

## PREFACE

This special edition of *A Guide for Biblical Studies* celebrates the 150th anniversary of the International Sunday School Lessons, which are created by the Committee on the Uniform Series (CUS). This committee is a partnership of twenty-five Protestant denominational and independent publishers, and is stewarded by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. The Church of the Brethren has been a member of the CUS for many years.

The Church of the Brethren's adult Sunday school quarterly, known as *Guide* today, has used the International Sunday School Lessons as the foundation for curriculum development for over 130 years. These curated Bible outlines give our writers and staff structure and educational insight. The CUS also invites publishers to give input as the committee refines these outlines, ensuring they reflect the diversity of contexts. Brethren Press appreciates the opportunity to be an equal partner in these conversations, and to glean wisdom from other Christian educators and publishers in our common work of equipping disciples and spreading the gospel.

By using the International Sunday School Lessons created by the CUS, the Church of the Brethren joins churches around the world in a systematic study of the *whole* Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. Over the course of each six-year cycle of lessons, you will read and study from every book of the Bible if you follow the daily Bible readings in addition to the printed text featured in each *Guide* lesson. For Brethren, this exposure to the entire biblical witness, especially less familiar parts of the Old Testament, is valuable.

Another reason why these Bible outlines have worked well for Brethren Press for so long is their *flexibility*. The materials the CUS supplies are not prescriptive, forcing partner publishers to align to any theological agenda or to remove denominational uniqueness. Instead, they are a well-planned framework that leaves generous room for adaptation, and our writers have the freedom to craft Bible study material especially for Brethren congregations.

To honor the work and history of the CUS, Brethren Press has gathered thirteen previously published *Guide* lessons, each by a different writer. *The lessons in this special edition will not follow the current cycle, so plan accordingly if you supplement your study by*

*use of other commentaries and resources based on the International Sunday School Lessons.* As you read and study the Word of God, focusing on life in Christ, notice the variety of scriptures used throughout the quarter. Listen to the different voices from within the Church of the Brethren, past and present. Pay attention to core Brethren beliefs that arise, such as baptism by immersion, simple living, humble service, love of neighbor and love of enemy. You'll also find biblical centerpieces of Brethren faith like Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount and the meal served at the Last Supper. This collection of *Guide* lessons mirrors the best of who we are and what we believe as the Church of the Brethren, and illustrates what's possible when we collaborate well with other members of the body of Christ.

Two concluding notes: If you'd enjoy reading a more detailed history of our use of the International Sunday School Lessons, look for an article published in the January/February 2022 issue of *Messenger* magazine. If you're interested in learning about the wonderfully diverse list of publishing partners on the CUS, visit [www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/cus](http://www.nationalcouncilofchurches.us/cus).

—James Deaton  
Managing Editor

# *A Guide for* **BIBLICAL STUDIES**

March, April, May 2022  
Vol. 137, No. 3

## *Life in Christ*

### Our writers:

Each lesson was written by a different person, as mentioned in the preface of this special edition. A credit line noting the writer's name and the source of the material is found at the end of each lesson. Frank Ramirez wrote the "Out of Context" segments. This quarterly feature concluded in 2021.

Editor: Susan Janzen  
Managing Editor: James Deaton  
Designer: Gwen Stamm

# CONTENTS

## **I. Guided by God's Justice**

March 6 .....	5
<i>The Greatest Commandment</i>	
March 13 .....	13
<i>God Calls People to Jubilee</i>	
March 20 .....	21
<i>Rebuked for Selfishness</i>	
March 27 .....	30
<i>A Generous Gift</i>	

## **II. Redeemed by Christ**

April 3 .....	38
<i>Faith Is Endurance</i>	
April 10 .....	46
<i>The Lord's Supper</i>	
April 17 .....	54
<i>The Living Word</i>	
April 24 .....	62
<i>Death Becomes Life</i>	

## **III. Equipped as Disciples**

May 1 .....	70
<i>Freedom in Christ</i>	
May 8 .....	78
<i>How to Live as God's People</i>	
May 15 .....	86
<i>Serving Neighbors, Serving God</i>	
May 22 .....	94
<i>Visible to God</i>	
May 29 .....	102
<i>Prepare for Leadership</i>	

Preview of the Next Quarter .....	110
-----------------------------------	-----

---

*A Guide for Biblical Studies* is published quarterly by Brethren Press, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, Illinois 60120.

