

May 20  
Lesson 12 (NIV)

## REMEMBERING

### WITH JOY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 50:1-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Leviticus 25

#### LEVITICUS 25:1-12

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai,  
<sup>2</sup> “Speak to the Israelites and say to them:  
‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. <sup>3</sup> For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. <sup>4</sup> But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. <sup>5</sup> Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. <sup>6</sup> Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, <sup>7</sup> as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

<sup>8</sup> “Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup> Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. <sup>10</sup> Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan. <sup>11</sup> The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. <sup>12</sup> For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.”



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#### KEY VERSE

*Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each of you is to return to your family property and to your own clan.—Leviticus 25:10*

#### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the nature of the rest the land was to receive during the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee.
2. Explain the spiritual principles that these laws were meant to instill.
3. Identify one way he or she can proclaim the “Year of Jubilee” that Jesus has ushered in and make a plan to do so.

#### LESSON OUTLINE

##### Introduction

- A. Living by Faith

## B. Lesson Background

I. Sabbath Year ([LEVITICUS 25:1-7](#))A. Principle Stated ([vv. 1, 2](#))B. Details Specified ([vv. 3-5](#))*Give the Land a Break!*C. Results Promised ([vv. 6, 7](#))II. Year of Jubilee ([LEVITICUS 25:8-12](#))A. Counting Sevens ([v. 8](#))B. Sounding Trumpets ([v. 9](#))C. Proclaiming Liberty ([v. 10](#))*Living as Reconciled People*D. Observing Jubilee ([vv. 11, 12](#))

## Conclusion

A. Old Testament Jubilee

B. New Testament Jubilee

C. Prayer

D. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Living by Faith

When we think about living by faith, we generally consider that to be a religious concept, meaning that one who lives by faith is trusting in God. But the fact is that *everyone* lives by faith, even the person who is not religious in the least!

Why do we get on airplanes? Because we have faith that the pilot has the proper skills to get us to our destination safely. How do we know that the pound of hamburger we purchase at the store is indeed (1) a pound and (2) hamburger? Because we have faith that the grocer is dealing with us honestly. Why do we entrust a package to a delivery person? Once again, we are taking a step of faith. Devout Christians, strident atheists, and everyone in between takes such steps of faith. This is faith based on evidence; it is not blind faith.

But imagine a world in which we could trust no one else because there was no evidence upon which to base that trust. How demoralizing that would be! Every action we took during any given day would be subject to incredible risk.

In truth, none of us lives totally on our own. To survive in society, we must have a certain level of faith in the competence of others. This sometimes involves risk. Many portions of the Law of Moses challenged the Israelites to exercise a measure of trust and risk. But the basis of the Israelites' actions was rooted first and foremost in their trust in God.

## B. Lesson Background

Often the various regulations found within the Law of Moses are placed in three categories: *civil* (those that helped maintain an orderly society), *ceremonial* (those dealing with how God's covenant people were to express their worship to him), and *moral* (those dealing with right living). Whereas the first two groups applied only to Old Testament Israel (though there may still be general principles of conduct to be drawn from them), the moral laws continue to serve as standards of right and wrong behavior.

Today's passage from [Leviticus 25](#) falls primarily within the ceremonial category, since it concerns certain religious observances that do not apply to Christians (see [Colossians 2:14-17](#)), specifically the Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee. These topics also have civil ramifications as well, since obedience to them was intended to help build a just society.

But if the specific commandments of today's text no longer apply, then why bother studying them? The answer is hinted at above: because they speak to principles of conduct that are important yet today.

## I. Sabbath Year

[\(LEVITICUS 25:1-7\)](#)

### A. Principle Stated ([vv. 1, 2](#))

#### <sup>1</sup> **The LORD said to Moses at Mount Sinai,**

There are dozens of references in the book of Leviticus that record *the Lord speaking to Moses*. This is direct word-revelation: God communicating with humans (in distinction from general revelation that is affirmed in, for example, [Psalm 19:1-4](#)).

The Israelites gathered *at Mount Sinai* in the third month after leaving Egypt ([Exodus 19:1](#)). The people encamp here for a little less than a year ([Numbers 10:11, 12](#)) in order to receive God's law.

