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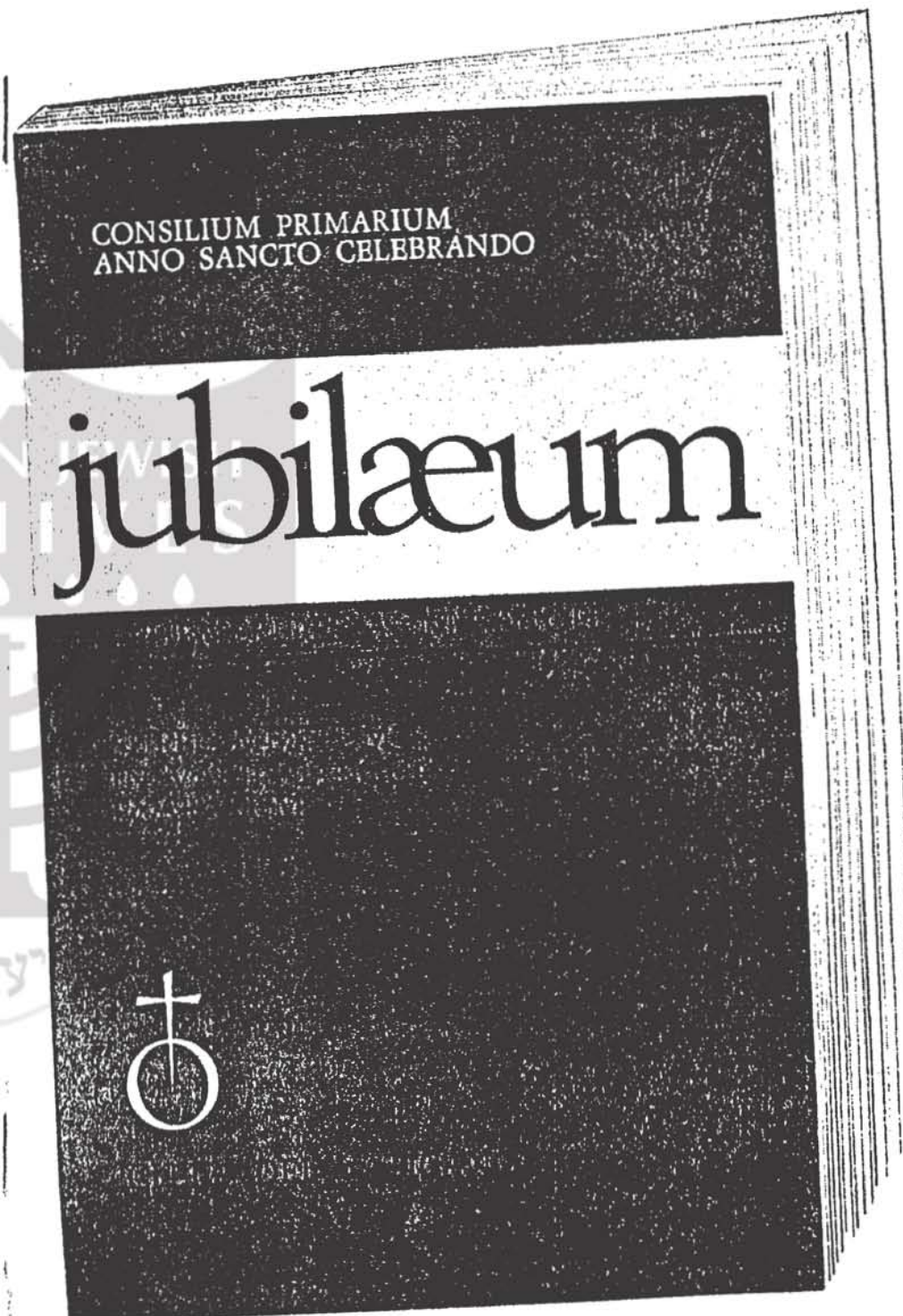
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V.

## HOLY YEAR 1975 AND ITS ORIGINS IN THE JEWISH JUBILEE YEAR

Marc H. Tanenbaum (\*)

In recent conversations with several distinguished Catholic bishops, priests, and sisters regarding Holy Year 1975, I was asked to explain the concept and practice of the Jubilee Year in Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism, and their possible implications for Catholic observances of the Holy Year.

Those inquiries stimulated me to prepare the attached document. My intention in this paper is simply to set forth an understanding of the Jubilee Year in Judaism and Jewish history, and to leave it to Catholic — and other Christian — authorities to draw any implications from this background study that may be appropriate for Christian observances of the Holy Year.

My hope is that such reflection on the Jewish origins of the Jubilee Year might contribute to advancing understanding and mutual respect between Christians and Jews, especially throughout the Holy Year.

I share this document with a request that you do me the favor of sending me any comments, criticisms, or other

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reactions that you will have in order to help sharpen my own reflections on this great Biblical theme and tradition.

Holy Year 1975, proclaimed by Pope Paul VI for observance by the Catholic faithful as a year of renewal and reconciliation, has been frequently characterized as the "Jubilacus Christianorum," the Christian Jubilee Year. That reference is to the Jubilee Year which has its origins in Biblical Judaism, and it may therefore be helpful to understand something of the practice and meaning of the Jubilee Year as it was developed and experienced in about 3,000 years of Jewish history.

The word "jubilee" derives from the Hebrew term 'yobel' which means "jubilating" or "exulting." It refers to the sounding of the shofar — the rams horn — on the Day of Atonement announcing the inauguration of the jubilee year. (Joshua 6:4 speaks of "Shofrot ha-yoblim," trumpets of the ram's horn.) Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the Jubilee had much in common. The central intention of both was a "new birth." The Day of Atonement provided an opportunity to free the person from slavery to sin and enabled him/her to start life anew, at one with God and with one's fellow human being. (Atonement is understood by the rabbis to be a precondition for at-one-ment). The Jubilee had for its aim the emancipation of the individual from the shackles of poverty, and the elimination of the various economic inequalities in the Jewish Commonwealth in accordance with the demands of social justice. Since Yom Kippur involved the preparation of the hearts of all members of the community for the self-discipline and sacrifices required for such spiritual rectification, it was deemed by Jewish tradition to be the most appropriate day for inauguration of such a year of communal and inter-personal rectification, especially in the social and economic order.

So important was the law regarding the Jubilee that, like the Decalogue, it was ascribed to the divinely-inspired legislation revealed on Mount Sinai (Leviticus 25:1).

There could be no more stirring call to the conscience for inaugurating the Jubilee than the blowing of the Shofar which heralded the revelation of the Ten Commandments. The Prophetic portion of the Torah which is read to this day in Synagogue services throughout the world is taken from Isaiah 58 which seems to have been recited on a Yom Kippur inaugurating a Jubilee Year. Isaiah scores the hypocrisy and worthlessness of ritual without righteousness. On the most solemn Fast Day in the year, he reminds his people that prayer and fasting alone are not enough, "doing justice" and "loving mercy" must go hand in hand with "walking humbly with your God."

What objectives were to be served through the observance of the Jubilee Year? The Bible sets forth four-fold obligations, all of which focus on realizing liberation in the actual life of the people of God as basic preconditions, or corollaries, to their spiritual liberation:

- a) Human - liberation of the slaves.
- b) Economic - the moralization of the use of property and material goods.
- c) Ecological - liberation of the land.
- d) Educational - the creation of a spiritual democracy by devoting the Jubilee Year to intensive education of all men, women, children and "resident aliens" in the teachings of the Torah.

A few words of elaboration on each of these themes of the Jubilee Year:

After proclaiming the observance of the Sabbatical Year (Shemittah), the Bible ordains the Jubilee Year (Yobel) in these words:

"And you shall number seven sabbaths of years unto you, seven times seven years; and there shall be unto you the days of seven sabbaths of years, even forty and nine years. Then shall you make proclamation with the blast of

the horn on the tenth day of the seventh month; in the day of atonement shall you make proclamation with the horn throughout all our land. *And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubilee unto you; and you shall return every man unto his possession; and you shall return every man unto his family.*" (Lev. 25:8 ff.).

### Human liberation

The proclamation of liberty was not a declaration of abstract rights, of philosophical or theological principles. As conceived and lived in Jewish life, it opposed the enslavement of one person by another and required the actual emancipation of slaves with their families. Slavery was a universal — and generally cruel — institution in the ancient world. While the Biblical and Rabbinic law were unable to abolish the deeply-rooted slave system, the Jewish legislation did seek to expose the evils of slavery, to curb its brutalities, and to ameliorate the hard lot of the slaves. By according the unfortunate the protection of the religious-civil law, it endowed him with human stature and human rights — something virtually unprovided elsewhere for the slave in ancient society.

Later on in the text, Lev. 25:39 ff, in a section that Rabbinic commentators call "Practical love of neighbor," the Bible insists upon humane and equalitarian treatment of indentured servants — one who out of his own free will, had sold himself to a master in order to escape the despair of his poverty:

"And if your brother be waxen poor with you, and sell himself to you, you shall not make him to serve as a bondservant. As a hired servant, and as a settler, he shall be with you, he shall serve with you unto the year of Jubilee: Then shall he go out from you, he and his children with him, and shall return to his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are my servants, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as bondsmen."

The Rabbis observe that the poor remains your brother and is to be treated in a brotherly and compassionate manner. You are not to allow him to come down into the depths of misery for then it is difficult to raise him, but come to his support — "uphold him" — at the time when his means begin to fail. Though he be a "stranger" or "an alien settler", he is to be included in the term "your brother" and is to be helped by timely loans, free of interest. (1) The expression that "your brother may live with you" means that it is the Israelite's personal and communal duty to see to it that his fellowman does not die of starvation. The great principle of "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" must be a reality in Jewish society, the Rabbis insisted.

When a person's ill fortune forces him to sell himself into bondage, the dignity of the laborer was to be safeguarded. As a "hired servant", he was not to be given any menial or degrading work, but only agricultural tasks or skilled labor, such as would be performed by a free laborer who is hired for a season.

Should the poor be the father of a family when he sells himself into slavery, the master has to take the children into his care and maintain them. The Rabbis taught that the freed slave must be received with cordiality and friendliness by his relatives, and no slight shown him because of his former servitude.

Since the people of God are His servants whom he brought forth out of the land of Egypt, an Israelite therefore can never be more than nominally a slave to any human master. (2) "For unto me the children of Israel are

(1) The prohibition of charging interest on loans led to the establishment in every organized Jewish community of a *Gemillus Chassidim* Society for making available loans free of interest to the poor. (See Deut. 23:19).

(2) According to Exodus 21:2f and Deut. 15:12 f, the Hebrew who sells himself into slavery serves his master for six years, and goes free in the seventh. Should the Jubilee occur before his six years of service are over, the servant regains his personal freedom at the same time that his inheritance returns to him in the year of Jubilee.



servants; they are my servants" — and they shall not be servants to mortal servants, as God's bond has the priority (*Sifra, Behar Sinai 7:1*). The Rabbis ruled that a Hebrew is not to be sold publicly in the slave market, but the sale is to be privately arranged to avoid any possible humiliation. In Rabbinic law, the rules that should regulate the relationship between a master and his slave are given in full detail, and are based on the principle that master and man are kinsmen, e.g., the slave must not be given inferior food or accommodations to that of the master. Kindness and consideration are to characterize the bearing of the Israelite towards his less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The humane treatment demanded by the Biblical and Rabbinic laws for the pagan (i.e., non-Jewish) slave was identical with that for the Jewish slave. Philo, the Alexandrian philosophical moralist who lived in the generation of Jesus — and whose teachings and reflections, mirroring the moral climate of Jewish life in that tumultuous age, were reflected in the Gospels — in his role as rabbi counseled the Jewish faithful: "Behave well to your slaves, as you pray to God that he should behave toward you. For as we hear them so shall we be heard, and as we treat them, so shall we be treated. Let us show compassion, so that we may receive like for like in return."

### Economic liberation

"In this year of Jubilee, you shall return every man unto his possession." (Lev. 25:13).

This enactment of the Jubilee Year required the compulsory restoration of all purchased land to the original owner and provided for the equal division of property. The permanent accumulation of land in the hands of a few was prevented, and those whom fate or misfortune had thrown into poverty were given a "second chance."

The Jubilee institution was an extraordinary safeguard

against the moral and spiritual degradation of poverty. By keeping house and lands from accumulating in the hands of the few, pauperism was prevented, and generations of independent freeholders assured. (3) It represented a rare, even revolutionary breakthrough in the introduction of morals into economics in the experience of mankind.

According to the Torah, "the earth is the Lord's" and all land was acknowledged to be held from God on lease. ("And the land shall not be sold in perpetuity: for the land is mine, for you are strangers and settlers with me. (4) And in all the land of your possession you shall grant a redemption for the land." Lev. 25:23 ff).

The Israelite who voluntarily or through some compulsion sold his land to another, sold not the ownership of the land, but the remainder of the lease - till the next year of Jubilee, when all leases expired simultaneously. The land then came back to his family, all contracts of sale to the

(3) The law regarding dwellings in a walled city was different from that pertaining to the sale of a field, in that the dwelling cannot be repurchased by its owner any later than one year from the sale, and it does not revert to its original owner in the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:29). The reason for this difference is that special conditions obtained in the walled city. According to the Rabbinic commentary, *Meshekh Hakhmah*, the "walled cities" were fortresses, disguised to protect the inhabitants in case of enemy attack. It was imperative therefore that all the inhabitants be familiar with every secret passageway, cave or shelter in the city. Moreover, it was virtually necessary that they be well acquainted with one another in order to be able to act together for purposes of mutual defense and protection.

(4) Commenting on the phrase "for you are strangers and settlers with me", the *Ohel Yaakov* (The Tents of Jacob) declares, "The Lord said to Israel, 'The relationship between yourselves and me is always that of strangers and settlers.' If you will live in the world like strangers, remembering that you are here but temporarily, then I will be a settler in your midst in that My Presence (*the Shechinah*) will dwell with you permanently. But if you will regard yourselves as settlers, as permanent owners of the land on which you live, when the land is actually not yours but mine, my Presence will be a stranger in that it will not dwell in your midst. In any case, you, O Israel, and I cannot be strangers and settlers at the same time. If you act the stranger, then I will be the settler, and if you act the settler, I must be the stranger." The Rabbis applied this instruction to ownership of land in the diaspora as in the Holy Land.



contrary notwithstanding. His children thus enjoyed the same advantage of a "fair start" as their father had had before them.

Scripture sets forth the laws of land-tenure in these words: "If you sell to your neighbor, or buy of your neighbor's land, you shall not wrong one another. According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy of your neighbor, and according to the number of years of the crops he shall sell to you" (Lev. 25:15, 16). The Rabbinic commentaries state this passage forbade rent gouging ("you shall not wrong one another.") As the land itself belongs to God, the ground itself was not a proper object for sale, but only the result of a person's labor on the ground; i.e., only the produce could be a matter for sale. Therefore, what is conveyed to the purchaser is not the land, but the number of harvests which the incoming tenant would enjoy.

The regulations of the Sabbatical year include also the annulment of all monetary obligations (*Shemittat Kesa'im*) between Israelites, the creditor being equally barred from making any attempt to collect his debt (Deut. 15:1 ff). While the law for the Jubilee Year does not have this provision, it operates in the same spirit by serving as the year of liberation of servants whose poverty had forced them into employment by others. This law of the Sabbatical year acts as a statute of limitations or a bankruptcy law for the poor debtor, in discharging his liability for debts contracted, and in enabling him to start life anew on an equal footing with his neighbor, without fear that his future earnings will be seized by his former creditors.

Significantly, the Rabbis extended the laws of money-release (*Shemittat Kesa'im*) to countries other than Palestine, but confined land-release (*Shemittat Karka-ot*) to Palestine during the period of the Second Temple. The money-release was obviously independent of the Holy Land and was included to free from his debts the poor in every land, and at a certain period of time. On the other hand, this bankruptcy law checked all business enterprises which the Jews were

engaged in after they had largely abandoned agricultural pursuits. Hillel the Elder (first century of this era) then amended the law by the institution of the *Prosbol*, a document circumventing remission of debts in the sabbatical year as a means of encouraging people to supply necessary small loans. The money-release was undoubtedly intended for the poor debtor, though the rich person also might take advantage of the general law. The Mishnah, however, plainly expresses the Rabbis' satisfaction with the debtor who does not make use of the sabbatical year in order to be relieved of obligations. The Rabbis nevertheless desired that "the laws of *Shemittah* shall not be forgotten". (Talmud Gittin, 366).

Heinrich Heine remarked, according to a citation quoted by chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz in his commentary on the Pentateuch (p. 533), that the Torah does not aim at the impossible — the abolition of property, but at the *moralization* of property, seeking to bring it into harmony with equity and justice by means of the Jubilee Year. "It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity, that is the aim of the Mosaic Code", Henry George has written. "Its Sabbath day and Sabbath year secure even to the lowliest, rest and leisure. With the blast of the jubilee trumpets the slave goes free, and a redivision of the land secures again to the poorest his fair share in the bounty of the common Creator."

### Ecological liberation

"A Jubilee shall that fiftieth year be unto you; you shall not sow, neither reap that which groweth of itself in it, nor gather the grapes in it of the undressed vines. For it is a Jubilee, it shall be holy unto you; you shall eat the increase thereof out of the field". (Lev. 25:12).

The Jubilee Year shares the features of the Sabbatical Year. It comes into force in this world, the real world, and

becomes possible only after the Israelites take possession of the land of Palestine. "When you come into the land which I give you." (Lev. 25:2). The Bible provides that one may cultivate his field and vineyard six years, but during the Sabbath-year the land was to lie fallow (Exodus 23:10 f) and was to be "released" from cultivation. "In the seventh year shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath unto the Lord; you shall neither sow your field, nor prune your vineyard. That which groweth of itself of your harvest you shall not reap, and the grapes of your undressed vine you shall not gather; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land (Lev. 25:4-6).

Significantly, the Torah personifies the land implying that it is due the respect and care that is owed to a person. "When you come unto the land which I give you, *then shall the land keep a Sabbath unto the Lord* (Lev. 25:2). The land should rest in the seventh year, as the human being rests on the seventh day. The Israelite may not during that year till it himself or allow anyone to do so on his behalf. Just as the freedom of the individual was a fundamental principle of the Torah, so was the freedom of the land from the absolute ownership of man. The land belongs to God, and is to be in trust for His purposes. The meaning of this unique law was, among other purposes, to save the soil from the danger of exhaustion.

As the Sabbath day was more than a cessation of labor and was a day dedicated to God, similarly during the Sabbatical Year, the soil was to be devoted to Him by being placed at the service of the poor and the animal creation (Exodus 23:10,11).

This dedication is stipulated by the Torah in the following manner: "And the Sabbath-produce of the land shall be for food for you; for you, and for your servant and for your ward, and for you hired servant, and for the settler by your side that sojourn with you; and for your cattle, and for the beasts that are in your land, shall all the increase thereof be for food" (Lev. 25:6).

The fruit and grain which grew of itself, spontaneously, in the Sabbatical year might be plucked and eaten, but not stored. The reference to the "sabbath-produce—shall be for food *for you*" is stated in Hebrew in the plural form ("lachem") to comprehend all those who are to benefit by this provision, including the non-Israelites (*Sifra*). What hitherto had been sown for the private gain, is now to be shared with all members of the community — the owner, his servants, and strangers who are equal in the right to consume the natural or spontaneous yield of the soil. The provision also includes the feeding of domestic animals and the free beasts of the field or forest who are uniformly regarded with tender concern throughout Scripture. They are part of God's creation and as such are comprehended in His pity and love. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast" (Proverbs 12:10).

#### Educational liberation

According to Deuteronomy 31:9 ff, we learn: "And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests, the sons of Levi, that bore the ark of the Covenant of the Lord, and unto all the elders of Israel. And Moses commanded them, saying: "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the stranger that is within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord our God, and observe to do all the words of this law; and that children who have not known, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land whither you go over the Jordan to possess it."

The Seventh Year and the Jubilee year were to be



utilized for national educational purposes. Special measures were to be taken to acquaint the men and the women, the children as well as the resident aliens, with the moral and spiritual teachings and duties of the Torah. Josephus rightly claims, that while the best knowledge of ancient times was usually treated as a secret doctrine, and confined to the few, it was the glory of Moses that he inaugurated universal education of the entire People of Israel.

Having committed the Torah to writing, Moses delivers it into the hands of the priests and elders — the religious and secular heads of the people — and enjoins them to have it read periodically to the assembled people. Religion in Judaism was not to be the concern of the priests only; the whole body of religious truth is intended to be the everlasting possession of the entire people. This commandment is the keynote of the spiritual democracy established by Moses. The Torah is the heritage of the *Congregation of Jacob* (Deut 33:4).

"To place within the reach of the (modern) worker, once in every seven years, a year's course at a University in science and law and literature and theology, would be something like the modern equivalent for one of the advantages which the Sabbath year offered to the ancient Hebrew." (F. Verinder, *Short Studies in Bible Land Laws*, quoted in Chief Rabbi Hertz' *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, p. 531).

Merely "to hear" the Torah read once every seven years in a public assembly would not be sufficient. It was to be "learned"; i.e., made an object of study. Further, the Torah must be made the rule of life, and its teachings "observed." The Rabbis worked in the spirit of Moses the lawgiver when they determined to make the Torah the Book of the People by translating it into the vernacular, and expounding it for the masses. They went far beyond the requirement of reading to the people a portion of Deuteronomy every seven years. They divided the Torah into 156 portions, and had a portion read on each Sabbath in the Synagogue, so as to make possible the reading of the whole Torah in three years. In

the large and influential Jewish community in Babylon, there prevailed the custom of completing the whole Torah in one year, and this eventually became the rule throughout the Diaspora.

### History of Jubilee Year

A number of scholars have questioned whether the institution of the Jubilee Year was ever in actual force. According to the Biblical scholar, Prof. Heinrich Ewald, "nothing is more certain than that the Jubilee was once for centuries a reality in the national life of Israel." The prophet Ezekiel speaks of its non-observance as one of the signs that 'the end is come' upon the nation for its misdoings. He mentions "the year of liberty," when a gift of land must return to the original owner.

Prof. S. R. Driver observes, "It is impossible to think that it has sometimes been supposed, the institution of the Jubilee is a mere paper-law; at least as far as concerns the land... it must date from ancient times in Israel."

The authoritative *Jewish Encyclopedia* states that "the Jubilee was instituted primarily to keep intact the original allotment of the Holy Land among the (Israelite) tribes, and to discountenance the idea of servitude to men." Evidence for this fact is derived from the knowledge that the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee were not inaugurated before the Holy Land had been conquered and apportioned among the Israelite tribes and their families. This first Sabbatical Year is said to have occurred twenty-one years after the arrival of the Hebrews in Palestine, and the first Jubilee thirty-three years later. Only when all the tribes were in possession of Palestine was the Jubilee observed, but not after the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manassah had been exiled. Nor was it observed more than nominally during the existence of the Second Temple. After the conquest of Samaria by



Shalmanesser, the Jubilee was observed nominally in the expectation of the return of the tribes, and until the final exile by Nebuchadnessar (586 B.C.).

In post-exile times the Jubilee was entirely ignored though the strict observance of the Sabbatical Year was insisted upon. This, however, is only according to a rabbinical enactment, but by the Mosaic law, according to Rabbi Judah (170-210 A.D.), the Sabbatical Year is dependent on the Jubilee and ceases to exist when there is no Jubilee.

The area of the Holy Land over which the Sabbatical Year was in force included in the time of the First Temple all the possessions of the Egyptian emigrants ("Ole Mizrayim"), which territory extended south to Gaza, east to the Euphrates, and north to the Lebanon Mountains. Ammon and Moab in the Southeast were excluded. In the period of the Second Temple, the area of the Babylon emigrants ("Ole Babel"), headed by Ezra, was restricted to the territory west of the Jordan and northward as far as Acre. The area of Palestine was divided into three parts, Judea, Galilee and the Transjordan districts, where the Sabbatical Year existed in more or less rigorous observance.

As indicated earlier, (see page 9), the Rabbinical enactment extended the money-release (*Shemittat Kesafim*) to countries other than Palestine, but confined the land-release (*Shemittat Karka-ot*) to Palestine within Ezra's boundary — lines of occupation during the period of the Second Temple. The money-release was obviously independent of the Holy Land and was intended to free from his debts the poor in every land, and at a specified period of time. The problem of encouraging the granting of loans was met by establishing the legal fiction of the *Prosbol* by Hillel the Elder, which circumvented the remission of debts in the Sabbatical Year by placing debts in the hands of a court which are not released by the advent of the Seventh Year. The Mishnah plainly expresses the Rabbis' satisfaction with the debtor who does not make use of the Sabbatical Year in order to be relieved of his obligations. The Rabbis nevertheless desired

that "the law of the shemittah shall not be forgotten." (Talmud, Gittin 36 b).

In the diaspora, throughout the centuries following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., the Sabbatical Year was unevenly observed and was mainly nominal in performance. The land-release (*Shemittat Karka-ot*), however, has been generally observed in Palestine where settled Jewish communities were to be found in every century. "During the Sabbatical Year," the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states, "the Jews of the Holy Land eat only of the products grown in the transjordanic districts."

