

## The Year Of Release

**John W. Ritenbaugh**

**Given 27-Sep-14; Sermon #1234s**

If anyone has been looking at the news the past several weeks, they should be informed that the year of release of biblical law was just about on us. This law and its operations are tied to the Hebrew calendar. The year of release is directly linked to the Feast of Trumpets that begins every seventh year. The year of release ends on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of Elul of the same year the seventh Feast of Trumpets begins in. Can you make that out so far? The 29<sup>th</sup> day of Elul always immediately precedes the Feast of Trumpets by one day.

The Hebrew people operated two calendars at the same time. One was the sacred calendar and the other was the civil calendar. The only major difference between the two is the day in which they begin. The sacred calendar's first day is always Abib 1 in spring. The civil calendar's first day is Tishri 1 in autumn. Thus Tishri is the first month of the civil calendar but the seventh month of the sacred calendar. The Feast of Trumpets always falls on the first day of Tishri. The six month of the sacred calendar is Elul. As the 29<sup>th</sup> day of Elul ends at sunset, the Feast of Trumpets begins. Thus this year, the 29<sup>th</sup> day of Elul fell on Wednesday, September the 24<sup>th</sup>, and the Feast of Trumpets fell on Thursday, September the 25<sup>th</sup> on the calendar that the Western world uses.

To the overwhelming majority of Americans calling themselves Christian, the year of release is almost a total mystery. I said "almost" because some of them at least have some familiarity with the name, but haven't the foggiest idea of what it's all about. This year, there has been more information on news sources about this particular Feast of Trumpets than is normal. This is because a number of fairly well-known writers on biblical subjects have written articles, and at least one book has appeared on the market, authored by a well-known religious personality. Within the context of his book, he has done sufficient historical research to tie the dates of many international events—in other words, not just things that are happening in the United

States or to the United States, but things that are worldwide—that occurred within the framework of a year of release time period.

Most significant to Americans have been the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers there in New York City, and two huge financial collapses, one in 2001, the other in 2008. They fell between one another almost exactly seven years, but they were well within the year of release—both of them.

There can be no doubt that viewed from within the biblical context, the years of release have important significance to the well-being of a family or a nation. I want you to get this clear because it's important to all of us, even in these days. This is because in the Bible, land is viewed as the primary source of prosperity and land is viewed as a gift from God, bearing major responsibilities. We think we buy land, and that's the way it looks on the surface because we do sell land from one person to another. Remember what I said here: *Biblically*, land is viewed as the primary source of prosperity and land is viewed as a gift of God, but having it bears major responsibilities.

Land belongs to God who created it. Nobody here has bought a piece of land from God. God created it and He is still sovereign over His creation. God gives land to His people, even as He did Adam and Eve. Just think of Adam and Eve, and God gave them this land. But it is given as a loan. In any interaction between God and mankind, you do not buy land from God; He gives it as a gift and it is given as a loan. We just have temporary use of it because He is kind enough, graceful enough, to give it. We must never forget that fact.

He also gave Adam and Eve instructions for how He wants it used for their well-being. There is a great deal contained within that one little phrase, "dress and keep." That means you're allowed to make money from it, but it also means you have to protect it. You have to guard it from degeneration. That's our responsibility as a renter from God. Biblically, there is no natural right for the expectation of prosperity. God is sovereign and He gives prosperity. But, biblically, there is no expectation of it.

The year of release is linked to respect for God as the land's Owner and in faith in Him to provide the prosperity. If He doesn't give the rain, there is no prosperity. The year of release is viewed as a Sabbath, a period of rest for the

land that God gave, and it is thus linked to the original "dress and keep" instructions. God expects those who were given the land as a gift to respect by faith the wishes of the land's Owner.

The term "release" is the definition of the Hebrew word *shemittah*. That word can also be translated as "cancel," "drop," or "remit," in relation to contexts regarding loans, indebtedness, and even slavery of some kind. The seventh year was vital to much of the Israelitish culture in the past, and you can mark my words, when the kingdom of God has established, it's going to be very vital once again.

Turn with me to Leviticus 25:

**Leviticus 25:23** 'The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine [This is God speaking. He makes it clear land is given by Him, but He never sells it. It is given as a gift from Him.]; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. [It's as though He is walking the path with us.]

