

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 25: 01-07

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Leviticus chapter 25. We will read verses 01-07 today.

Leviticus chapters 23 to 25 focus on the theme of the Lord's appointed feasts. Chapter 23 records the weekly Sabbath day and the seven annual feasts. Chapter 24 reminds us of the purpose of these feasts: God desires that people find true rest. True rest comes from having God's light illuminating within, His word supplying life, honoring God's name outwardly, and living in harmony with others. Chapter 25 then describes feasts observed in units of years; after six years comes the seventh year, the Sabbath year, and after fifty years comes the Year of Jubilee.

From a practical perspective, the Sabbath emphasizes personal rest before God. In the Old Testament, the Israelites observed the Sabbath; however, in the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself became the Lord of the Sabbath, replacing it. Yet, Jesus also instituted the Lord's Table, commanding New Testament saints to break bread and drink the cup in remembrance of Him on the Lord's Day. Therefore, whether it is the Sabbath or the Lord's Day, the focus is on the rest of each person belonging to God before Him.

The seven annual feasts emphasize a collective rest before God, involving both the Israelites in the Old Testament and the saints in the New Testament. The first group includes three feasts: the Passover, the Feast of Firstfruits, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. In the Old Testament, these feasts commemorate God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. In the New Testament, these three feasts represent the church's experience of corporate redemption. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all who believe in Him are united with Him in death and resurrection. By the indwelling Holy Spirit, they are enabled to live a sinless life.

The second group, the Feast of Pentecost, holds special significance. Traditionally, the Israelites would read the Book of Ruth during this feast to remember Ruth, a Moabite woman who followed her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. While gleaning in the fields, she met Boaz, a wealthy landowner, and later married him, becoming an ancestor of King David. For New Testament saints, Pentecost has profound meaning. On the Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit was poured out, empowering the disciples to preach the Gospel and begin establishing the church. This marked the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the establishment of churches among them, a work that continues to this day.

The third group of three feasts is directed toward the Israelites. Today, the vast majority of Israelites are still awaiting the Messiah. This situation will persist until the end of the age. Before Christ's return, the Feast of Trumpets will call the people of Israel together, and they will be sealed according to their twelve tribes. Those sealed Israelites will be preserved during the Great Tribulation. Toward the end of the Great Tribulation, the most severe disaster for the Israelites will be the nations rising against them in battle. When they have nowhere to escape, Jesus Christ will descend on the Mount of Olives and provide a way of deliverance for them. At that time, the Israelites will recognize that the Messiah is Jesus, whom they pierced. Then the entire congregation of Israel will repent, fulfilling the Day of Atonement. Following this will be the Feast of Tabernacles, a foreshadowing of the millennial kingdom, where Israel will become a kingdom of priests, leading all nations to worship God.

Thus, the seven annual feasts represent the corporate rest of God's people before Him, encompassing both the Israelites and New Testament saints. For the Israelites, this is reflected in lighting the lamps and eating the showbread in the sanctuary, while for New Testament saints, it is seen in exalting the Lord in the church and living a life of love among brothers and sisters. Both the Sabbath and the seven annual feasts emphasize rest, with an individual aspect and a corporate aspect. However, the scope of the Sabbath year extends even further. Its focus is not on humanity itself but on the environment in which people live. Since God is the God of the whole earth, after redeeming mankind, He also intends to redeem the land.

Verse 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, then the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord.’”

At the beginning, the phrase "The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying:" specifically mentions Mount Sinai, indicating that the statutes and ordinances that follow were also given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. This detail emphasizes that these commands are part of the divine law given at that sacred location. The instructions that follow are so challenging to implement that people might set them aside or assign them abstract meanings, implying that they are not to be taken literally. To counter this tendency, God explicitly included the reference to Mount Sinai to affirm that these statutes and ordinances are part of His law delivered there. God instructed Moses to tell the Israelites that once they entered the land of Canaan, not only were they to observe rest before God during the annual feasts, but even the land that God had given them was to observe rest before Him. This declaration is remarkable—how can the land observe rest before God? The land cannot actively observe rest unless God’s people fully obey His commands. Only then can the land observe rest.

Next, we need to ask: why must the land observe rest? Is the land not currently at rest? In Genesis 3:17-18, after Adam and Eve sinned by eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden, the scripture reveals, “Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field.” From this, we see that when man lost rest, the land also lost rest. Therefore, God ordained that when the Israelites entered the good land, they were to allow the land to observe rest before Him.

Verse 3: “Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit;”

Here it states that man must toil diligently to reap a harvest. For six years, people are to sow their fields; for six years, they are to tend their vineyards, and God will

bless the land. Their harvests will not only sustain them but also provide an abundance, which they are to store up.

Verse 4: “but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard.”

In the seventh year, the land is to observe rest, as ordained by God. In the seventh year, people are not to sow their fields or tend their vineyards. The Sabbath year is for the land to rest, and human labor would disrupt the land's rest. Therefore, "you shall not sow your field, nor prune your vineyard." This is a great challenge for people, as the land is the place of their labor and the source of their harvest. To rest for a year and give up the harvest for that year is a huge test for man's greedy nature. A year of rest, depending entirely on God's grace for provision, is a great test of faith.

What should people do during this year of rest? As mentioned earlier, rest before God is positive and active; it is not merely physical rest. It involves laying aside external labor, but within, it is about kindling the lamp of life and regularly tending to it. At the same time, fresh showbread should be placed in the soul, and the old showbread should be eaten, symbolizing the subjective experience of God's Word. In this way, people can experience breakthrough growth before God.

Verse 5: “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.”