<sup>2</sup> **“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD.**

## HOW TO SAY IT

apartheid uh-*pahr*-tate.Degradation Deg-ruh-*day*-shun.Deuteronomy Due-ter-*ahn*-uh-me.

Isaiah Eye-zay-uh.

Israelites Iz-ray-el-ites.

Jubilee Joo-buh-lee.

Levites Lee-vites.

Leviticus Leh-vit-ih-kus.

Mandela Man-del-uh.

Sinai Sigh-nye or Sigh-nay-eye.

Thessalonians Thess-uh-**lo**-nee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

The most important feature of the promised land that lies ahead is that it will be God's gift. His covenant people, *the Israelites*, will not be able to claim they have earned it ([Deuteronomy 9:6](#)). They will be stewards of God's grant, not owners who are entitled.

At this point, the Israelites have already received the Ten Commandments, the fourth being that of keeping the Sabbath (see [Exodus 20:8-11](#)). The importance of this commandment is underlined by the fact that it is the longest of the 10. It is to be obeyed by every person in Israel, including non-Israelites who live among the covenant people. Even animals are to be given a rest.

In the verse before us we have reached the point of *wait—there's more!* as the command regarding Sabbath is to be applied to *the land* as well.

#### *What Do You Think?*

As you personalize the Sabbath principle, how will you know when you've gotten the proper amount of rest?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Considering tell-tale signs of inadequate rest

Considering tell-tale signs of too much rest

### B. Details Specified ([vv. 3-5](#))

3. 4. **“For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. But in the seventh year the land is to have a year of sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards.**

The *year of sabbath rest* for the land operates on a principle similar to that which undergirds the Sabbath Day: just as the people are to work for six days and rest on the seventh, the land is to be sown and its produce reaped *for six years . . . But in the seventh year* neither sowing nor reaping is to be done. From a productivity standpoint, we know that it is good to let farmland lie fallow for a time or to rotate crops. But the focus of this legislation is spiritual: this period of *sabbath rest* for the land is *a sabbath to the Lord*.

The timetable to be observed with this law is similar to the laws concerning both debts and servants. In the Sabbath Year, debts are to be canceled (some suggest “suspended”) in the case of loans made to Israelites ([Deuteronomy 15:1-6](#)). The law also states that a Hebrew servant is to serve for six years, then in the seventh year he or she is to be set free ([15:12](#)).

#### ***GIVE THE LAND A BREAK!***

A 2013 report by the Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) Initiative indicates that not giving the agricultural land breaks from growing crops or forests has consequences. Erosion increases, soil quality declines, and the capacity of the land to yield crops goes down.

Farmers are discovering they can double the amount of crops a parcel of land yields by allowing it to lie fallow for a few years. Such a practice has the potential of doubling the amount of livestock the land can support. ELD researchers estimate that if some form of resting the land were practiced worldwide, the crop yield could potentially increase by 2.5 billion tons annually.

The ancient Israelites did not have access to ELD research. They had something better: God. They could either honor his desire in faith or trust their own instincts. We face the same choice in countless ways daily, don't we?

—L. G. S.

5. **“Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest.**

**The Sabbath law of rest applies, not only to what the people intentionally sow and harvest, but also to any edible substance that grows on its own. Thus the entire land is given the opportunity to rest, not just the part the people have farmed.**

#### *What Do You Think?*

How will you deal with obstacles to build seasons of rest into your life?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Regarding practical obstacles

Regarding cultural obstacles

Regarding psychological obstacles

Other

### C. Results Promised ([vv. 6, 7](#))

6. 7. **“Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you—for yourself, your male and**

**female servants, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.**

Although no harvesting or reaping occurs during *the sabbath year*, enough food will be available during that entire year. The people need not fear, for God promises that there will be adequate food for all, whether Israelite, non-Israelite, or animal.

We might wonder how the land is to provide food when the people are not allowed to eat what normally is sown and reaped ([Leviticus 25:4](#), above) or reap what grew apart from any deliberate cultivation ([25:5](#), above). The answer may lie in distinguishing between harvesting and simply living off the land. The key concept of “harvesting” is gathering the crop for storage. During the sabbatical year people can collect food from the field for use at that time. The people are to live much like the poor among them, who are permitted during the seventh year to take whatever they wish from the land ([Exodus 23:11](#)).