The significance of the sabbatical and the jubilee year, which we will get to in just a little bit, is not limited to the rest of the land ("rest" in terms of giving it time to spend recuperating) and rejuvenation of the soil. There are things that we can learn from this even, though we do not have land that we are farming. The principles are within this—things that apply to our life in other areas. There are spiritual principles that are woven into the year of release's function.

First of all, it is to remind us, as does the weekly Sabbath, that the Eternal is the Creator, but it does it in a much more intense fashion. Even as the weekly Sabbath comes up every seventh day, the year of release comes up every seven years, just like the in the same kind of pattern as the weekly Sabbath. Just as it took faith for the Israelites not the farm on the sabbatical and the jubilee years, so today it takes faith to trust God for sustenance. In other words, it doesn't matter whether you are farming the land or you're working in an office somewhere; we have to learn to trust God for what keeps us going every single day. The most simple thing, is every day, every second, He enables us to breathe the oxygen that He gives. Every other aspect of life feeds off that principle. He provides us with all that we need for life.

In the Bible, man is never viewed as the sole owner of the soil (we just read that in Leviticus 25:23), and he does not hold property in perpetuity, but only under the Almighty's trust. We own nothing by inherent right, for like the children of Israel, we were slaves in Egypt. That's where our roots are. We were slaves. The Israelites owned no property in Egypt. You begin to see the principal there: While we were in spiritual Egypt, as the far as the way God looks at it, we own nothing because a slave owns nothing. They just work for somebody else.

**Deuteronomy 15:15** You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. Therefore, I command you this thing today.

We will not go on to the command. I just wanted to get the principal there that even as the Israelites owned nothing before God gave them the land, we have to look at ourselves, too, as owning nothing spiritually until God gives us something following our release from our spiritual captivity.

The word translated "release" in Deuteronomy 15:1 can also mean "dropping." I gave you three other definitions before; here is a fourth: "dropping." The seventh year can easily be called "a year of dropping" or "a year of cancellation" (there is another definition for you)—the dropping of debts or the cancellation of debts.

Here is another principle that we can put to work. We shouldn't have to wait seven years to do this, but it is tied into this year of release. That is, what better time than the seventh year to settle with people to bury the hatchet. I mean, that's basically what it means. In that year, peace breaks out because you settle everything.

Somebody owes you a loan that they borrowed from you and maybe it was quite a number of years before that, and they've been paying little bits here and there. But when the seventh year begins, the clock is ticking. It's not necessary that you—if you do not have the money—give up anything else for that. It is up to the person who loaned you the money to forgive the debt.

It doesn't matter how big that debt is that is owed to you. It doesn't matter how it came about. It just matters that you are holding somebody's note and it is up to you to just write it off.

This is the equivalent of forgiving sin. Nobody pays you to forgive another person. It's up to us if the sin is against us to do the forgiving, not expecting anything in return. We just forgive. This is a major, major lesson in forgiveness because there is hardly anything closer to us, more dear to us, than our wealth that we gave to somebody else, expecting to get it back. Whatever the reason, they could not pay it back, and so God says, "Even as I forgave you and got you out of Egypt, you are to forgive them; expect no payment." Is there anything, brethren, we can do for God to pay Him back? You get the principle that's involved here.

I think you can begin to see why the Israelites had a very, very difficult time keeping the year of release. Like everybody else, they love money. They love wealth and they want to hang on to it. But when the year of release comes around, God says, "Forgive it. Get rid of it." We have to play God and forgive. That's not easy.

So, we follow the spiritual types that are involved here. When we were in spiritual Egypt, we were on death row, awaiting execution in the Lake of Fire. But the Almighty, in His great mercy, called us and forgave us. Through His Son, the Messiah, all the charges against us were dropped. We can remember a scripture, then, like Colossians 2:14-15, where it says that Jesus Christ nailed those things to the cross. What did He pay for it? His life. Are we willing to do that? God doesn't ask that much of us. Just forgive them.

**Leviticus 25:1-2** 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 [there it is: "which I give you"], then the land shall keep a sabbath to the LORD.

