

The Day of Atonement and the Meaning of the Jubilee Year

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Every fifty years on the Day of Atonement, God commanded Old Testament Israel to observe the Jubilee year (Leviticus 25:8-10)¹. The primary themes of the Jubilee: liberty, redemption and restoration, were important for ancient Israel and are of even greater importance for modern Christians.

The Sabbatical Year

To better understand the timing of the Jubilee observance, and how it was kept, we need to look at what some call the "Sabbatical Year" or the "Land Sabbath." Every seven years the land was to rest, with no sowing or harvesting of crops, and pruning of vineyards. Whatever grew by itself in the fields or on the untended vines, Israel must not harvest. However, the people, especially the poor were permitted pick what they needed to eat from fields and vineyards (Leviticus 25:1-7; Exodus 23:10-11).

When to Observe the Jubilee

The land sabbaths played an important role in determining when to begin the Jubilee: "And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family" (Leviticus 25:8-10 All scriptures quoted are from the *New King James Version*, unless otherwise noted).

The Jubilee was also a land sabbath, in which Israel is to "neither sow nor reap what grows of its own accord, nor gather the grapes of [their] untended vine. For it is the Jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat its produce from the field" (Leviticus 25:11-12). This results in two land sabbaths in a row, the forty-ninth and fiftieth years.

What Happens During the Jubilee

During the Jubilee land sold outside a family during the previous fifty years, returned to the family who originally owned it. Those who sold themselves into a type of indentured servitude also gained their freedom and returned home to their families: "And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family. . . . In this Year of Jubilee, each of you shall return to his possession. . . . And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you . . . he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee" (Leviticus 25:10, 13, 39-40).

¹ The name jubilee is derived from the Hebrew word *yobel* (H3104), which "literally means 'a ram's horn,' but the blowing of a ram's horn was so common as an introduction on special days of feasts and festivals that the term itself came to describe the joyous times and festivities it was signaling. This is especially true of the Year of Jubilee, a year of freedom, joy, and festivity that occurred every fiftieth year" (Carpenter, Eugene E. and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words*. Accordance electronic ed. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000).

Normally, Israelite indentured servants received their freedom after serving six years (Exodus 21:2-4; Deuteronomy 15:12-15, 18), liberty coming during the seventh year. Freedom did not come during the Sabbatical or Land Sabbath Year, unless these were an individual's seventh year of servitude. But during the Jubilee all Israelite indentured servants gain freedom regardless of whether it's their seventh year of services or not.

Regulations Governing the Jubilee

God told the Israelites not to use the Jubilee as an opportunity to take financial advantage of others: "And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you according to the number of the years of the crops. Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 25:14-17).

An Israelite or his family did not have to wait until the Jubilee year to regain control of the land they sold. They could redeem this property any time before the Jubilee: "The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with Me. And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land. If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold. Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession" (Leviticus 25:23-28).

The redemption of a house located in a walled city could happen anytime within a year of its sale. But after one year the sale became final, with the original owners having no further claim to the house, even during the Jubilee. However, the redemption of a house located in village, or in a city without walls could occur any time. With the house reverting to the original family during the Jubilee: "If a man sells a house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; within a full year he may redeem it. But if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to him who bought it, throughout his generations. It shall not be released in the Jubilee. However the houses of villages which have no wall around them shall be counted as the fields of the country. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the Jubilee" (Leviticus 25:29-31).

The regulations governing the sale of houses in Levitical cities were not the same as non-Levitical cities. A Levite cannot permanently sell his home. He can redeem the house any time after its sale, and during the Jubilee the house returns to the family of its original owner: "Nevertheless the cities of the Levites, and the houses in the cities of their possession, the Levites may redeem at any time. And if a man purchases a house from the Levites, then the house that was sold in the city of his possession shall be

released in the Jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their possession among the children of Israel. But the field of the common-land of their cities may not be sold, for it is their perpetual possession" (Leviticus 25:32-34).