© 2022 Brethren Press. All rights reserved. No portion of this curriculum may be reproduced in any form or by any process or technique without the written consent of the publisher.

Purchase one copy per student, per quarter. Order copies by calling 800-441-3712, or by going online at [www.brethrenpress.com](http://www.brethrenpress.com). Price is \$6.95 each per quarter, \$9.95 for large-print edition (plus postage and handling). Congregations and individuals can order on a yearly basis to receive the curriculum quarterly. Yearly orders start with the fall quarter.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Lessons and readings are based on the *Uniform Series International Bible Lessons for Christian Teaching* © 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 the Committee on the Uniform Series and/or National Council of Churches. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

BRETHREN PRESS is registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office by the Church of the Brethren, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, Illinois 60120.

Printed in the United States of America

March 6



## THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 4:35; 6:1-9;  
Mark 12:28-34

When one of Jesus' interrogators asked him which was the most important commandment, Jesus quoted from two verses in the Hebrew Scriptures: Love God and love your neighbor.

### *Monday*

Deuteronomy 7:7-16      Love and Commandment  
Keeping

### *Tuesday*

Deuteronomy 10:12-21      Serving God with Heart and Soul

### *Wednesday*

Deuteronomy 11:1-7      Keeping God's Commandments  
Always

### *Thursday*

Leviticus 19:11-17      Relating to Your Neighbor

### *Friday*

1 Kings 8:31-36      Sin against a Neighbor or God

### *Saturday*

Psalms 15      They Shall Not Be Moved

### *Sunday*

Leviticus 19:18;  
Deuteronomy 6:4-9;  
Mark 12:28-34      Loving God and Neighbor



## *Preparing for the class*

- 1 Make a list of the five most important things in your life. If someone asked you what your first priority is, how would you respond?
- 2 Leviticus 19:9 says that some of the harvest was to be left for the poor. Given your setting (rural, urban, small town, etc.), think of some gracious ways that you can share with the poor.
- 3 Leviticus 19 describes how to be a good neighbor. Which of these instructions seems most important? These verses were written in ancient times and in a very different culture. How might you update them for today?
- 4 Every Israelite child committed Deuteronomy 6:4-5 to memory. If you were to choose one Bible verse for the children in your life to memorize, what would you choose?

### *Leviticus 19:18*

<sup>18</sup>You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

### *Deuteronomy 6:4-9*

<sup>4</sup>Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. <sup>6</sup>Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup>Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup>and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

### *Mark 12:28-34*

<sup>28</sup>One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear,

O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; <sup>30</sup>you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ <sup>31</sup>The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” <sup>32</sup>Then the scribe said to him, “You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; <sup>33</sup>and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’—this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” <sup>34</sup>When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” After that no one dared to ask him any question.

**W**hen Jesus taught on the commandments of the law, he focused on the intentions of the heart as the essential basis for external behaviors. Time and again, he valued caring relationships more highly than upholding every detail of biblical law.

In today’s lesson, Jesus responds to a very basic question: Which commandment is the most important of all? The setting for this question is Jerusalem. Jesus entered Jerusalem in a triumphal procession with the acclamation of the crowds. Then he entered the temple and disrupted business as usual, calling it a robbers’ den.

### *By What Authority?*

The next day when Jesus returns to the temple, he is accosted by a hostile group of priests and scribes and elders. They fire away with their first question: “By what authority are you doing these things?” (Mark 11:28). Jesus responds with a question of his own: “You answer me and I’ll answer you. Was John the Baptist’s authority from heaven or of human origin?” (author’s paraphrase). Either answer would put them on the spot, so they refused to answer. In response, Jesus told a parable in which they recognized themselves—and they became even angrier.

### *Wicked Tenants*

A man prepares a vineyard and leases it out to tenants. At harvest time, the owner sends servants to collect the rent, but the tenants refuse to pay and abuse the servants. So the owner sends his son, thinking they will respect him. Instead they kill the son and try to claim the vineyard for themselves.

The vineyard evokes a parable in Isaiah 5, where the vineyard is God's beloved chosen people, carefully nourished and tended, but only producing sour grapes. Jesus' listeners understand that the parable is about them, and they want to arrest him. But they are afraid of the crowds, so they turn around and walk away. Instead, they send their cronies—Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees—to try to trap him.

