

The Jubilee Year
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Lev. 25:8-16. (8) You shall count off seven weeks of years—seven times seven years—so that the period of seven weeks of years gives you a total of forty-nine years. (9) Then you shall sound the horn [shofar] loud; in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month—the Day of Atonement—you shall have the horn sounded throughout your land (10) and you shall hallow the fiftieth year. You shall proclaim release throughout the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you: each of you shall return to his holding and each of you shall return to his family. (11) That fiftieth year shall be a Jubilee for you: you shall not sow, neither shall you reap the aftergrowth or harvest the untrimmed vines, (12) for it is a Jubilee. It shall be holy to you: you may only eat the growth direct from the field. (13) In this year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his holding. (14) When you sell property to your neighbor, or buy any from your neighbor, you shall not wrong one another. (15) In buying from your neighbor, you shall deduct only for the number of years since the jubilee, and in selling to you, he shall charge you only for the remaining crop years: (16) The more such years, the higher the price you pay, the fewer such years, the lower the price: for what he is selling you is a number of harvests.

Lev. 25:29-31. (29) If a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, it may be redeemed until a year has elapsed since its sale, the redemption period shall be a year. (30) If it is not redeemed before a full year has elapsed, the house in the walled city shall pass to the purchases beyond reclaim throughout the ages; it shall not be released in the Jubilee. (31) But houses in villages that have no encircling walls shall be classed as open country: they may be redeemed, and they shall be released through the Jubilee.

Lev. 25:39-41. (39) If your kinsman under you continues in straits and must give himself over to you, do not subject him to the treatment of a slave. (40) He shall remain with you as a hired or bound laborer; he shall serve with you only until the Jubilee year. (41) Then he and his children with him shall be free of your authority; he shall go back to his family and return to his ancestral holding. (JPS)

Controversies

Are there similar customs elsewhere in the region?

Bamberger in Plaut, ed., *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*: "...we should take note of the word *deror*, 'release' (v. 10). ... The Babylonians had a term, *duraru*, also *anduraru*, which resembles *deror* both in sound and meaning. ... *Duraru* was sometimes a release of freemen who had been enslaved, sometimes the restoration of real property to its original owners, sometimes a cancellation of debts—or a combination of these. So striking a parallel can hardly be accidental. The Babylonian *duraru* was not, indeed, a regularly recurring procedure. It was an exceptional act of grace on the part of a ruler. Sometimes it marked the accession of a new king. Prof. Mattiahu Tsevat has suggested that, in a somewhat similar way, the sabbatical and Jubilee years in Israel celebrated the renewal of the covenant between the divine King and His people."

What is the authorship date of the passage?

Levine, JPS commentary on Leviticus, Excursus 10, pp. 273-74. "...we should perhaps see in [Lev. 25] an attempt to deal with a radically new situation. The legislation enacted in response to this new situation sought, as its paramount objective, to prevent the loss of land by Israelites and their families. The close parallels with Nehemiah 5, discussed above, suggest a common historical setting for both sources: the situation of the Judean community under Persian domination. Lev. 24:45f. recalls the complaints of the citizenry in Nehemiah 5 and betrays the probability that both reflect the life of the post-exilic community. ... Historically, the returning Judean exiles were repatriates allowed to resettle in their ancestral land and to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. Those terms were granted by the edict of Cyrus the great, issued in 538 BCE... But that edict did not guarantee that Judeans would recover their former lands or take possession of other lands within their new areas of settlement. ... it was undoubtedly necessary in many cases to repurchase land from non-Judeans, and there was probably conflict over rights of ownership. ... The priestly leaders of the repatriated Judean community formulated a theory to legitimize their situation: God had granted the Land of Israel to his people as an everlasting '*ahuzzah*, "holding." His people were His tenants and were granted the right to work the land and enjoy its fruits. They were, however, denied the right usually considered a *sine qua non* of ownership, the right to alienate what one owns. Following this line of reasoning, the edict of Cyrus was translated into a divine land grant."

Milgrom, *Anchor Bible* 3B:2242. "In any event, these parallels in the ancient Near East contemporary with or prior to Israel's settlement on its land tip the scales in favor of a preexilic and, probably, premonarchic date [i.e. 700s or prob. 800s BCE] for the inception of the jubilee concept, a time when family membership and land ownership had 'critical weight in the matter of one's own standing in the religious community.' To claim that