As mentioned above, a poor Israelite who sells himself into indentured servitude must serve for six years or until the Jubilee, whichever comes first: "And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. And then he shall depart from you--he and his children with him--and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God" (Leviticus 25:39-43).

Non-Israelites slaves did not have the same right to the Jubilee liberty. They were permanent slaves: "And as for your male and female slaves whom you may have--from the nations that are around you, from them you may buy male and female slaves. Moreover you may buy the children of the strangers who dwell among you and their families who are with you, which they beget in your land; and they shall become your property. And you may take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to inherit them as a possession; they shall be your permanent slaves. But regarding your brethren, the children of Israel, you shall not rule over one another with rigor" (Leviticus 25:44-46).

An Israelite who sold himself to a non-Israelite had the right to receive redemption from a family member or even himself: "Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, after he is sold he may be redeemed again. One of his brothers may redeem him; or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; or anyone who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him; or if he is able he may redeem himself. Thus he shall reckon with him who bought him: The price of his release shall be according to the number of years, from the year that he was sold to him until the Year of Jubilee; it shall be according to the time of a hired servant for him. If there are still many years remaining, according to them he shall repay the price of his redemption from the money with which he was bought. And if there remain but a few years until the Year of Jubilee, then he shall reckon with him, and according to his years he shall repay him the price of his redemption. He shall be with him as a yearly hired servant, and he shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight. And if he is not redeemed in these years, then he shall be released in the Year of Jubilee--he and his children with him. For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" ((Leviticus 25:47-55).

In Leviticus 27:16-24 we find additional information on how during the Jubilee year, Israel was to redeem land previously dedicated to God. Also Numbers 36:1-13 discusses issues surrounding the Jubilee and the redemption of land inherited by women.

The Spiritual Meaning of the Jubilee

Having examined the Old Testament teachings about the Jubilee, we will now look at its spiritual meaning. This will allow us to better understand God's love and mercy.

Liberty from Sin

At the beginning of the Jubilee Israel was to "proclaim liberty throughout all the land to all its inhabitants" (Leviticus 25:10), with all Israelites held in servitude receiving liberation (verses 39-41). In Isaiah 61 we find a similar statement to proclaim liberty: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn" (Isaiah 61:1-2). The basis for this prophecy in Isaiah of the "acceptable year of the LORD," which is a time of liberty, is the Jubilee.²

At the beginning of his Galilean ministry, while speaking in the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus explains his role as God anointed one by quoting Isaiah 61:1-2: "Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, . . . So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.' Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:14-21).

In Luke 4, Jesus is speaking about the spiritual liberty he brings to those in captivity and oppression to sin. According to Jesus "whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34), but through his sacrifice, we have freedom from this slavery: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? . . . For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. . . . But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become

² The "acceptable year of the LORD" is commonly identified with the Jubilee. For example see "Jubilee," Robert B, Sloan, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, InterVarsity Press, 1992; and the note for Isaiah 61:1-3 in the *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, Zondervan Corporation, 1994.

slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:3-7, 17-22).

The Jubilee is a forerunner of the spiritual liberty that comes through Jesus. Not only does the Jubilee picture the spiritual liberty we now have in Christ. But it looks forward to Jesus' second coming, and the physical and spiritual liberty this brings.

Liberty from Captivity

As we have already seen, Jesus begins his public ministry quoting Isaiah 61:1-2, an applying these verses to himself (Luke 4:16-21). But, Isaiah 61 is a dual prophecy about Jesus' first and second comings. When looking at the context of chapter 61, it's clear we are dealing with events surrounding the coming messianic age. Which includes the physically freedom of Israelites held in captivity by Gentile nations.