### *An Impressed Scribe*

A scribe who was listening to the interrogation is impressed with Jesus' answers, so he poses a sincere question of his own: "Which commandment is the first of all?" (Mark 12:28). Scholars had identified 613 commandments in their scriptures, and some religious leaders who were sticklers for detail were insisting that in order to please God, one needed to observe all of them. But were they all of equal importance?

Jesus' response is quick and direct. He quotes two texts from the Torah. The first is from Deuteronomy 6:4, and the second is from Leviticus 19:18. Number one, love God with all your heart; number two, a close second, love your neighbor as yourself. Can it really be that simple? The scribe who asked the question is truly amazed at Jesus' answer. He repeats it all, and heartily agrees.

### *The Shema*

Every good Jew learns Deuteronomy 6:4 as a child. Deuteronomy even details how to impress the importance of this commandment on everyone: Recite it frequently so that your children will learn it by memory. Talk about it every day in your family conversations. Wear it on your headband. Insert it into your bracelet. Put it on a sign at the door of your house. This is where customs like phylacteries and mezuzahs had their origin. All this could be very time-consuming,



but these were intended to be constant and visible reminders of their identity as God's people.

*Shema* is the first word of the classic declaration of Israel's faith in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. The Hebrew word itself means "Hear ye!" The *New Revised Standard Version* translates these verses this way: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." The verses that follow give instructions on teaching these words to children, talking about them morning and night, at home and away from home. From early on, these words were recognized as the foundation of Israel's faith.

### *Instructions in Leviticus*

Leviticus was known among the rabbis as the priest's manual. The Levites were the hereditary priestly family. The book includes instructions for sacrifices, ceremonies for the consecration of priests, definitions of clean and unclean, the ceremony for the Day of Atonement, instructions to govern Israel's life as a holy people, and a section on religious vows.

Among all the detailed instructions for holy living found in Leviticus 17-26, Jesus selects one verse: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18). It is worthy of note that the two commandments Jesus selects as the most important both talk about relationships. But what kinds of relationships?

### *Agape*

Greek has a much more nuanced language for "love" than English. In English we use the same word to speak of our feelings about chocolate, about our favorite music, about our spouse, our children, our friends, and our country.

Greek has three primary words. *Eros* describes that all-consuming passion we feel for our spouse. *Philos* primarily describes the relationship we have with good friends or compatible siblings, a kind of warm affection. *Agape* is less specific and less commonly used in secular Greek.

However, *agape* is used in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus uses to answer the scribe's question. Jesus uses

it to describe the way we are called to relate to God and neighbor. In fact, it is frequently used in the New Testament. *Agape* describes the unconditional love of God that seeks the healing and well-being of every living creature and of creation itself. It describes the deep concern that most parents have for the growth and development of their children into healthy and whole human beings. *Harper's Bible Dictionary* describes it as selfless and self-giving love.

### *Loving One's Enemies*

Jesus' command to love our enemies (Matt 5:43-48) is perhaps the most unique aspect of Christianity. It is also probably the most difficult for the human mind to grasp.

The Hebrew Scriptures recommended controlled retaliation (Lev. 24:19-20; Deut. 19:21). One was not to do more harm than what had been inflicted on him- or herself. In contrast, Jesus calls his followers to live out the same selfless and self-giving concern for one's enemies that God manifests for each one of us. This remains probably the most difficult and challenging concept for those of us who claim the name of Jesus Christ.



### *Studying the text together*

- 1 As a way to begin focusing your thoughts, share what you put as number one on your list of the five most important things in life (see "Preparing for the class," number 1).
- 2 Compare the two commandments Jesus selects in response to the scribe's question with the Ten Commandments. Suggest ways in which each of the Ten Commandments is summed up in the two commands of Jesus.
- 3 Brainstorm some ways in which the ministry of Jesus as related in the Gospels illustrates the living out of his two great commandments.
- 4 Discuss some ways that modern disciples practice these commands. How do the lives of Christians today represent a continuation of the works of Jesus in the world?
- 5 Questions 3 and 4 of "Preparing for the class" suggest that Leviticus 19 describes how to relate to the poor and how to be a good neighbor. Which of these instructions seems most im-

portant? These verses were written in ancient times and in a very different culture. How might you update them for today? Given your setting, what are some gracious ways you can share with the poor?

