

SABBATIC YEAR VS YEAR OF RELEASE

Hebrew Servants Freed After 6 Years vs. The Sabbatic Year

Floyd Nolen Jones, Th.D., Ph.D.

Excerpt from Apples of Gold

“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” Proverbs 25:11

These three passages uniformly refer merely to a “seventh” year but do not use the term “Sabbatical” and thus should not be confused as though they are addressing the Sabbatical year. Other than footnote 1 below, the only other mention of a Hebrew bondservant regaining their freedom was every 50th year at Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–24; note vs. 25:40).

As to the “year of release” (Deu. 15:1-3), such was merely a *release* enjoined to *creditors* stating they may not exact any payment during the 7th year of the debt a Hebrew hired servant may owe him. Just as the land had rest that year, so the debtor also had financial *relief*, but the debt itself was *not cancelled*. Payment must be resumed the following year – it is a year of release, not cancellation.² A foreigner’s debt was not so released (vs. 3). Of course all debts were cancelled and all servants set free with their ancestral land returned to them at the beginning of the great year of Jubilee.

This clarifies what should have previously been an enigma. Were the Hebrew servants released every Sabbatical year, after the seventh Sabbatic year (i.e., the 49th year) who would have been left to be set free in the Jubilee year that immediately followed? All the Hebrews would already have been freed in the prior 49th year. Such would greatly diminish the anticipation and significance attendant with the Jubilee. Thus resolved, the apparent inconsistency of the two biblical laws ceases.

Accordingly, it is with the Hebrew servant’s freedom after six years service, as given in Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12, and the year of release (Deu. 15:1–3) that Jeremiah chapter 34 has to do and *not* with a Sabbatical year. Consequently, Jeremiah 34 does not have to be synchronized with the Sabbatic year 590 BC and that Sabbatical year does not have to correspond with the 9th year of Zedekiah (which was actually 588, not 590). Below are the relevant scriptures.

Exodus 21:2 If thou buy an Hebrew servant, **six years he shall serve**: and **in the seventh he shall go out free** for nothing.

3 If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.

4 If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself.

Exodus 23:10 And six years thou shalt sow **thy land**, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof:

11 But **the seventh year thou shalt let it rest** and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. (**Sabbatical year**)

² Proof: “at the *end* of every 7 years thou shalt make a release” (Deu. 15:1) compared to “6 years shall he serve and *in the 7th* he shall go out free” (Exo. 21:2) – these are different matters! Thus, if a Hebrew servant had worked off two years of his debt before the year of release he would still have to work four more years afterward for a total span of 7 years before his freedom. Indeed, a year of release or “relief” would always occur during any servants 6 year period of service. Deuteronomy 15:1-3 has nothing to do with freeing a Hebrew hired servant.

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Leviticus 25:2 Speak unto the children of Israel, & say unto them, **When ye come into the land** which I give you, then shall **the land** keep a sabbath unto the LORD.

3 **Six years thou shalt sow thy field**, & six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof;

4 **But in the seventh year** shall be **a sabbath of rest** unto **the land**, a sabbath for the LORD: thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard.

5 That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. (**Sabbatical year**)

Deuteronomy 15:12 And if thy brother, an **Hebrew man**, or an **Hebrew woman**, be sold unto thee, and **serve thee six years**; then **in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free** from thee.

13 And when thou sendest him out free from thee, **thou shalt not let him go away empty**:

14 Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him.

15 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.

Deuteronomy 15:1 At the **end** of **every seven years** thou shalt make **a release**. (**not a cancellation**)

2 And this is the manner of the release: Every **creditor** that lendeth ought unto his neighbor shall release **it**; he shall not exact **it** of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. (it, not him!)

3 Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;