During the end time, God punishes the Houses of Israel and Judah for their sins by sending them into national captivity. The following verses refer to this future captivity and eventual liberation. The prophet Jeremiah writes: "The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, 'Thus speaks the LORD God of Israel, saying: "Write in a book for yourself all the words that I have spoken to you. For behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that I will bring back from captivity My people Israel and Judah," says the LORD. "And I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. . . . For it shall come to pass in that day," Says the LORD of hosts, "That I will break his yoke from your neck, And will burst your bonds; Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God, And David their king, Whom I will raise up for them. Therefore do not fear, O My servant Jacob," says the LORD, "Nor be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar, And your seed from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet, And no one shall make him afraid. For I am with you," says the LORD, "to save you; Though I make a full end of all nations where I have scattered you, Yet I will not make a complete end of you. But I will correct you in justice, And will not let you go altogether unpunished"" (Jeremiah 30:1-3, 8-11).

According to the prophet Isaiah: "It shall come to pass in that day That the LORD will thresh, From the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; And you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem" (Isaiah 27:12-13). Notice that Israel's liberation begins when "the great trumpet will be blown." As previously discussed, the Jubilee year of liberation begins with the blowing of a trumpet (Leviticus 25:8-10).

Like the Jubilee, during the messianic age people will return to their ancestral homes. Jeremiah prophesies about Israel and Judah's future liberation and return to their ancient homeland: "At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts. In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers" (Jeremiah 3:17-18). The prophet writes of a time when "it shall no more be said, 'The LORD lives who

brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'The LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them.' For I will bring them back into their land which I gave to their fathers" (Jeremiah 16:14-15).

Jesus the Kinsman Redeemer

Redemption is a crucial part of the Jubilee. If an Israelite sold his land anytime before the fiftieth year one of his relatives or kinsman could redeem (buy back) his land. A kinsman could also redeem any Israelite from servitude before the Jubilee, if he had sold himself to a non-Israelite (Leviticus 25:23-28, 47-55). God is Israel's redeemer (Deuteronomy 15:15; 2 Samuel 7:23; Psalm 78:35; Isaiah 48:17). During the Jubilee God acts as Israel's kinsman redeemer, redeeming those in servitude, as well as lands sold outside the family.

The physical acts of redemption in the Old Testament, especially the Jubilee, point to the future redemption that comes through Jesus. As our older brother (Matthew 12:47-50; Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11, 17), Jesus is our relative or kinsman, redeeming us from sin. Paul writes that God "has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14). In the letter to the Hebrews we learn "Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:11-14). In Revelation Jesus is praised in a song declaring, "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9-10).

A Future Redemption

Isaiah 63:1-6 is a prophecy concerned with Jesus' second coming: "Who is this who comes from Edom, With dyed garments from Bozrah, This One who is glorious in His apparel, Traveling in the greatness of His strength?— 'I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? 'I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes. For the day of vengeance is in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, And I wondered That there was no one to uphold; Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me; And My own fury, it sustained Me. I have trodden down the peoples in My anger, Made them drunk in My fury, And brought down their strength to the earth'" (Isaiah 63:1-6). These verses are similar to the account of Jesus' coming described in Revelation 14:17-20; 19:11-21 and Zechariah 14:1-7, 12-15. Verse four of Isaiah sixty-three refers to "the year of My redeemed" or "My year of redemption" (*New American Standard Bible Updated*). This is a time of physical and

spiritual redemption beginning when Jesus intervenes in human affairs. Jesus' second coming ushers in a time of Jubilee, a "year of redemption" or the "day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

The New Testament further enhances our understanding of this future redemption. In Luke's account of the Olivet Discourse, Jesus mentions certain signs that will precede his second coming. He concludes by saying, "Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Luke 21:25-28). The apostle John records a vision of the future after the second coming, with Jesus, the "Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand. . . . who were redeemed from the earth. These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb" (Revelation 14:1-5). The apostle Paul, in comparing the suffering that believers were experiencing in this life now, to the future glory they will experience after Jesus return. Says, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:18-23).

To have a redeemed body means no longer having a mortal, natural flesh and blood body. But a body like the resurrected Jesus: spiritual, immortal, incorruptible and glorious. The apostle John writes that as the children of God, we know that when Jesus comes, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2). Paul tells the Philippians that when Jesus returns he, "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Philippians 3:20-21). In First Corinthians Paul provides us with a detailed description of this glorious body: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed-- in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Corinthians 15:42-54).

