

A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE STUDY OF

“JUBILEE, YEAR OF,”

by

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Please, bring to my attention all mistakes and suggestions for improvements

THE TASK

Yesterday I was asked to speak between three to five minutes next Monday (10-26-98) during Chapel, about the *Year of Jubilee* in the Tanakh/Old Testament.

What to do? Of course, I know a little bit about the topic, but, details, implications, ... then and now? Sooo, what do I do?

When I know very little or even nothing about a biblical topic then what do I do to find out, quickly, the basic information, which I need, in order not to make a fool of myself in a conversation with a precocious twelve year old or a seventy five year old, highly educated, person who asks me (and, probably, has already checked the Internet for information)?

I am, of course, a pious, Evangelical, Lutheran Christian teacher, pastor and professor, who is expected to have all of the answers about the Bible (Tanakh/OT & NT, of course, reading it in Hebrew and Greek), Judaism and Christianity. And if I do not know then I am expected to know which sources to consult or whom to ask to find out.

I have absolutely no understanding of theological students and pastors who desire to remain uninformed, but continue to behave in a pompous and authoritarian manner and even disrespect professors who want to help them and guide them in *their* studies.

I have absolutely no understanding of students and pastors who are offended when I ask them, “Well, what have you learned, lately, tell me, teach me. E.g. when a parishioner comes to you and asks, ‘Tell me, Pastor, what does the word *Jesus* actually mean?’ How will you respond?”

I have absolutely no understanding of people and students who insist that *their* perception of a story or event is the *only* possible truth in spite of the fact that all other persons contradict this perception.

Should the “God of Ignorance” and the “God of Perception” rule in our midst? Should such persons become pastors? What do you think? Knowledge is freedom from the prison of stupidity and ignorance. Knowledge is not faith, but faith without knowledge is stupid and deadly.

NOW, HOW DO I EDUCATE MYSELF ABOUT THE YEAR OF JUBILEE?

(or any other biblical topic)

DICTIONARY - Hebrew-English Dictionary

The very first thing I do is to check a HEBREW DICTIONARY. The best is still

The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon with and Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1979 (1907). Copyright 1979 by Jay P. Green, Sr.

On p. 385 I find the entree,

רָמָה, n. m., 1. *ram*, Josh 6:5, *the ram's horn* as wind instrument. 2. “designation of 50th year marked by blowing of cornets ... orig. no doubt שָׁנַת רָמָה *year of he ram*(’s horn) as Lv 25:13.28.40 ...” etc.

Great! Now I read as many of the passages as possible to get a feel for for the context in which the term is used.

CONCORDANCE

Next I check a CONCORDANCE to see if the dictionary has left out some of the passages.

There are numerous concordances. Today there are wonderful concordances available for the computer. I continue to use the following, because it lists the word in Hebrew and in Greek and I have it on my shelf for immediate use.

Young, R., *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (on an entirely new plan containing about 311,000 references, subdivided under the Hebrew and Greek originals, with the literal meaning and pronunciation of each. Designed for the simplest reader of the English Bible. Also Index Lexicons to the Old and New Testaments being a guide to parallel passages and A Complete List of Scripture Proper Names showing their modern pronunciation. Twenty-second American Edition, revised by W. B. Stevenson, to which is added a supplement, entitled "Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands" by W. F. Albright). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, n.d. (1939?).

Aha, and there on p. 553 I find the etree, "Jubilee, or Jubilee-- 1. *Jubilee, time of shouting,*" and passages, listed from Lev 25 and 27 and one in Num 38:4

The scholarly concordance to use is

Mandelkern, S., *Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraicae atque Chaldaicae*. Tel Aviv: Sumptibus Schocken Hierosolymis (editio sexta), 1964.

THE TEXT

So, I just discovered that the basic text on the Year of Jubilee is found in Leviticus 25. Therefore, I must turn to the text in the Hebrew Bible.

The standard text today is

BHS = Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984 (1976).

Other Editions of the Hebrew Bible:

BHK = Kittel, R., ed., Biblia Hebraica. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937 (Third Edition). This was the standard text until the publication of the *BHS*.

There is also a *BHK* published together with a German Translation. I use it because I want to compare the English translations with the German translations.

Das Alte Testament Hebräisch-Deutsch. Biblia Hebraica mit deutscher Übersetzung. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1974 (1971, 1964)

So, I read the text.