When in 1888-89 the Sabbatical Year 5649 (dated from the symbolic Year of Creation) approached, the Ashkenazic Rabbis in Jerusalem opposed any compromise or modification of the Sabbatical Year obligations. On October 26, 1888, Rabbis J. L. Diskin and Samuel Salant issued the following declaration:

"As the year of the shemittah, 5649, is drawing nigh, we inform our brethren the colonists that, according to our religion, they are not permitted to plow or sow or reap, or allow Gentiles to perform these agricultural operations on their fields (except such work as may be necessary to keep the trees in a healthy state, which is legally permitted). Inasmuch as the colonists have hitherto endeavored to obey God's law, they will, we trust, not violate this Biblical Command. By the order of the Ben Din of the Ashkenazim at Jerusalem."

At the end of the 19th century, an appeal, issued by prominent Jews in Jerusalem for funds to enable the colonists to observe the Sabbatical Year, was directed to Jews outside the Holy Land. Dr. Hildesheim, president of the Society *Lema'an Zion* (For the Sake of Zion) in Frankfurt, Germany, collected donations for this purpose. Baron Edmond de Rothschild, on being informed by Rabbi Diskin that the laws of the Sabbatical Year are valid, ordered the colonists laboring on the farm settlements under his protection in Palestine to cease work during the Sabbatical Year.



## Dating the Jubilee Year

According to Talmudic calculations, the entrance of the Israelites into Palestine occurred in the year of Creation 2489, and 850 years, or seventeen jubilees, passed between that date and the destruction of the First Temple. For the first jubilee cycle commenced after the acquisition of the land and its distribution among the Israelite tribes, which took fourteen years, and the last jubilee occurred on the "tenth day of the month (Tishri) in the fourteenth year after that the city was smitten" (Ezekiel 40:1), which was the New-Year's Day of the Jubilee. Joshua celebrated the first jubilee, and died just before the second.

The Babylonian captivity lasted seventy years. Ezra sanctified Palestine in the seventh year of the second entrance, after the sixth year of Darius when the Temple of Jerusalem was dedicated (Ezra 6:15, 16; 7:7). The first cycle of the Sabbatical Year (*Shemittah*) began with the sanctification of Ezra.

The Talmud gives as a rule for finding the year of *Shemittah* to add one year and divide by seven the number of years since the destruction of the Second Temple, or to add 2 for every 100 years and divide the sum by seven (Talmud Abodah Zarah 96).

Jewish authorities differ as to the correct Sabbatical year owing to varied interpretations of the words "closing of Shebi'it", as meaning either the last year of the cycle or the year after the cycle; also as to the beginning of the Sabbatical Year in exile from the year when the destruction of the Temple occurred, or from the year after. Maimonides (1135-1204 A.D.) began the cycle with the year following that of the destruction of the Temple. A conference of Rabbis called in Jerusalem, who concurred in the opinion expressed by the rabbis from Safad, Damascus (Syria), Salonica (Greece), and Constantinople, fixed the Sabbatical year of their time as 1552 (5313 since Creation) in accordance with the view of Maimonides and also with the practice of the oldest members

of the Jewish communities in the Orient by whom the Sabbatical years were observed.

By that reckoning 1974 would constitute the 20th year of the present Jubilee Cycle.

## The significance of "Seven"

The cycle of sacred seasons in Judaism revolves about the system of Sabbaths — the Sabbath at the end of the week, Pentecost (Shabuoth) at the end of seven weeks; the seventh month, Tishri, as the sacred month featuring the holy days of Ros Hashonah and Yom Kippur. The cycle is completed by the Sabbatical year and by the Jubilee, which came after a "week" of Sabbatical years.

In the Kabbalah, the number seven is a symbolic division of time, and is sacred to God. This mystical tradition holds that the duration of the world is 7,000 years, the seven thousandth year being the millenium, the Great Sabbath of the Lord (Sanhedrin 97 a).

In his classic depiction of the Messiah, the great philosopher and Rabbinic sage, Maimonides, links the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee with the Messianic Era. Writing in the eleventh and twelfth paragraphs of his code of "Laws Concerning the Installation of Kings," Maimonides declares,

"The Messiah will arise and restore the Kingdom of David to its former might. He will rebuild the sanctuary and gather the dispersed of Israel. All the laws will be reinstituted in his days as of old. Sacrifices will be offered and the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years will be observed exactly in accordance with the commandments of the Torah. But whoever does not believe in him or does not await his coming denies not only the rest of the prophets, but also the Torah and our teacher, Moses." (The Messianic Idea in Judaism, by Gershom Scholem, Schocken Books, 1972, pp. 28-29).