On this future "day of redemption" we will experience the ultimate Jubilee. With our physical bodies redeemed from death and decay, and changed into immortal spiritual

bodies. The Holy Spirit is now the seal or guarantee of this coming glorious redemption (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30).

Restoration

Jesus' second coming results in the "restoration of all things": "Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send Jesus Christ, who was preached to you before, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). Restoration, the returning of people and land to their original condition, is a major theme of the Jubilee (Leviticus 25:10, 13, 27-28, 41), and foreshadows the coming messianic restoration.

Isaiah provides us with a good description of the future restoration of the earth; as well as the restoration of those who are physically and spiritually weak: "The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them, And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose; It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice, Even with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, The excellence of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, The excellency of our God. Strengthen the weak hands, And make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, With the recompense of God; He will come and save you.' Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, And the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, And streams in the desert. The parched ground shall become a pool, And the thirsty land springs of water; In the habitation of jackals, where each lay, There shall be grass with reeds and rushes. A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray. No lion shall be there, Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it; It shall not be found there. But the redeemed shall walk there, And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, And come to Zion with singing, With everlasting joy on their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, And sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isaiah 35:1-10). Verses 9 and 10 speak of those the LORD (Jesus) "redeemed" and "ransomed." Two Jubilee themes discussed earlier. The coming kingdom age will be a time of the restoration for humanity and nature.

The Jubilee and the Day of Atonement

The events of the Day of Atonement as described in Leviticus 16, teach us about the true Jubilee of liberty, redemption and restoration that come through Jesus Christ. The Day of Atonement focuses on Jesus' role as our High Priest, and the atoning sacrifice who bears our sins.

Only on the Day of Atonement could the old covenant high priest enter the sanctuary's holy place (Leviticus 16:2-4, 12-16, 29-34; Hebrews 9:1-7). The high priest, is a type of Jesus who is now the true High Priest in heaven (Hebrews 2:17). As High Priest, Jesus entered the true holy place in heaven, to offer his blood for mankind's redemption (Ephesians 1:7; Hebrews 9:11-14, 23-28).

On the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, two goats taken "from the congregation of the children of Israel" had lots cast for them, with one goat chosen "for the LORD," the other "for the scapegoat." The high priest slays the LORD's goat, using its blood to "make atonement for himself, for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel" (Leviticus 16:5, 8-9, 15-19). This goat represents Jesus, whose blood brings atonement for sin. The apostle Paul says we "are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith" (Romans 3:24-25 *New Revised Standard Version*). The apostle John writes something similar: "The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. . . . and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. . . . In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:10 *New Revised Standard Version*).

Just as the LORD's goat is used to make atonement, so is the scapegoat used "to make atonement" (Leviticus 16:10). This scapegoat symbolizes Jesus who makes atonement for sin. The scapegoat shows us that making atonement includes more than just death and the shedding of blood. It includes bearing the sins of the people: "And when he [the High Priest] has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place, the tabernacle of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring the live goat. Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, concerning all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and shall send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a suitable man. The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness" (Leviticus 16:20-22). When Jesus was crucified not only did he shed blood (Colossians 1:20), he also "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24). As the scapegoat, sent away into the wilderness removes the sins of Israel, so Jesus "was manifested to take away our sins" (1 John 3:5). The Epistle to the Hebrews provides us with a commentary on meaning of the Day of Atonement. The author identifies Jesus' role as High Priest (Hebrews 9:11), as well as his role as the LORD's goat, whose blood makes forgiveness possible (verses 12-14, 23-26). The chapter ends by identifying Jesus' role as the sin bearing scapegoat: "So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9:28). Jesus' atoning sacrifice brings us the Jubilee of liberty, redemption, and restoration.

Conclusion

Every fifty years beginning on the Day of Atonement, Israel was to observe the Jubilee. It began with a trumpet blast: proclaiming liberty, redemption and restoration. We have seen what this special year meant for Old Testament Israel and what it means for modern Christians: liberty, redemption and restoration through the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ.