

Dr. Don Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds,

Session 7, Jubilee

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Okay, so today we are diving deep into something that you've probably heard of, but maybe don't totally get. The idea of jubilee in the Bible. Yeah, the jubilee year.

It's like debt canceled, land resting, and freedom for folks in servitude. It is. And even today, it's kind of radical.

You know, we're going to use pieces of a lecture by Dr. Donald Fowler, some Old Testament backgrounds, to like really unpack this. Okay. He brings up some surprising stuff.

Yeah, the jubilee year. It's definitely one of those things that's like weirdly familiar and also totally out of left field for most people today. So let's like start with the basics.

Right. What exactly was a jubilee year in ancient Israel? So it had these three main parts. Okay.

First, any debts between Israelites would be completely wiped out. Gone. Gone.

Yeah. Then all the land had to lie fallow, so no farming for a whole year. Wow.

And third, anyone who had entered into servitude, they were set free. Okay. So hang on.

You're saying that slavery back then wasn't about race? Exactly. In ancient Israel, being a slave was mainly an economic thing. Okay.

Like imagine a farmer, bad harvests, facing bankruptcy. Right. No safety net back then.

So selling yourself or someone in your family into servitude to another Israelite was a way to survive, a desperate one. Yeah, that's a tough thought. Yeah.

So how common was this kind of economic servitude in the ancient world? Pretty common. Yeah. Not just Israel; a lot of societies.

Interesting. And this brings us to a cool connection that Dr. Fowler makes. There's evidence that this biblical jubilee thing comes from an older practice in Mesopotamia; they had debt releases too.

So other cultures were doing similar stuff? What were those Mesopotamian releases like? Well, they were kind of similar to the jubilee, at least the debt cancellation part. These releases, new kings would proclaim them. It was their way of creating what they called a righteous order.

And it's interesting because that exact phrase, righteous order, it's in the Bible too, describing jubilee. Wow. That's pretty strong, that connection.

So we got both the Mesopotamians and the Israelites with these debt releases. Yeah. But why was it the king's job to make this happen? Why the king? So in both cultures, the king was like the top dog.

Right. Owned all the land, had the power to do these big economic things. Yeah.

It showed their power. Yeah. But also their kindness and justice.

So bringing this back to the Bible. Right. If God is the ultimate king of Israel, then him setting up jubilee makes sense.

Makes total sense. It's a powerful way for him to take care of his people. Absolutely.

Jubilee wasn't just some random economic policy. It was God showing he's king and wanting a just and caring society. It's like a safety net, but from God, built into their world.

I'm starting to see how radical this idea really was, but here's what's bugging me. If jubilee was so important to God's plan for Israel. Right.

Why didn't they actually follow it? Did they ever really do it fully? That's a great question. And Dr. Fowler talks about this. The evidence says that even though God commanded it, they probably never really did the Jubilee fully.

Really? Why not? It seems like a brilliant system. Right. You'd think they'd be all over that reset button every 50 years.

Dr. Fowler thinks maybe part of the problem was that they didn't have one leader after Joshua died. Oh. Joshua, the leader after Moses.

Right. For a few hundred years, the Israelites didn't have a king. Wow.

And the book of Judges, it says that back then it was like every man did what was right in his own eyes. So chaos. Pretty much.

And without someone strong to enforce it, jubilee just kind of went away. Seems that way. Yeah.

By the time kings came back, it was probably too messy to bring back such a radical economic thing. That's true. I wonder how different things would have been if they had made it work.

Yeah. But even if they weren't doing jubilee exactly as it was laid out, did the idea still mean anything to them? Like, did it still shape their thinking at all? Oh, totally. Okay.

The ideals of jubilee, they kept showing up, especially in what the prophets were saying. They were always railing against the same injustices that jubilee was supposed to stop. Like the rich taking advantage of the poor, powerful folks pushing around the weak, land being grabbed up unfairly by a few people.

It's like the prophets were showing Israelite society a mirror. Like, hey, remember this awesome system God gave you? You're not living up to it. What happened to caring for the vulnerable and giving everyone a fair shot? Yeah, that's a good way to put it.

Yeah. They wanted people to remember God's vision for a just and equal society. And that vision, it was all wrapped up in jubilee.

Right. And what's really interesting is that this whole theme of jubilee- the debt release, the land restored, the oppressed freed- it's all like perfectly shown in Jesus. Wait, hold on.

Are you saying there's a link between Jesus and jubilee? That's not something you hear every day. It might surprise you, but it's right there in the gospels. Okay.