Students will be interested to know that there is now a publication which explains every Hebrew word, word for word, for every biblical book. Fantastic. I call this a cheat-sheet. Used appropriately, constantly and with devotion and diligence it will yield untold joys and deep spiritual treasures. You do not believe me? Try it for a year or so and then tell me if I am not right?

Owens, John Joseph, *Analytical Key to the Old Testament*. Volume 1, Genesis - Joshua. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990.

This means that students who only know even just a little Hebrew can look up every Hebrew word in the BDB (see above).

Most students are aware of the fact that the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, called the Septuagint, LXX (third century B.C.E.). Should we also have a look at the LXX. Of course, but we do not emphasize the use of the LXX on the seminary level.

There are a number of excellent publications of the LXX. Some students may prefer an edition with an English translation, sooo see, e.g.,

The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament with and English Translation and with various readings and critical notes. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1970.

THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARIES.

Then I turn to THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARIES.

In Young's Concordance I found out that there is no reference to an occurrence of the equivalent Greek word for יֹבֵל *yōbēl* in the New Testament -- at least, I could not find a reference. Help!

So, this means that I will not turn to the *TDNT* in this case. But, in most cases I will turn to the *TDNT* and read the whole article on the item there.

Kittel, G. and G. Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. 10.vols. Grand Rapids/London: Eerdmans/SCM, 1964-1976.

Most Greek words are discussed in the context of a discussion of the equivalent Hebrew word. Do not deprive yourself of this source. But, careful! you might get hooked.

So, because there is nothing in the *TDNT* (or, at least, I could not find anything) I then turn to the *TDOT*, i.e.,

Botterweck, G. J. and Ringren, H., eds., *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Translated by David Green. Volume VI *yōbēl* - *yātār* I. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990 (1980-1982)

I turn to the entree

"יֹבֵל *yōbēl* (North)" and read pages 1-6 and I learn all I really need to know, quickly, about this topic.

Reading only this article gives me enough material to explain the Year of Jubilee.

BIBLICAL DICTIONARIES

But, of course, I am not satisfied and so I turn to the most important BIBLICAL DICTIONARIES ... and I read the articles there.

I read information in the order of publication. The reason is that I want to educate myself also about the history of the development of the information about a topic. What did we know about the topic and when and where and how and who said it first?

At the end of such articles I also find a brief bibliography. I read these bibliographies and decide which books and articles I need to read.

1962

"Jubilee, Year of," *IDB* 2 E-J (1962) 1001-1002 (J. Morgenstern)

At the end of the article I find out there is also such a thing as

"Jubilees, Book of," *IDB* 2 E-J (1962) 1002-1003 (S. Tedesche). Great. So, I read the article and I find out that in this book "The whole history of the world is divided into jubilee periods." Fantastic! What a beautiful vision!

IDB = The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible--An Illustrated Encyclopedia in Four Volumes. G. A. Buttrick, ed. New York-Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

1976

"*Jubilee, Year of," *IDBSup* (1976) 496-498 (A. Van Selms). More information. Wonderful.

IDB-Sup = The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible--An Illustrated Encyclopedia: Supplementary Volume. K. Crimm, ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1976.

1972

Then I turn to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and to my great surprise, I find, that there is no entree "Jubilee, Year of" But I find an entree,

"Jubilees, Book of," *EncJud* 10 Jes-Lei (1972) 324-326 (Y.M.G. = Yehoshua M. Grintz). The article is good and very informative, but I am not satisfied. So, I look under

"Year," *EncJud* 16 (1972) 724-726 (M.I.G. I turn to the INDEX and find Mayer Ewin Gruber). Not much on "Jubilee, Year of." So I try

"Calendar," *EncJud* 5 (1972) 43-50 (E.J.W. = Ephraim Jehudah Wiesenberg). I remember having read the article before. Very informative, but nothing on "Jubilee, Year of."

"Sectarian Calendars," *EncJud* 5 (1972) 50-53 (J.L. = Jacob Licht). Again, not much. Where could the information be? For the moment I give up and will search another time.

EncJud = Encyclopaedia Judaica. 16 Volumes. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd./Macmillan, 1972.

I am still not satisfied. There must be some information on the the Year of Jubilee in this encyclopaedia. I'll find it, but I must move on.

1982

"Jubilee, Year of, *ISBE* 2 E-J (1982) (1142-1143 (J. B. Payne).

"Jubilees, Book of," See "Apocalyptic Literature III.B."