Remember the connection before. The land Sabbath occurs every seven years, just like the weekly Sabbath occurs every seven days. The land Sabbath is a type of the weekly Sabbath. The weekly Sabbath reminds us of God every week. The land Sabbath reminds us of God in a slightly different aspect every seven years.

**Leviticus 25:3-4** 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 . . .

. . . even as we rest on the Sabbath because we stop working. Every seventh year, the land is given a rest. *It* stops working, as it were. I think you can begin to see that God is doing this, in a sense, as an act of kindness both to the land, almost as if it was a living thing, as well as to the farmer who was farming the land. It's a gift to him to give that land rest. In both cases, it's an act of kindness because if he keeps on farming the land year after year after year, he wears it out. And then, the land stops producing wealth, as we are seeing all over the United States now.

**Leviticus 25:4-7** . . . 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.

Let's summarize the seventh year: No sowing. No reaping. No storing of what comes up volunteer. No pruning of your vines or trimming of your trees. However, the farmer was still allowed to eat what came up volunteer. He's allowed to eat it, but he had to go out and pick it every day. He was not allowed to reap it. He was not allowed to store it, even though it came up volunteer. He had to leave it there until he needed it. Then he went out and got it.

You get what's going on here? It's just like they had to do with the manna. It's a reminder of the manna. Every morning you go out and you take what you need to eat, and then the next morning you do the same thing.

He could eat what comes up volunteer, but also can the poor, the alien, the animals of the field—the wild animals, as well as the domesticated animals like the cattle. They were allowed to eat freely of what came up volunteer in

the field. What you can begin to see here is this is a form of God's welfare system.

**Deuteronomy 15:1-8** “At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD’s release [It's as though God is giving it out]. Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother, except when there may be no poor among you [this is an interesting exception]; for the LORD will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance [in other words, "If you're all so rich, we will just scratch this part out"]—only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today. For the LORD your God will bless you just as He promised you; you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow; you shall reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over you. [What a promise! Just for keeping the year of release!] “If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs.

That is put in there as a direct stipulation to encourage us to be generous. If somebody comes in need, God says, "Give it to them." But you see, what's turning around in my mind here is, "Well, this is the sixth year of a seven-year cycle, and the year of release is only about nine months away or so. . . and if I give this guy the \$10,000 he wants, how is he ever going to pay it back when he doesn't have a nickel even right now?" That's what He means.

**Deuteronomy 15:8-9** you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, ‘The

seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you.

—because we are stingy. Actually, what we are doing is we are thinking of ourselves. And you know these are things all of us are guilty of because we have these feelings. God knows we have these feelings, and that's why he put these things in here.

**Deuteronomy 15:10** You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand.

It is really a test for those who are being asked to help. And then He goes on in verse 11 to show that there is possibility that's going to occur:

**Deuteronomy 15:11** For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'

Let's go on. Now it's getting into a little bit different area:

**Deuteronomy 15:12** If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you . . .

God permitted a form of slavery. He laid down strict ordinances regarding how the slave was to be treated, and it was not the kind of slavery that we think of that went on in the Deep South, but rather it was really, in a sense, like they were almost making this slave a part of their family.

**Deuteronomy 15:12** If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you.

Let me explain this a little bit. Usually when a person needed money, it was because of a couple of different reasons. One, they did not work very hard.



Two, they did not work very wisely. They were careless, lazy, or whatever. And so their inheritance—the land that they owned—went to pot. They had no money. So, they came to you and asked for a loan, or maybe they would actually, on occasions, sell themselves to a landowner because that was the best way out. Maybe they would get some money and that money would help take care of the family that the guy kind of left behind when he went into his slavery.

Regardless of when it occurred in a seven year cycle, the person had to serve the person who bought him for six full years. In other words, if a seventh year, a year of release, fell before the six years with up—tough. The guy had to remain in slavery until a full six years had been served from the second year to the year of release was over. And then, when his six year period was over, then the guy who bought the slave had to give him his freedom. I will not go into this because of a lack of time, but when that occurred, the servant went out free and clear and the owner had to give him enough to get him started in his own place once again. Cattle, sheep, money, whatever he needed was given to him so that he would be able to succeed.