Think about how Jesus starts his whole ministry thing. Okay. Walks into the synagogue, opens up the scroll of Isaiah the prophet.

Right. And reads this passage that talks about, guess what? The year of jubilee. No way.

Yeah. Luke chapter four, verse 18, Jesus says, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he's anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Whoa. You're right. When you put it like that, it's totally describing jubilee.

Yeah. Freedom for prisoners, good news for the poor. It's all there.

Yeah. Are you saying that Jesus thought he was like making jubilee happen? It's a strong interpretation, and a lot of scholars agree. Wow.

Jesus's whole thing was about bringing freedom and making things right, both spiritually and like in real life. Yeah. He was healing sick people, calling out the religious leaders, talking about the kingdom of God, and that kingdom, it's a place where the last is first, the first is last.

Right. In a way, he was offering a new jubilee, one that went beyond just money and society to get to the heart of being human. Okay.

My mind is blown. Yeah. I always thought of jubilee as this old economic policy, like a cool history thing.

Yeah. But you're saying it's so much bigger. It is.

It's like this thread through the whole Bible leading up to Jesus. You got it. Wow.

And there's another cool connection Dr. Fowler talks about. Oh. Even the word shepherd, the one we always think about with Jesus, is tied to the idea of release in old Mesopotamia.

Wait, what? Shepherd connection? Tell me more. Remember those Mesopotamian kings? Right. Claiming debt releases to make a righteous order.

Yeah. Well, they often use this image of a shepherd leading and taking care of his sheep. Okay.

To describe what they were doing. Interesting. It was a way of saying, look, we got to protect and provide for our people just like a shepherd does for his sheep.

So the shepherd was like a symbol of good leadership. Exactly. Someone who puts the needs of their people first.

Yeah. Interesting. And the Israelites, they really connected with this image.

In the Old Testament, God himself is often called a shepherd, guiding and protecting his people. And of course, Jesus calls himself the good shepherd, the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Wow.

It's powerful connecting Jesus to this old tradition of righteous leadership and caring. It's amazing how it all fits together. Kings, shepherds, jubilee.

Yeah. We're all part of this big story about God wanting justice, freedom, and making things right. Yeah.

And Jesus, he's at the center of it all, showing those ideals like no king on earth ever could. Well said. Yeah.

It makes you wonder if these old jubilee principles, these ideas of justice and compassion. Yeah. If they could teach us something today in our modern world.

That's what I keep coming back to. Jubilee feels so relevant even thousands of years later. Yeah.

Debt forgiveness, caring for the environment, social safety nets. We're dealing with these things right now. We are.

Could jubilee give us a new perspective, a different way to approach these tough problems? It's a question worth thinking about. It is. But before we jump ahead to what it means for us today, we need to look closer at what Dr. Fowler calls the Sabbatarian nature of jubilee.

It helps us get the deeper meaning of this practice for both the ancient Israelites and for us now. Sabbatarian nature. Okay.

Now you've got me curious. Yeah. Let's dive into that.

What did the ancient Israelites' practice of the Sabbath have to do with jubilee? Well, think about the Sabbath. Okay. The seventh day of rest that God made way back at creation.

The original me time, but commanded by God. Everyone needs a break. For sure.

And the jubilee year, with its focus on rest and restoration for both the land and the people, is basically an extension of that Sabbath idea. So you're saying it's like a super Sabbath for the whole community. Exactly.

They see the connection. Just like God rested on the seventh day, the land was supposed to rest every seventh year. Right.

And then every 50 years, the whole economic and social system got a total reset with jubilee. Wow. It was this beautiful cycle of rest and renewal built right into how their society worked.

But it wasn't just about physical rest, was it? There's a deeper spiritual side to Sabbath and maybe to jubilee too. You're right. Right.

The Sabbath and jubilee too, they were a big reminder that everything belongs to God. We don't really own our land, our stuff, not even our own lives. Right.

It's all a gift from God, given to us to manage wisely and fairly. So jubilee was a way of saying, okay, God, we remember you're in control. We're letting go of our need to always be producing and striving.

Exactly. Powerful. That understanding that God is ultimately in charge changes how we treat each other and the world around us.

I'm starting to get that. Yeah. It's like Jubilee is built in to remind us to live right with God, with each other, and with the land.

Yeah. It's about resetting our priorities and remembering what really matters. You got it.

Yeah. And it's not just about resting from work. It's about letting go of things, trusting that God will provide.