- 6 Name some ways in which our culture lives out the laws of retaliation rather than Jesus' law of self-giving love. Is some form of legal retaliation a necessary aspect of an orderly society? Why, or why not?
- 7 Women in our society are acculturated to put the interests of others ahead of their own. Discuss ways in which this is a helpful and healthy way to relate to others. Suggest some ways in which it may be harmful or destructive.
- 8 Discuss some ways in which parents can seek to pass on their faith in Christ and a commitment to loving others to their children. If you were to choose one Bible verse for the children in your life to memorize, what would you choose (see "Preparing for the class," number 4)?



## out of context . . .

*You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:18).*

I love Leviticus. As a matter of fact, I wrote an article with that title for *Messenger* a long, long time ago. Now, most people would struggle to name a single verse from that book, but they'd know this one—or at least a third of it. That middle part—"you shall love your neighbor as yourself"—is pretty familiar, but the front and back are kind of important too.

That first part, for instance, about not taking vengeance or holding a grudge. You know, it's easy to say we love everybody, but sometimes it's easier to

love humanity in the abstract than humans we know darn well. Taking vengeance and bearing a grudge can sound so attractive, but I think of Joseph in Egypt, playing games with the brothers who left him in the pit because they didn't recognize him. He couldn't go through with it, he couldn't take vengeance, even though he tried, he really tried. Love won out.

But that last part really matters: "I am the LORD." If you're not comfortable saying the name of God (that's what lies behind the word "LORD"), then translate it this way: "I am I AM." Either way, this is the signature that occurs again and again in Leviticus 19, the John Hancock left by the Creator of the Universe, that emphasizes that this is not a suggestion. This is God who is speaking. Do you know why you can't take vengeance, but have to love the most unlovable people?

Because the I AM said so.

Give thanks for the treasure of being able to actually own a Bible yourself. Then think about carefully copying this session's scripture passage as a way of honoring all those faithful servants who laboriously copied the Word of God.

*[Estella Horning wrote the lesson and study questions, previously published in the spring 2014 quarterly.]*

March 13



## GODS CALLS PEOPLE *to* JUBILEE

Leviticus 25:8-24; Luke 4:14-19

The practice of Jubilee, loaded with details requiring a different way of viewing possessions, provided a way to embody the justice, mercy, and love of God.

*Monday*

Luke 4:14-19

Jesus' Vision of Ministry

*Tuesday*

Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness and Mercy

*Wednesday*

Luke 10:25-37

Compassion and Mercy

*Thursday*

Matthew 9:35-38

Compassion for the Helpless

*Friday*

Luke 7:11-17

Compassion for the Bereaved

*Saturday*

Matthew 25:31-40

Ministry to the Needy

*Sunday*

Leviticus 25:8-21,  
23-24

The Year of Jubilee



## *Preparing for the class*

- 1 Read the daily Bible readings and the lesson text. Identify a quality of the “jubilee lifestyle” for our time and write it down to share with the class.
- 2 Reflect on ways you and your household might reflect “jubilee principles” in daily living. Prayerfully resolve to put at least one of these ideas into practice.
- 3 In a time of prayer, thankfully name “jubilee moments,” as referred to in the lesson, in which God’s spirit seems to free people from concerns and into God’s vision.

### *Leviticus 25:8-21, 23-24*

<sup>8</sup>You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. <sup>9</sup>Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. <sup>10</sup>And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.

<sup>11</sup>That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. <sup>12</sup>For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

<sup>13</sup>In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property. <sup>14</sup>When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. <sup>15</sup>When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. <sup>16</sup>If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. <sup>17</sup>You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the LORD your God.

<sup>18</sup>You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. <sup>19</sup>The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. <sup>20</sup>Should you ask, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?” <sup>21</sup>I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years. . . . <sup>23</sup>The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. <sup>24</sup>Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.

*Luke 4:14-19*

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. <sup>15</sup>He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

<sup>16</sup>When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup>and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

<sup>18</sup>“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,

<sup>19</sup>to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

**T**he phone rang for the fourth time in less than an hour. Glancing at the caller ID, I determined it to be a telemarketer and ignored it. I wasn’t in the mood to say no again, to rationalize my established patterns of giving, and to hang up feeling that I had abandoned the Missouri State Highway Patrol Troopers, whom I know “protect us out there where it’s really dangerous.” The nation is in economic crisis, my church needs money, my neighbors and family could use some help, and there must be something left to pay on the new hybrid,

purchased in the interest of all things ecologically compelling. The rental house requires maintenance. And here I am, trying to meet a deadline, bogged down with nothing less than Leviticus 25.