"Apocalyptic Literature," *ISBE* 1 A-D (1979) 151-161 (G. E. Ladd).

ISBE = The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Fully Revised. Illustrated. In Four Volumes. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1979-1988.

1992

"Jubilee, Year of," *ABD* 3 H-J (1992) 1025-1030 (Christopher J. H. Wright). Wonderful. Most of what I need to know is in this article.

"Jubelees, Book of, *ABD* 3 H-J (1992) 1030-1032 (James C. VanderKam). Again, great. And the BIBLIOGRAPHIES at the end of the articles ... I read them and decide which books and articles I absolutely, definitely have to read.

ABD = *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Vol 3 H -J. David Noel Freedman, Editor in Chief. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1992

COMMENTARIES.

ONE-VOLUME COMMENTARIES

Now it is time to turn to COMMENTARIES.

First, I turn to ONE-VOLUME COMMENTARIES

1971

Milgrom, Jacob, "The Book of Leviticus," *IOVCB* (1971) 68-84.

I know J. Milgrom, and I know from other sources that he is the most informed scholar on Leviticus. So, I read what he has to say, very attentively.

On p. 82f. he writes about "The Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (25:1-26:2)." This is all I need for a quick introduction to the topic and to the biblical passage.

IOVCB = *The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*. Introduction and Commentary for Each Book of the Bible Including the Apocrypha. With General Articles. Edited by Charles M. Laymon. Nashville and New York: Abingdon, 1971.

1990

Roland J. Faley, T.O.R., "Leviticus" *The New Jerome* (1990) 61-79.

On p. 77 I read about "The Holy Years (25:1-55);" "(a) Sabbatical Year (25:2-7);" "(b) Jubilee Year (25:8-55)." ... Excellent, all I need for a quick introduction to the topic.

The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. Brown, Raymond E., Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy, eds. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990 (1968). BS 491.2 .N485 1990 cop.3

COMMENTARIES

The one commentary series I turn to, immediately, whenever I study a book in the Tanakh/OT is the Soncino Books of the Bible.

So, I turn to

Cohen, A., ed., *The Soncino Chumash. The Five Books of Moses with Haphtaroth*. Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Exposition based on the Classical Jewish Commentaries. London, Jerusalem, New York: The Soncino Press, 1983 (1947).

The Book of Leviticus is on pp 604-791.

The next commentary I turn to (when the biblical book is part of the Torah/Pentateuch) is

Plaut, W. Gunther,
הרות The Torah: A Modern Commentary. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations,
 1981.

For the commentary on Leviticus I turn to

Bamberger, Bernard J.,
 "ארקיוֹ Leviticus," pages 731-1008.

Aha, this gives me the quickest and best introduction to biblical and Jewish thinking about the Year of Jubilee. This is, probably, the kind of information that Jesus would have known.

I read Leviticus 25:1-55 - for Jewish persons this section is called רהב, *bhr*, - at the Mountain, i.e., at the Mountain of Sinai, pages 940-952.

I pay attention, especially, to "Gleanings," 951-952.

I read the article "Sabbatical Year and Jubilee," pp 940-945.

The subsections are

1. The Sabbatical Year, 940-941
2. The Jubilee Year, 941-944
3. Slavery, 945

This is wonderful, but, it is not enough.

My Jewish brothers and sisters now turn to the "Haftarah."

What is that? Well, it is the additional reading to the Torah portion from the Prophets.

פָּרַט *pāṭar*, means (see BDB 809) "separate, remove, set free, dismiss, discharge" and also to complete the reading of the Torah with a reading from the Prophets. הפב ריטנאיב *hipṭîr bēnābî* means to conclude the reading of the Torah portion with a passage from the Prophets, i.e, the *hapṭārāh*, הפהרט, Haftarah.

In Plaut, *Torah*, see pp. 1003-1005, on Jeremiah 32:6-27.

But, see also

Plaut, W. Gunther, *ספר ההפחות The Haftarah Commentary*. Translation by Chaim Stern with the assistance of Philip D. Stern. S. David Sperling, Consulting Editor. New York: UAH Press, 1996.

For our passage see

"B'har Sinai 25:1-26:2 יס רהבני Jeremiah 32:6-27," pages 308-317

SABBATH?

A quick word about "Sabbath." You know what to do. You turn to all of the dictionaries and to articles on "Sabbath."

The best article which I have found on "Sabbath" is the following,

Tsevat, M., "The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972) 447-459.

On p. 49 Tsevat summarizes his thoughts on sabbath as follows (please, disregard the non-inclusive language - there was no such thing in 1972),

“In other words, God’s dominion over space and His dominion over time are largely two aspects of the same thing: His dominion over man and especially over Israel. There is, therefore, nothing incongruous nor bold in the conclusion that every seventh day the Israelite is to renounce dominion over time, thereby renounce autonomy, and recognize God’s dominion over time and thus over himself. Keeping the sabbath is acceptance of the sovereignty of God.”

Did you hear this? Did you pay attention? Once more:

“... EVERY SEVENTH DAY THE ISRAELITE IS TO RENOUNCE DOMINION OVER TIME, THEREBY RENOUNCE AUTONOMY, AND RECOGNIZE GOD’S DOMINION OVER TIME AND THUS OVER HIMSELF. KEEPING THE SABBATH IS ACCEPTANCE OF THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD.”

... and that is also the meaning of every sabbatical year and also the meaning of the Year of Jubilee. The earth, the land, does not belong to us. It belongs to God. The sabbatical year is a reminder of this truth.

The land does not belong to nations, ethnic groups, communists, capitalists, big companies, little companies or private persons. It is as if we would *rent* the use of the land from God and are responsible to God for what we do with the land.

Is any one of us starving? If so we are held responsible by God for every person who dies of lack of resources because of our mismanagement of the land and the inflexibility of our economic systems.

It is also important to read the treatment of “Sabbath” in the discussion of the Ten Commandments

See Plaut, *Torah*,

“Exod 20:8-11 ורתה The Decalogue -- The Sabbath Day,” pp. 546-552.

For the “Gleanings” Plaut selected from the Midrash, Exodus. R. 25:11, on p. 551:

“One Shabbat

God said to Israel: ‘If you observe one Shabbat I will account it to you as if you had observed all the mitzvot in the Torah; and if you desecrate one Shabbat I will reckon it to you as if you had desecrated all the mitzvot.’ If Israel would keep but one Shabbat properly the Messiah would come.”

(*mitzvot* means commandments)

Oh, and what does the Hebrew verb תָּבַשׁ *šābat* mean?

Well, look it up in the BDB, 991, ... “cease, desist,” it does not really mean “rest” because one is tired ... aha! ... on the seventh day God “ceased, desisted” from work and we are asked to do the same. I.e., we are asked to work six days for our living, but the seventh day we are asked to reserve to remember that our hard work is fine, but, in the end does not guarantee us any kind of security.

Our security comes only from God no matter how hard we work. Our house can go up in smoke and we did not pay the last insurance payment. You earn a fantastic Ph.D., but, no institution is willing or able to hire you. You do everything right and you earn an M.Div., but, after many interviews, still, no congregation is extending a call ...

Where does inequality come from? Why does it rain on one field and not on another. What good is all of my hard work if it does not rain on my field? Whose fault is that? What do I do when my ruin is God’s fault and not my sin or laziness? Should my brothers and sisters help me and forgive my debt? ... but, of course, they should not forgive me if I, irresponsibly, run up debts by maxing out all of my credit cards and buy cars and all kinds of “stuff” ... then they should put me in jail until I work off all of my debts.

Read Genesis 4, the story of Cain and Abel. Both worked hard and did the right thing. One was "blessed" by God the other was not. So, some inequality comes directly from God. What to do? Is murder the solution? ... that is what the story asks us.

Remember Ps. 127:1 ... "If the LORD/YHWH does not build the palace, in vain do its builders labor on it."

Then I turn to other full COMMENTARIES.

With great confidence I go to my bookshelf. To my great shock I find out that J. Milgrom's commentary on Leviticus only covers chapters 1-16 and, at this moment, I am not sure that the next volume has already been published. I will have to check.

Now I need to go to the library and look at all of the commentaries on Leviticus, but, I have no time to do so before Monday.

Milgrom, Jacob, *Leviticus 1-16*. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentry. The Anchor Bible. New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Auckland: Doubleday, 1991.

On pages 69-128 I find a bibliography on Leviticus. I read it. Wonderful. I find dozens of publications which I want to read NOW, but, of course, I must turn to other things.

My quick reading of the bibliography did not find an entree on "Jubilee, Year of." It is possible that Milgrom will cover this in the second volume.

Among the commentaries which he lists are, e.g., the following:

- Abравanel, I., *Commentary on the Torah*. 3 vols. Jerusalem: Bnei Arvel, 1964.
 Baentsch, B., *Exodus, Leviticus and Numeri*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1903.
 Bertholet, A., *Leviticus*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1901.
 Dillmann, A., *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus*. 3rd ed. Leipzig: F. Hirzel, 1897.
 Driver, S. R., *The Book of Leviticus*. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1894.
 Driver, S. R., *The Book of Leviticus* (translation). New York: Dodd, Mead, 1898.
 Eerdmans, B. D., *Das Buch Leviticus*. Giessen: Töpelmann, 1912.
 Elliger, K., *Leviticus*. HAT 4 Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (P. Siebeck), 1966.
 Harrison, R. K., *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1980.
 Heinisch, P., *Das Buch Leviticus*. Bonn: hanstein, 1935
 Hoffmann, D. Z., *Leviticus*. Vol 1. Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook (Hebrew), 1935. Trans. of vol. 1 of *Das Buch Leviticus*, Berlin: M. Poppelauer, 1905-
 Kalisch, M. M., *Leviticus*. 2 vols. London: Longmans, 1867-72
 Levine, B. A., *Leviticus*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.
 Noth, M., *Leviticus*. Trans. by J. E. Anderson from the German. London: SCM, 1965.
 Rendtorff, R., *Leviticus*. Vol 3.1. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1985.
 Snaith, N. H., *Leviticus and Numbers*. London: Thomas Nelson, 1967.

Well, now I am suspicious. I know that there are more commentaries on Leviticus. Why has he not listed them. I do not have the time now, but I will check and try to write a more complete list of commentaries.

ARTICLES IN JOURNALS

Finally (well, there is no such thing in biblical studies or in any study) I turn to articles in journals. How does one, quickly, find out which articles have been written on a particular passage in the Tanakh/Old Testament?

There are a number of possibilities.

The easiest is to turn to *Old Testament Abstracts*.

OTA = *Old Testament Abstracts* (1978-present). BS 419.O42. Appears three times a year and contains English summaries of many articles published in many journals throughout the world. The indexes are invaluable: authors, Scripture passages, Semitic words.

When I take time to study a particular passage I go through ALL of *OTA* and I read all of the summaries, list all of the publications in a bibliography (Praise the LORD for the word processors!) and then I begin to select articles which I absolutely, definitely must read.

Then I go to the library and copy these articles and put them into my files.

I am not able to take time to go through all of *OTA* to check for articles on the Year of Jubilee, but, only checking a few issues reveals the following:

OTA 20.1 (February 1997) #240 [Leviticus 25]

Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, "The Jubilee and *qds*," *Exeg* 6 (1995) 31-48 (Japanese). The English summary helps, but I do not know Japanese. So, if I, really, want to know what the article contains then I must learn Japanese or have the article translated.

OTA 20.1 (February 1997) #2420 [Leviticus 25]

Jacob Milgrom, "The Land Redeemer and the Jubilee," *Fortunate the Eyes That See*, 66-69 [See #523] At #523] I read

Astric B. Beck et al. (eds.), *Fortunate the Eyes That See: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Seventieth Birthday* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995).

OTA 20.3 (October 1997) #1528 [Lev 25:23-24]

Jacob Milgrom, "Jubilee: A Rallying Cry for Today's Oppressed," *BRev* 13 (2, 1997) 16, 48.

The summary states, "Reflections on contemporary applications of Lev 25:23-24 in the light of the 1996 Jewish-Christian Symposium on the Jubilee sponsored by the World Council of Churches in Bosey, Switzerland."

That is not enough for me. What I would really need is a research assistant who would now go to the journal and make a copy and give it to me as soon as possible.

Do you know how much time it takes to find the journal and then to make a copy? You, probably, think that professors have all the time in the world. Well, become one and see.

OTA 16.3 (October 1993) #1852 [Lev 25:8-24]

Yairah Amit, "The Jubilee Law--an Attempt at Instituting Social Justice," *Justice and Righteousness*, 47-59 [see #2299]

At #2299 I read

Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and their Influence* (JSOTSup 137; Sheffield: JSOT, 1992).

ETC. ... Praise the LORD! We are living in a time of almost unlimited wealth of information on almost any aspect of Biblical studies. There is no reason to be uninformed about any subject and it is only a matter of time, motivation, energy and money for any one of us to become an expert in a particular field.

Sooo, why a theological student or pastor would, purposely, want to remain uninformed, is beyond my understanding. Please, teach me why this is so. Please, I will listen.