Later, in [Leviticus 25](#), the Lord offers additional assurance in anticipation of the people’s concern for having enough to eat during the Sabbath Year. He says, “I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year [that is, the year before the Sabbath Year] that the land will yield enough for three years” ([Leviticus 25:21](#)). The land will experience its rest in the seventh year, the people will sow new crops in the eighth year, and then the ninth year will be the next year during which crops are harvested ([25:22](#)).

Such laws as these are grounded in a key truth that bears repeating: the promised land is the Lord’s. His people must trust that he, as its ultimate caretaker, will ensure that it produces exactly what the people and the animals need. Of course, the stated blessings and provisions hinge on the people’s faithful obedience to the Lord, as [Leviticus 25:18, 19](#) makes quite clear.

## II. Year of Jubilee

([LEVITICUS 25:8-12](#))

### A. Counting Sevens (v. 8)

**8. “Count off seven sabbath years—seven times seven years—so that the seven sabbath years amount to a period of forty-nine years.**

This is another one of those *wait—there’s more!* moments. In addition to the Sabbath Year that occurs every seventh year, God has another requirement. This one involves counting off *seven* cycles of sabbath years to determine the passage of *forty-nine years*. The reason why is given next.

### B. Sounding Trumpets (v. 9)

**9. “Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land.**

Given the importance of the seventh day and year, it is not surprising that the *seventh month* (late September and early October) is also special. The first day of this month is commemorated as a day of rest and offerings ([Leviticus 23:24, 25](#)). The people cease working *on the tenth day* and celebrate *the Day of Atonement* ([23:27-31](#)). The details of its observance are outlined in [Leviticus 16](#). This particular day is also described as “a day of sabbath rest” ([23:32](#)). On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, the people cease work at the start of the seven-day Festival of Tabernacles ([23:34](#)).

The tenth day also heralds the arrival of the “jubilee.” The Hebrew word being translated appears to be derived from a word translated “rams’ horns” in [Joshua 6:4](#). The word translated *trumpet* here is different, although still referring to a ram’s horn.

Just who is to *sound the trumpet* is not stated. Since it is to be *sounded everywhere*, it may be the duty of the priests or Levites, who will be assigned territory among the people of Israel (see [Joshua 21](#)).

### C. Proclaiming Liberty (v. 10)

**<sup>10a.</sup> “Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you;**



Sheet 6—Spring 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lesson 12. Pointing to this visual as you ask, “Under what conditions does God expect us to apply the Jubilee principle today, if any? Why?”

Our word *holiday* derives from the phrase *holy day*, but in many cases we have kept the celebration part while not retaining the holiness aspect. The Israelites are not to miss the latter. The *liberty* to be proclaimed *throughout the land to all its inhabitants every fiftieth year* is certainly ample cause for celebration. The people will celebrate it as a *jubilee*. But they must also be sure to *consecrate* that year, meaning to set it aside as a holy year. Exactly what the terms *liberty* and *consecrate* include are explained in the verses that follow.

<sup>10b.</sup> **“each of you is to return to your family property**

This is to be the result of the proclamation of liberty. The word *property* refers to one’s ancestral possession of land within the promised land. A scenario is described in [Leviticus 25:25-28](#) in which an Israelite sells property because of his impoverished state. When the Year of Jubilee arrives, the property reverts back to its original owner, who is allowed to *return to it*. [Leviticus 25:14, 15](#) establishes how this is fair to those who must give the land back.

<sup>10c.</sup> **“and to your own clan.**

In some cases, an impoverished Israelite may sell himself into servitude to another Israelite, as [Leviticus 25:39-43](#) describes. That person is to be given freedom to return to his *own clan* in the Year of Jubilee. Every fiftieth year is, in effect, an opportunity to start over.

The Israelites are thus being encouraged to see their land and their fellow Israelites as God sees them. Land is not something to be acquired and hoarded for selfish purposes, and people are not to be used as a means for promoting one's own personal status or comfort. In all of this the Israelites are to remember their former status in Egypt ([Leviticus 25:38, 42, 55](#)) and treat others with the compassion and mercy that God showed them when he brought them out of that bondage.