That's a powerful message, especially in our world today where we're always striving, acquiring, and consuming. Maybe we could all use a little bit of jubilee in our lives. I think you're right.

Yeah. What if we tried these jubilee principles today? Okay. What would it look like to forgive debts as a whole society? Wow.

What if we took caring for the environment as seriously as the Israelites took the Sabbath? Yeah. What if we put the wellbeing of those who are struggling first? Right. Made sure everyone had what they needed to thrive.

Those are some big questions. They are. But they're the kind that can lead to real change.

Yeah. And that's what I love about these deep dives. Yeah.

They don't just give us information. Right. They make us think differently about the world and where we fit in.

You said it. Yeah. And we might never see a full-on jubilee happening in our world today.

Right. But the ideas behind it, they can still inspire us to work for a world that's more, just more compassionate and more sustainable. This has been an incredible journey.

And I feel like I get this whole jubilee thing in a new way now. And we've barely scratched the surface. Wow.

There's so much more to discover. Right. But for now, let's leave our listeners with this thought.

Okay. What if the ideas of jubilee, debt forgiveness, caring for the environment, and a strong safety net, what if those are the keys to fixing poverty, inequality, and the damage we're doing to the planet? Something to think about. It is.

And maybe a call to action. Perfectly said. Yeah.

That's all we have for today's deep dive into the world of jubilee. Okay. But the conversation doesn't have to end here.

Right. We encourage you to keep exploring these ideas. Think about what they mean for you and your community.

Yeah. And maybe, just maybe, start imagining what a modern-day jubilee could look like. That's a good idea.

Until next time, keep diving deep. Keep diving deep. Oh, absolutely.

Yeah. The ideals of jubilee, they didn't just vanish. They kept coming up, especially in what the prophets were saying.

Yeah. They were always like railing against the same things jubilee was supposed to fix. Yeah.

The rich taking advantage of the poor, powerful folks pushing around the weak. All that land being gobbled up by a few. Yeah.

Is it like those prophets were holding up a mirror, right, to the Israelites and saying, hey, remember that amazing system God gave you? You're not living up to it. Exactly. What happened to taking care of those who were struggling? Making sure everyone has a fair chance.

Yeah. That's a good way to put it. Yeah.

They wanted people to get back to God's vision, you know, for a just and equal society. Right. And that vision.

It was all about jubilee. And here's the thing. This whole theme of jubilee, the debt release, the land restored, freedom for the oppressed.

It's like it all comes together perfectly in Jesus. Wait, are you serious? A link between Jesus and jubilee. Now that's not something you hear every day.

It might surprise you, but it's all right there in the gospels. Okay. Just think about how Jesus kicks off his whole ministry.

Okay. He walks right into that synagogue, opens up the scroll of Isaiah, the prophet. Right.

And reads this passage. And guess what it's about? The year of jubilee. No way.

Yeah. Luke chapter four, verse 18: Jesus reads, The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.

To set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. You're right. When you put it like that, it is like a straight-up description of jubilee, freedom for those held captive, good news for the poor.

It's all there. It is. Yeah.

So are you saying that Jesus saw himself as like the fulfillment of jubilee? It's a powerful way to look at it. And a lot of scholars agree with that. Wow.

See, Jesus's whole deal was about bringing freedom, making things right, both spiritually and like in real life. Yeah. He healed the sick, challenged the religious leaders, and talked about the kingdom of God and that kingdom.

Yeah. It's where those who are last are now first, and the first are last. It's like he was offering a new kind of jubilee, one that went beyond just economics and social structures, you know, getting right to the heart of what it means to be human.

Okay. My mind is officially blown. I always saw a jubilee as this old economic policy, a fascinating piece of history.

Yeah. But you're saying it's so much bigger. It is.

It's this thread running through the whole Bible leading up to Jesus. You got it. Wow.

And there's another cool connection that Dr. Fowler brings up. What's that? Even the word shepherd, the one we always associate with Jesus, ties back to this idea of release in ancient Mesopotamia. Hold on.

A shepherd connection. Now I'm intrigued. Tell me more.

Remember we talked about those Mesopotamian kings proclaiming debt releases to create a righteous order? Yeah. Well, they often use this image of a shepherd. Right.

Leading and caring for his flock. Right. To describe their own role.

You know, it was like them saying, look, we got to protect and provide for our people just like a shepherd does for his sheep. So the shepherd was a symbol of good leadership. Someone who puts the needs of their people first.

Yeah. Interesting. And this image, it resonated deeply with the Israelites.

