

Notes on the *yobel*

26 occurrences, in three settings:

Exod 19:13 (1x), signal for the people to approach the mountain of God.

Not in sermon, but analyzed here to assure completeness.

Same construction *bemeshok hayyobel* as Josh. 6:5 (where *beqeren* is interposed).

Definitely NOT the drawn-out sound of the trumpet: when sound in fact comes, the instrument is called a *shophar*, vv.16,19, and then God in the same verses FORBIDS the people to come near. Not even in ch. 24, where (v.2) the people are still forbidden to come up. So we should rethink the connection with a horn in Exod 19:13. The primary meaning of *mšk* is to draw, drag, lead. It can mean “prolong,” but the only citations in BDB for “draw out a signal, give a sound” are this verse and Josh 6:5.

There are four occurrences of *mšk* inf cs in the OT:

- here, + gen *hayyobel*
- Ps 10:9, to draw the poor (gen suffix) with (*b-*) a net
- Eccl 2:3, to draw the flesh (*'et-*) with (*b-*) wine
- Josh 6:5, to draw with the *yobel*-horn (*beqeren hayyobel*; *yobel* here can hardly be direct object, since that would have to be construct to the inf cs, and *beqeren* could not intervene.)

The best understanding in Exod appears to be, “when one brings in the *yobel*” or “when one prolongs the *yobel*,” where *yobel* has not yet been defined, and can only be understood by the people in the light of Lev. 25, to be revealed shortly. Vv. 12 and 13 exclude the people from the mountain, an exclusion that is echoed throughout the encampment at Sinai. Indeed, unauthorized presumptuous ascent to the mountain of God (later generalized from Sinai to Zion) is a sin, ascribed e.g., to the King of Babylon (Isa 14:13). But along with this exclusion, there is a promise that one day there will be a *yobel*, a yet-undefined provision under which God’s people can at last come up to the mountain of God and enjoy fellowship with him, as Moses did.

The Jubilee of Lev. 25,27 does indeed prefigure this experience, founded as it is on the day of atonement (Lev. 25:9), since access to God’s hill requires sinlessness (Ps 24:3). But ultimately it is an eschatological hope, occasioned by God’s forgiveness and the coming of his messenger (Isa 40:1-9) and associated with the last days (Isa 2:3).

This eschatological promise may be compared with another, also introduced in the exodus but not enjoyed until the coming of Messiah: the rest in the land, at peace with all her enemies (Exod 33:14; Deut 3:20; 25:19; esp. Deut. 12:9,10). Rest was occasional but sparse during the judges and monarchy: Joshua (14:15; 21:44; 22:4; 23:1), judges (Othniel, 3:11; Ehud, 3:30; Deborah, 5:31), David (2 Sam 7:1), Solomon (1 Kings 5:4; 8:56), Asa (2 Chr 14:6,7; 15:15), Jehoshaphat (2 Chron 20:30). These kings together account for only 143 years of the 457 year monarchy. The judges add another 120 years

or so to make no more than (say) 300 years out of the 800 between the conquest (1400) and the Babylonian captivity (600). Ultimately the rest had to await the coming of Christ, Isa 11:10, Matt. 11:28-30.

The seventh sabbatical year, the year of release. Transliterated “Jubile.”

Lev 25 (14x) and 27 (5x), the founding legislation. See also Num 35:4, reference to the Jubilee year in the deliberations over the daughters of Zelophehad. Two points to be noted here: the character of the Jubilee, and the association with a distinctive trumpet call.

Character of the Jubilee

Lev. 25:10 is the first occurrence of *yobel* in this section, and seems to provide a definition. Three terms in parallel:

1. Liberty. Freedom from bondage.
2. *Yobel*; LXX translates it *afesis* “release, removal.”
3. Return of every man to his own possession.

This was a time when debts were forgiven, slaves released, and property returned to its ancestral families. (This last is particularly important for our exposition.) Isa 61:1 links this with the Messianic age, as shown by the Lord Jesus’ appropriation of it in Luke 4:18-19, and ultimately it points to the Millennium (James 5:1-8).

Distinctive Trumpet Call

The only association with a trumpet is Lev. 25:9, where the jubile year is initiated on the day of atonement with a special trumpet call. Though 25:9 uses English “jubile,” the underlying Hebrew is *tru’a* rather than *yobel*. The former word is a distinct trumpet call, sometimes translated “alarm.” Four functions:

1. start the march of the tribes (Num 10:5-6),
2. send the people to war (Num 10:9),
3. announce the feast of the seventh month (Num 29:1; Lev 23:24),
4. announce the start of the year of Jubile (here).

Num 10:7 shows the distinction between this call and others.

Josh 6:4,5,6,8,13 (5x)

- 4, 6, cf. 8, 13: w:/\$ib:(fh koh:aniym\ yi&:)w. \$ib:(fh \$owp:rowt ha/y.owb:liym\ *on the double plural by grammatical attraction, see Jouon ¶136o.*
- 5: b.i/m:\$ok:\ b.:/qeren ha/y.owb"l\5

These are thus “trumpets of jubilee,” those wont to be used in the announcement of the jubilee, or blowing the characteristic “alarm” call associated with the jubilee.

Significance

Israel has returned to its ancestral habitation, the land promised to Abraham and his descendants, after having been forced from it by poverty. The land, so long enslaved to pagan tenants, now will be restored to its legitimate owners.