood), redeems us from sin's debt and bondage, and restores us to God's family and inheritance (see Isaiah 61:1-2, Luke 4:18-19, Galatians 4:4-5, and the theme of redemption throughout the Gospels and Epistles).

In summary, the Bible's laws on redemption of land and enslaved relatives emphasize that **nothing is permanently lost** in God's economy — land returns to families, people regain freedom, and everything is calculated with fairness and mercy, all because God owns the land and His people belong to Him alone.

Questions

What do you think these passages suggest about God or his desires for humanity?

As a community, how are we invited to respond?

Are you seeing connections to other parts of Scripture or life in general?

What can we learn about redemption from Israel's ancient laws about property and slave ownership?

Redemption of Land and Enslaved Relatives

- Redemption of Land and Enslaved Relatives
- Year of Jubilee
 - Renewal every 50 years
 - Seventh (Sabbath) year
- The land belongs to God
 - Redeeming (buying back) family land
 - God owns the land
- Economic justice
 - Faith in God's provision
- Redemption Rights
 - Treatment in Servitude - (not be ruled over ruthlessly)
 - The Israelites belong to me as servants
 - Kinsman Redeemer
- Compassion, justice, and temporary servitude
 - Return of Land to Original Owners
 - Rest for the Land
 - Liberty for people in bondage.
 - Restoration of family land and clan relationships.
 - A societal "reset" that could limited extreme wealth inequality and protected the vulnerable.
 - Prevention of Permanent Poverty cycles
- Holy rest and celebration - Jubilee
 - Economic reset, social justice, and covenant renewal every 50 years