The announcement of the Year of Jubilee on the same day that the Day of Atonement is observed is not mere coincidence. God wants his covenant people to understand that on the same day that reconciliation with him is carried out, a kind of reconciliation among people is to happen as well every 50 years. As the people are restored with God spiritually, those who have been separated from their homes due to personal setbacks are to be restored to their families and their property. Thus reconciliation with God is to be demonstrated in a very practical, tangible manner.

*What Do You Think?*

What steps can we take to become known as people of reconciliation?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- When relational debt is outstanding
- When sin debt is outstanding
- When monetary debt is outstanding
- When deficits of justice abound

### ***LIVING AS RECONCILED PEOPLE***

In modern times, there is perhaps no greater example of practicing reconciliation than that of Nelson Mandela. Mandela spent 27 years in prison for his role in resisting the South African government and its commitment to racial apartheid. Instead of emerging from prison embittered against his captors, he displayed an unflagging commitment to unify a nation that had been divided by years of institutionalized racism.

Mandela eventually became the first black president of South Africa. In that role he created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which provided amnesty to anyone who had committed a politically motivated human rights violation during the apartheid era. Neither side of the conflict was exempt from being called to stand before these public hearings. Part of the plan's genius was that amnesty would be granted only to those who fully disclosed their crimes. This model of restorative justice created the possibility for forgiveness between a people hopelessly divided.

The Day of Atonement offered reconciliation between a holy God and his sinful people. The Year of Jubilee, which was proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, encouraged the people to think of a kind of reconciliation with fellow Israelites by allowing them to return to ancestral property and family. God's people were thus taught to think of reconciliation not just as a matter of their personal relationship with the Lord but also in terms of how others were treated. The spiritual and the practical were thus closely linked together. So it should also be for God's people today.

—L. G. S.

### **D. Observing Jubilee (vv. 11, 12)**

**11, 12. “The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields.”**

The laws concerning sowing and reaping to be followed during the Year of Jubilee are similar to those that accompany the Sabbath Year ([Leviticus 25:5](#)). A question arises as to whether the Year of Jubilee is the same as the seventh Sabbath Year within a given cycle or is an additional year. If the latter, the result is two consecutive years of neither sowing nor reaping.

[Leviticus 25:20-22](#) appears to say that God's promises to provide enough abundance in the sixth year that the people's needs will be met through the seventh, eighth, and ninth years. But that text specifies sowing during the eighth year. Since (1) the year on which the Year of Jubilee falls is an eighth year and (2) sowing is forbidden in a jubilee year ([25:11](#)), then (3) it appears that the seventh Sabbath Year in the cycle is also a Year of Jubilee. The *fiftieth year* may have been the same as the forty-ninth year by counting both the first and last years of the cycle.

The primary purpose of legislation such as that in today's text is not agricultural or economic, although there are indeed benefits to be had along those lines. Rather, the primary purpose is spiritual. God's people are being encouraged to place their faith in the Lord and to trust him as the giver of the land to provide for his people.

*What Do You Think?*

How will your neighbors see your life change as you rely more and more on God's provision?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In your approach to generosity
- In contentment
- In family life
- Other

Sadly, what follows in the Old Testament record is the account of a people who repeatedly disobey God's commands. When the people of the southern kingdom of Judah are taken into exile, [2 Chronicles 36:21](#) states the land enjoyed Sabbath rests while lying desolate—rests presumably denied before the exile by the disobedience of God's people.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Old Testament Jubilee**

Did the Israelites ever practice jubilee as a nation? We don't have any firm evidence that they did ([Isaiah 37:30](#) is a possible reference to jubilee ideas). Although

the generation that followed Moses rebelled against God ([Judges 2:10-13](#)), the lack of reference to jubilee in the historical narratives of the Old Testament does not mean that jubilee was not practiced. That would be an argument from silence. We simply do not know.