The crops left in the fields will grow by themselves in the seventh year, and vineyards that are not tended will continue to produce grapes. Since these crops and grapes grow by themselves, not through human labor, "people shall not harvest the crops, nor pick the grapes." People are not to violate the land's rest. Once the Israelites entered the promised land, they were to divide the land by

tribes, and each household would receive an inheritance. In name, people had ownership of the land, but in the seventh year, the crops and grapes that grew on the land and in the vineyards under their ownership did not belong to them. The true ownership of the land is God's; human ownership is merely the right to use the land. In the seventh year, when the land produces without human toil, it does not belong to those who have the right to use it. This concept comes from God, who wants people to transcend their narrow, selfish views and experience God's generosity and mercy.

Verse 6: “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,”

The ownership of the land belongs to God. Since the land produces naturally without human labor, the produce should rightfully belong to God. God then gives these products to those in need. This certainly includes "the owner of the inheritance, as well as his servants, maids, hired workers, and the foreigner who dwells in the land." In other words, all those in need are invited to partake. No one is allowed to harvest the crops on a large scale or pick the grapes, as that would be considered work, which goes against the true purpose of the Sabbath year.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is God's social security system for the Israelites. For the poor and the vulnerable, God grants them the right to partake in the produce of the land with dignity. However, they still need to exert some effort to gather what grows, which is far superior to the social welfare systems in Western countries today.

Verse 7: “for your livestock and the beasts that are in your land—all its produce shall be for food.”

Here we see that God not only cares for human needs but also for the animals and creatures of the earth. They too are allowed to partake in the produce of the land. We see that for the land to rest, people must first be freed from their greed and selfishness. Understanding that the ownership of the land belongs to God, the crops and grapes grown from six years of labor belong to the workers; but in the seventh year, during the Sabbath year, the land's produce, which grows on its own, belongs to God. God intends to use this to supply the needs of those in need, even providing for the animals and wild creatures.

In today's society, some schools and companies have a Sabbatical system, where after working for six years, one can take a year off. Most people use this year to further their education or develop new career skills, but this is still work and differs from the Sabbath year ordained by God. The Sabbath year is a time when God wants people to learn and allow the land to rest. If people do not rest, the land cannot rest. For people to rest, they must overcome their greed and selfishness, following God's arrangement for the land to have its rest. Although God established the law of the Sabbath year, there is no record in the Old Testament of the Israelites observing this law. Perhaps we can say that the Israelites never truly kept the commandment of the Sabbath year.

When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, they never truly possessed the land as God had given it to them. After the period of the judges, during the kingdom era, and until David replaced Saul, the Israelites went through many battles to fully occupy the land promised by God. Even in the history of the kings, there is no record of the Israelites observing the Sabbath year. This shows that, despite the commandments given by God, the Israelites struggled to follow God's law fully, particularly the Sabbath year, which required trusting God for provision and putting aside their own labor and greed.

As a result, in 586 BC, the southern kingdom of Judah fell into the hands of the Babylonian Empire. Later, the scribe Ezra, while compiling the history of Israel, specifically mentions in 2 Chronicles 36:21, "to fulfill the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah: 'The land enjoyed its Sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the

Lord.'" This indicates that God allowed Israel to be exiled for 70 years, during which the temple was destroyed, and the Israelites were unable to worship God. This period of exile served as a consequence for the failure to observe the Sabbath years, showing how God's commands, when neglected, lead to judgment and a forfeiting of blessings.

Historically, we know that the kingdom of Judah fell in 586 BC, and after the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire took over. In 516 BC, the Second Temple was completed, exactly 70 years later. This fulfillment of the prophecy made by the prophet Jeremiah is significant. Ezra explains that God allowed the destruction of the temple for 70 years because the land could not enjoy its Sabbaths. More accurately, it was because the Israelites had failed to let the land rest. As a result, God required the Israelites to make up for those 70 missed years of Sabbath rest, ensuring that the land received its due rest. This event highlights the seriousness of God's commandments regarding rest for both people and the land, and how failure to observe them results in divine judgment and restoration.

Now we ask: how many years passed before there were 70 years of rest? We know that according to God's command, every 50 years there should be 7 years of rest, plus a year of Jubilee. Therefore, every 50 years, there should be 8 years of rest; every 100 years, there should be 16 years of rest; every 400 years, there would be 64 years of rest, plus an additional 6 years, making it 70 years. This requires an additional 42 years, totaling 442 years. The Israelites needed 70 years of rest. Since the Kingdom of Judah fell in 586 BC, counting back 442 years brings us to 1028 BC.

Another calculation method: we know that the Jewish year consists of 360 days, while the solar year consists of 365 days. 442 Jewish years is equivalent to 436 solar years. If we count back 436 years from 586 BC, we arrive at 1024 BC. Therefore, it was roughly between 1024 and 1028 BC that Samuel anointed David. We can say that from the time Samuel anointed David until the destruction of the southern kingdom of Judah, the Israelites never observed the sabbatical year. As a result, they owed the land 70 years of rest. God then reclaimed that rest at once by allowing the Israelites to be taken into captivity, and the land became desolate. The land's desolation naturally provided the rest it was owed.

In the following verses, we will see that the sabbatical year is merely a training for the Israelites, enabling the land to rest. God's true purpose is to bring about the Year of Jubilee. In the Year of Jubilee, everything is to be reset, as if there is a new beginning. This is a special grace God gives to His people.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We all admit that it is indeed difficult for us to rest. For us individually, You have established the Sabbath or the Lord's Day; for the community, You have set up seven festivals each year; and for the land, You have set the sabbatical year every seven years. Lord, help us recognize that You are a God who values rest. Not only must people find rest, but the church must find rest, and our environment must also find rest. Grant us the grace of rest and help the church I belong to enjoy communal rest. We pray in the holy name of Jesus Christ.