Jubilee: God's profound expectation that property be bought, cared for, and shared according to a divine stewardship plan. Jubilee: The notion that what is owned can be held so loosely that every forty-nine or fifty years the fellow who got in over his head and had to sell it to you cheap would again be handed the keys to the estate. Good grief!

To my comfort, various commentators have already informed me, in varying degrees, that Jubilee was never seriously implemented in the nation of Israel. So in light of all the financial and property matters on my mind just now, why must there be a whole lesson on "God Calls People to Jubilee"? Might the absence of this lesson go unnoticed by the managing editor of Brethren Press? It's a long shot, but it could happen. On the other hand, the One who has issued this call might be disappointed, so we'd better wade in.

### *Warming Up to Jubilee*

Leviticus 25 begins with a call for resting of the land every seventh year and names specific expectations that apply to Jubilee years. There would be no sowing, pruning, or harvesting of the fruit of untended vines. God promised abundant harvest the six years prior to the sabbath year, with some of the harvest to be preserved for the seventh year.

The previously well-tended ground would continue to produce and that yield could be used on the spot—like going to the berry patch to eat rather than bringing home a full bucket to preserve. But there would be no planting; no threshing, picking, and toting; no pressing and drying, winnowing, and grinding for the purpose of preserving. Exodus 21 and 23 and Deuteronomy 15 provide additional provisions of the sabbath year. Persons indentured or enslaved, many times for being unable to pay debts, were to be freed. As former slaves, Israelites should understand why. Debts were to be written off. As those for whom God provided over many miles and miseries, former Hebrew children surely desired to participate in extending similar provision to another!

When the ram's horn sounded on the Day of Atonement during the seventh year, Israelites recognized several things. Not only did the



land require rest and relief under the sabbath principle, but a serious time for remembrance was at hand, along with a season of justice and mercy extended to servants, resident aliens, and even livestock.

Furthermore, after “seven weeks of years,” or forty-nine years, a year would come that carried even more significant shake-up for the social and created orders. Scholars are not certain whether Jubilee occurred during the forty-ninth year or followed in the fiftieth year, but in either case, it represented the largest unit of time on the Hebrew calendar. A straight horn from a mountain goat was to be “sounded loud” (25:9) and liberty proclaimed “throughout the land to all its inhabitants” (v. 10). Land was returned to those who owned it at the beginning of that fifty year period “because the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (v. 23).

In *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, Don Kraybill calls this practice the “Jubilee equalizer,” as it prevented anyone from permanently holding large tracts of land at the expense of the poor. Theoretically at least, once in every generation original land titles were restored. Land could be purchased in the years between Jubilees, with cost based on the harvest seasons remaining until the next Jubilee.

“There can be no question that the Jubilee vision called for . . . an upsetting of the social apple cart,” Kraybill wrote. “Control of the land represents access to natural resources. Ownership of slaves symbolizes the human labor necessary for production. Borrowing and lending money points to the management of capital and credit. . . . These three factors . . . are the keys to determining the amount of inequity in any society” (p. 101).

We are sometimes hesitant to join the embrace of social justice and spiritual well-being, but there is no separating the two. As Kraybill concludes, “The jubilee is rooted in a joyous response to God’s gracious liberation and deliverance. As the people recalled how God had redeemed them out of slavery, the only logical response was to pass that liberating freedom on, forgiving debts, releasing slaves, and redeeming the land” (p. 102).

### *A New Testament Principle*

One does not look far into Jesus’ ministry to find the seeds of Jubilee sprouting abundantly and causing predictable distress among those who enjoyed privileges of property and influence. It was fine that the popular young preacher read from Isaiah—after all the scroll was

“given to him.” “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19).

It was what Jesus tacked onto the reading that changed the reception of the crowd: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” What? The young upstart has just claimed that he is authorized to make jubilee proclamations. The devout Nazareth crowd tried to run Jesus off a cliff, knowing full-well no hometown boy could have been born or called to such a role (Luke 4:29).

As his ministry bears out, Jesus proclaims and embodies the gospel of God’s jubilee for the oppressed, the outsider, and the marginalized. He offers another way of living and believing that frees humanity from remaining indentured to destructive, sinful ways and liberates people to break the bonds of co-dependency with social and religious systems that oppress instead of bless. He stirs a potion of spit and mud to restore eyesight on a sabbath day, and moves around planting seeds of foresight in little villages and large cities to a generation of Jews and Gentiles alike: Here is a preacher who allows the black-sheep Samaritan cousin to be the hero of the morning message (Luke 10:25-37). As a song by Michael Card proclaims, “sins forgiven, slaves set free; Jesus is our Jubilee!”

### *The Matters on Our Minds*

How can we take Jubilee seriously? Shall we approach it with query and study? “Whereas we all enjoy the benefits of citizenship in a free society and whereas many have already given generously to the poor through lifetimes of service, the Inquiring Minds District petitions the Annual Conference to provide guidance and direction: Does Jubilee remain the expected practice for Christians living in a capitalistic society?” Following a couple years for the report of the inevitable Annual Conference Study Committee and an additional year’s consideration by the Committee for Unfunded Mandates, Brethren would likely approve an answer we could live with.

Or, we could acknowledge today that the failure of jubilee principles contributes to much of the oppression and misuse of power still present in our world. We might pause to thank God that we have been blessed by jubilee moments, days when the Spirit of the Lord permeated whole communities of faith and folks are freed up, at least figuratively, to blow the long straight horn of the mountain goat for

all to hear. We might make some small or large commitment within our Sunday school class to collectively sponsor a give-back that will change the way we eat out, travel, or do Christmas—without the blast of a goat’s horn to announce it!

As Don Kraybill needles us: “Just as the Hebrew response to God’s liberating exodus had real social consequences, so must ours. It is not enough to sit and ponder the theological beauty of this. . . . The biblical model means that now we start forgiving, not only interpersonal insults but debts as well. We bring release to those who we oppress socially and economically. We lower rents and raise salaries. . . . Jubilee response to God’s merciful love is the New Testament expectation” (p. 108).

I might have known, with all that’s on my mind, he would bring up the subject of rent.



## *Studying the text together*

- 1 Begin by inviting class members to share when or if the biblical concept of Jubilee was part of formational teaching they received in the church. In what ways does Jubilee mesh easily with traditional Christian thinking about mission and service? In what ways does it run counter to church teaching?
- 2 Read the printed scripture text. Allow time for sharing of ideas that came as a result of reading this scripture or today’s lesson.
- 3 Make a list of the actions that were to come during the Jubilee year. Consider what the Israelites, formerly a people without land or freedom, might have thought at such a proposal.
- 4 From “Preparing for the class,” ask class members to share their ideas about the qualities of a “jubilee lifestyle” for our time. How similar or different are these ideas from Leviticus 25?
- 5 How does your congregation encourage “jubilee principles”? How is jubilee reflected in your budget, in the way decisions are made, in the way the church teaches, preaches, witnesses, and serves? If jubilee is not reflected in your congregation, come up with some ideas to change that.
- 6 Name times when “the Spirit of the Lord freed up the whole community of faith” and new vision or practice emerged. How did the faith community create an atmosphere in which that could happen—or did the impetus come from the faith community at all?

- 7 Prayerfully consider what response individuals, the class, or the church might consider to embody jubilee in the community or beyond. Close by reading responsively number 803 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.



## out of context . . .

*The land shall not be sold in perpetuity,  
for the land is mine; with me you are but  
aliens and tenants (Lev. 25:23).*

For a nation of immigrants we sure get lippy about the next group waiting in line to join us. My family left Mexico for New Mexico in 1910 because of the Revolution (the Galvans left the country when they were asked to shoot their own people), when the only thing stopping you from crossing the border was whether you felt like making a change.

We all came from somewhere else, even if it was over the Bering Straight thousands of years ago. That's why the current wave of anti-immigrant hostility stirred up by politicians rubs me the wrong way.

It doesn't take long for each wave of immigrants to start feeling like they own the place and that the next group are usurpers, inferior, or dangerous. Even though the people were led into the land and took possession of it, and despite the promise of the Jubilee to return property to families, God seems to have reminded them that their tenancy was temporary. No matter how much pride, deserved or otherwise, people take in ownership, we're just passing through.

Aliens and tenants. That's us. God said it, not me.

*[Sandy Bosserman wrote the lesson and study questions, previously published in the summer 2009 quarterly.]*