Yet we do know that the prophets appealed to the jubilee ideal figuratively with reference to the coming kingdom of God. An example is [Isaiah 61:1](#), where the Hebrew word translated *freedom* is the same word translated as *liberty* in [Leviticus 25:10](#) (the only other places where this word is used are [Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17](#); [Ezekiel 46:17](#)).

### B. New Testament Jubilee

When one considers what the Year of Jubilee signified for God’s people in the Old Testament, it is not difficult to see a reference to a new jubilee in Jesus’ declared intent “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free,” as he quoted from [Isaiah 61](#) in [Luke 4:18](#).

Jesus is the one who has made it possible for human beings, separated from God because of sin, to come home, to return to where we belong—with the Lord. The “liberty” of this jubilee is the freedom from sin that Jesus brought about by defeating the devil and releasing us from bondage to him (see [Hebrews 2:14, 15](#)).

The jubilee that Jesus inaugurated at his first coming will reach its ultimate fulfillment and consummation when he returns. At that time a trumpet will sound ([1 Thessalonians 4:16](#); compare [Leviticus 25:9](#)), and all Christians will be gloriously and finally liberated from the curse and the brokenness of sin—to dwell with our rightful owner in his home forever.

A jubilee for eternity!

#### *What Do You Think?*

What steps can you take to help your fellow Christians live more fully as beneficiaries of Jesus’ jubilee?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- In congregational worship settings
- In Bible class settings
- In fellowship settings
- Other

### C. Prayer

Our Father, we acknowledge that true freedom comes only when we follow your commandments. Help us to treat your Word as the ultimate authority, to follow your Son as Lord, and to depend on your Spirit for the power to live holy lives before the world. We pray in the name of the one who set us free. Amen.

### D. Thought to Remember

View people and possessions as God does.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Distribute handouts (you prepare) of the poem below, which is “No Man Is an Island,” by John Donne (1573-1631).

No man is an island entire of itself; every man  
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;  
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe  
is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as  
well as any manner of thy friends or of thine  
own were; any man’s death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind.  
And therefore never send to know for whom  
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

Invite a volunteer to read the poem aloud, and then write on the board, “No man is an island.” Talk about what this statement means, and challenge students to give examples from their own lives when they have seen this to be true.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Who Would I Trust?” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Have students work individually to decide whom to trust in various situations. Afterward, read each statement and let volunteers share the names they listed.

After either activity say, “None of us lives totally on our own. To flourish, we must show trust in others, trust that sometimes involves risk. One key part of the Jewish law demonstrates this type of trust and risk.”

### Into the Word

Say: “Putting one’s trust in God is not a mere mental exercise. It is following God’s commands, even when those commands seem to violate common sense or endanger one’s well-being. God’s commands to observe a periodic Sabbath Year and a Year of Jubilee fall into that category.”

Divide the class into three groups. The groups should read their assigned Bible texts and come up with objections that may have been voiced by the people of Israel concerning those commands. (Possible objections are listed in italics.)

*Group 1—Leviticus 25:1-5*

*Why does land need rest anyway? It's just dirt!*

*It's my property; I'll do what I want with it!*

*Isn't this just promoting laziness? Why should someone who is willing to work sacrifice a year of income?*

*Group 2—Leviticus 25:6, 7, 20-22*

*What will keep me from starving if the land does not produce enough food in these special years?*

*Faith in God is fine, but shouldn't I take responsibility to provide for myself and my family?*

*If there is a food shortage in one of these special years, why should I give some of the food to my servants and animals?*

*Group 3—Leviticus 25:8-12, 23, 24*

*These people are my servants because they owed me money. I am supposed to forgive that debt? How unfair!*

*Wait a minute. I worked hard to buy more land to provide for my security and to pass it on to my children. I am supposed to give up what I worked a lifetime to earn?*

*What I worked for is mine. No one has the right to tell me to give it away!*

After groups have finished, allow them to share their findings and objections. Point out how controversial these commands are. Yet by following them, the Israelites would have grown in their trust for God as well as their compassion for their countrymen who had difficult years.

## **Into Life**

Challenge students to talk about ways they could celebrate a type of jubilee year in their own lives. Distribute lengths of streamers and have students write on the streamers different words or Bible verses that remind them to trust and thank the Lord.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the "Remember and Rest" activity for students to complete.