In the Old Testament, God himself is often described as a shepherd guiding and protecting his people. Right. And then of course, you've got Jesus calling himself the good shepherd.

Right. The one who's willing to lay down his life for his sheep. Powerful stuff.

It connects Jesus to this ancient tradition of righteous leadership, of compassionate care. It's amazing how it all comes together. Kingship, shepherding, jubilee.

It is. They're all part of this huge story about God wanting justice, liberation, and setting things right. Absolutely.

And Jesus, he's right at the center of it all, showing those ideals like no earthly king ever could. You said it perfectly. Yeah.

Makes you wonder, doesn't it? If these old jubilee principles, these ideas of justice and compassion, could they teach us something for today, for our world? That's what I keep thinking about. Jubilee just feels so relevant even now, thousands of years later. I agree.

Debt forgiveness, caring for the environment, social safety nets. Yeah. We're dealing with all of that right now.

We are. Could jubilee offer us a new perspective, a different way to tackle these huge problems? It's a question worth thinking about. Definitely.

But before we jump ahead to what it might mean for us now, I think we need to take a closer look at something Dr. Fowler calls the Sabbatarian nature of jubilee. Okay. It's key to understanding this whole practice on a deeper level for both the ancient Israelites and us today.

Sabbatarian nature. Okay, now you've really got me curious. Yeah.

What did the ancient Israelites' practice of Sabbath have to do with jubilee? Well, think about the Sabbath for a second. Okay. The seventh day of rest that God established way back at creation.

Exactly. The original me time, divinely ordained. Right.

Everyone needs a break. Absolutely. And jubilee, with all its focus on rest and restoration for both the land and the people, is basically extending that whole Sabbath idea.

So it's like a super Sabbath, right? For the entire community. I'm starting to see the connection. Just like God rested on that seventh day, the land was supposed to rest every seventh year.

Right. And then boom, every 50 years, the whole economic and social system got a total reset with jubilee. Wow.

It was a beautiful cycle, huh? Rest and renewal built right into their society. It was. But it wasn't just about taking a break physically, was it? Feels like there's something deeper there, something spiritual to both Sabbath and jubilee.

You're right on the money with that. Yeah. The Sabbath and jubilee, by extension, were a powerful reminder.

Everything ultimately belongs to God. We're not the real owners of our land or stuff, not even our lives. It's all a gift from God entrusted to us to manage wisely and justly.

So jubilee was a way of acknowledging that God's in control of everything, saying, okay, God, we get it. We're taking a step back, recognizing that you're running the show. We're letting go of this need to constantly produce and strive and acquire.

Yeah. And that has big implications for how we treat each other and, well, the world around us. I can see that.

It's like Jubilee is this built-in reminder to live the right way with God, with each other, and with the land. That's it. It's about hitting reset on our priorities, remembering what really matters.

You got it. And it's not just about stopping our work. It's about letting go, trusting God to provide.

That's a powerful message, especially now when we're always pushing ourselves. Right. Always trying to get more and more stuff.

Yeah. Maybe we could all use a little bit of jubilee in our own lives. I think so.

What if we actually applied these jubilee principles to how we live today? Okay. Yeah. What would it look like if we forgave debts as a whole society? What if we took caring for the environment as seriously as those Israelites took the Sabbath? What if we put those who are struggling first, made sure everyone had what they need to do well? Those are some seriously challenging questions.

They are. But they're the kind that can make real change happen. Exactly.

That's what I love about these deep dives. We too. They don't just give us facts.

They change how we think about the world and our place in it. You got it. And we might never see a full-blown jubilee happening today.

Probably not. But the ideas behind it, they can still push us to work for a better world. A better world, how? One that's more just, more compassionate, more sustainable.

This has been incredible. I feel like I understand Jubilee in a whole new way now. It's been a journey, and we've only just scratched the surface.

I know. There's so much more to discover, right? So much more. But for now, let's leave our listeners with this thought.

Okay. What if those jubilee ideas- debt forgiveness, taking care of the environment, a strong safety net for those in need- are the answers to fixing poverty, inequality, and all the damage we're doing to the planet? It's something to think about. And maybe, just maybe, it's a call to action.

Perfectly said. That's all the time we have for today's deep dive into the world of Jubilee. But this conversation doesn't have to stop here.

It doesn't. We encourage you to keep exploring these ideas, what they might mean for your life, your community, and maybe, just maybe, start to imagine what a modern-day jubilee could actually look like. Until next time, keep diving deep.

Keep diving.