

**GOD RESHAPES  
THE PEOPLE**  
Sabbath, Festivals,  
and Jubilee

 **MAIN IDEA:**

The stacked practices of weekly Sabbath, regular festivals and the every 49-years Jubilee were intended to create a societal structure that was very different from life in Egypt, and from the nations around them, marked by rest, remembrance, joy, generosity and justice. As you'll see below, these 3 connect to a many key parts of the larger biblical story.

 **KEY NUMBER - 7**

What's with all these sevens? As we've seen before in the GBBW, numbers in the Bible are usually symbolic in some way. Seven is no exception. In Biblical times, seven was a symbol for completion or fullness. The world being created in seven days, for example, was not the author of Genesis giving us a history lesson. It was their way of showing that God had finished the work. Creation was complete, and part of the completion was God stopping from Their work and resting.

Life, then, is not complete with only work. It is only complete when the seventh day, the day of rest, is included. The sevens in these stories are to show that Sabbath and Jubilee are not to be seen as add-ons or optional, they are key parts, and Israel's life as a community would be incomplete without them.

 **HOW WOULD THEY EAT IF THE LAND SABBATHS?**

If you let crops go to seed on their own, some portion of them will sprout on their own the next year. These non-planted crops are called "volunteers" and could have provided the people with grain while not requiring a proper planting and harvesting process.

 **CONNECTIONS - THE LAND**

When Israel enters the Promised Land, one of the first jobs is to divide up the land. This is the long, boring section that takes up the second half of the book of Joshua and consists of endless lists of place names and tribes, chapter after chapter. Yes, it's boring to read, but it's actually a really important moment. It's laying out God's intention of economic justice, wherein every family would have the means to support themselves, which in that time and place meant having their own land on which to grow food and raise livestock.

Jubilee is the way that intention was meant to be sustained in the real world where people fall on hard times, whether due to bad luck or bad choices. According to Jubilee, economic justice means giving families a new chance, restoring their land no matter why they lost it in the first place, so that no one person would have too much, and everyone would have enough.

## **CONNECTIONS - SABBATH**

The Jubilee year arises right out of the concept of Sabbath. When the Law gives the Sabbath to the Israelites so that they would have rhythms of work and rest, it makes clear that this rest is also meant for the servants and even the animals. They all are meant to have time for rest and play. The rhythms of God's goodness are for everybody. Then, even the land itself is given a sabbath every seventh year. The rhythms of God's goodness aren't just for everybody they are for everything, all of creation.

Then, added on top is the Jubilee year, the year after the seventh seven, when land is to be returned to the original owner's family. How is this related to Sabbath? The logic of both is based in trusting God to give us enough. We don't need to maximize productivity to guarantee we will have enough. We can rest. We don't need to hoard more and more land to guarantee we will have enough. We can return it to its original owners. And we will have enough, because of who God is. And, in so doing we will ensure that the original owner's too will have enough.

## **CONNECTIONS - EGYPT**

One place the Jubilee laws are laid out is Leviticus 25, and in the midst of them is this from verse 38: "I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God." Exodus is the reason why the people would do such a ridiculous thing as give land back for free. After all, God set the people free from Egypt, and so sets up laws intended to prevent any of them from falling back into slavery. Our God is an exodus God, one who sets people free from oppression. And that means we are a jubilee people, who do what we can, even if it's as radical today as returning land to the original owner was back then, to make sure people can have life, freedom, dignity, joy. We don't ask questions about who deserves what, or whether they brought it on themselves, because our God doesn't ask those questions of us.

## **CONNECTIONS - JESUS**

"The Messiah set us free so that we could enjoy freedom!" Paul writes in Galatians 5:1. In Luke 4, Jesus stands up in the synagogue and reads from Isaiah that he is setting captives free and announcing the year of the Lord's special favor. While the word Jubilee is never used in the New Testament to describe what Jesus is doing, it's right there under the surface. Jubilee was about the forgiving of debts and restoring people to their rightful place as full members of the community of Israel, no matter what they had done to lose that status along the way. In the same way, Jesus was bringing about the ultimate restoration of all people to their rightful place as members of the family of God.