

“JESUS IS OUR JUBILEE” . . . BUT HOW?
THE OT BACKGROUND AND LUKAN FULFILLMENT
OF THE ETHICS OF JUBILEE

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary Christian church, one does not need to look far to find references to the biblical Jubilee. On the campus of Wheaton College, the World Christian Fellowship sponsors a yearly Jubilee week, in which students are challenged to think globally about the world Christian movement. A branch of a local charitable organization is called the “Jubilee Furniture Company.” This group raises funds for Christian outreach through the re-sale of furniture and supplies needy families with home furnishings. An internet search will lead one to the Jubilee Christian Church, the Jubilee Christian Academy, and even the Jubilee Water Park and Resort.

In the history of the church, the Jubilee has often played a significant role. In the year 1300, Pope Boniface VIII proclaimed a “Jubilee” plenary indulgence for the forgiveness of sin for all those who fulfilled the necessary requirements.¹ Although these papal proclamations have continued until the present day and other biblical interpreters have often called for the church to “proclaim a Jubilee,”² the last decade has seen an increase in these calls with the turn of the millennium and frequent appeals for debt forgiveness for African nations as an expression of Jubilee.³

In this article, we will begin by summarizing three such calls for a modern Jubilee: the theological summary in *Jubilee 2000: Economic Justice for Churches in Eastern and Southern Africa*;⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright’s *Old*

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¹ See Giulia Barone, “Jubilee,” in *The Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* (ed. André Vauchez, et al.; trans. Adrian Walford; 2 vols.; London: Routledge, 2000) 1:788.

² Apart from the resources discussed below, see the following for other discussions of Jubilee: André Trocmé, *Jésus-Christ et la révolution non-violente* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1961); Christopher J. H. Wright, “Jubilee, Year of,” in *ABD* 3:1025–30; Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 19; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 116–17; Hans Ucko, ed., *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility: Jewish and Christian Insights* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997).

³ See Joshua William Busby, “Bono Made Jesse Helms Cry: Jubilee 2000, Debt Relief, and Moral Action in International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 51 (2007) 247–75.

⁴ *Jubilee 2000: Economic Justice for Churches in Eastern and Southern Africa* (ed. Chiramwiwa Gavi; Harare, Zimbabwe: EDICESA, 1999).

Testament Ethics for the People of God;⁵ and John Howard Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus*.⁶ After briefly outlining each of these proposals, we will turn to the biblical data in an attempt to summarize the main themes connected to Jubilee. Finally, we will return to these initial proposals and evaluate them in light of the biblical data.

II. MODERN PROPOSALS

In *Jubilee 2000*, the theological rationale for the call for debt forgiveness begins with the claim, "Jubilee points to a year of grace whereby relations between human beings are restored and a new beginning established."⁷ Therefore, while debt forgiveness is part of their proposal, the Economic Justice Network for Churches in Eastern and Southern Africa also calls for a restoration of relationships in "the community of God's people."⁸ While there is a close link between Jubilee and freedom, the freedom envisaged in this proposal is more than economic and political freedom. It also includes freedom to function as the image of God, as humans were intended to do.⁹ Thus, the theological basis in *Jubilee 2000* is essentially twofold. First, there is a call for economic and political freedom for African nations and peoples. This freedom, however, cannot be divorced from a second type of freedom—freedom to live at peace with God and God's people.

Our second proposal is found in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*. Wright's argument is somewhat more complex than the proposal in *Jubilee 2000*. He argues that the Christian church can apply the Jubilee in three modes: typologically, paradigmatically, and eschatologically.¹⁰ He argues first that the typological approach allows us to interpret the Jubilee in light of the Christ event. Through Christ's fulfillment of Jubilee in Luke 4, the "freedom" of the Jubilee becomes both spiritual forgiveness and economic freedom.¹¹ In the church's paradigmatic application of the Jubilee, Wright focuses on the principles of economic and social equality as the abiding prin-

⁵ *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).

⁶ *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

⁷ *Jubilee 2000* 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.* 2–3.

¹⁰ This method is a specific application of Wright's larger OT ethical model. Wright rejects the two extremes of attempting to replicate ancient Israel as closely as possible and altogether rejecting the ethical relevance of the OT (*Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* 62–63). Rather, he suggests that we see both Israel's society and law as a paradigm. The primary method of application is analogy; one applies the principles from Israel's circumstances to different and broader circumstances. Although the paradigmatic approach is Wright's primary tool for transferring the ethics of the OT to the modern Christian believer, he does not consider this approach the only way for us to appropriate OT ethical guidelines. In his discussion of the land and Christian ethics, he suggests two other methods of interpretation. First, an eschatological approach focuses on the relationship between God, redeemed humanity, and the new creation. Second, a typological approach sees Israel and the OT in light of the Messiah and his people so that they point forward to God, the church, and the fellowship of the church (*ibid.* 182–84).

¹¹ *Ibid.* 206.

ciples of Jubilee. Thus, “the jubilee speaks volumes to the massive issue of international debt.”¹² Finally, Wright’s eschatological mode of applying Jubilee is centered around the hopes of Isaiah 61 and God’s promise of Israel’s (and the world’s) restoration. Although this began to be fulfilled in Christ, the full realization of these promises is yet to come.¹³

Somewhat earlier than the previous two proposals, John Howard Yoder’s application of the Jubilee offers a unique perspective on this issue. In his *Politics of Jesus*, originally published in 1972 but revised and updated in 1994, Yoder argues that the Jubilee was central to Jesus’ gospel proclamation.¹⁴ Thus, when Jesus instructs us to forgive our debtors, he “tells us purely and simply to erase the debts of those who owe us money; that is to say, practice the jubilee.”¹⁵ Arguing from the parables of the unmerciful servant and the unfaithful steward, Yoder insists that Jesus’ Jubilee proclamation in Luke 4 was intended to overturn the oppressive economic and political policies in Israel and to initiate an equitable redistribution of capital.¹⁶ Therefore, while Yoder sees “forgiveness” as a central concept to the modern application of Jubilee, his emphasis is on economic and political structures, almost to the exclusion of the more traditional spiritual import that “forgiveness” tends to have in the Christian tradition.

While their emphases on the importance and meaning of forgiveness varies, all three of these works share a common feature: the modern application of the Jubilee demands freedom from economic oppression and some level of equality. As we turn to the biblical data, we will seek to understand how the NT, specifically Luke-Acts, interprets the Jubilee call for release/forgiveness. From this, we will be in a better position to determine how the NT applies the economic proscriptions of the Jubilee, and how we can do the same.

III. METHOD

In our exegetical analysis, we will begin with Jesus’ synagogue sermon in Luke 4:18–19 and survey some of the major biblical texts that provide the background for his proclamation of liberty. We will focus on the Jubilee as the background of this proclamation, directing attention to the proclamation of liberty (דָּוָר) found in Lev 25:10 and subsequent texts that allude to it, culminating with a discussion of Isa 61:1–3.

The aim of this article is decidedly not to reconstruct the textual histories of the Jubilee laws and their subsequent references. Rather, approaching the text as a committed Christian, I will discuss the texts in their final form in both OT and NT. Therefore, any interaction with those who have attempted to reconstruct the history of the texts in question will only appear as part of a larger attempt to interpret the final form of the text. Based on

¹² Ibid. 208.

¹³ Ibid. 210.

¹⁴ Yoder self-admittedly draws heavily from Trocmé, *Jésus-Christ et la révolution non-violente*.

¹⁵ John Howard Yoder, *Politics of Jesus* 62.

¹⁶ Ibid. 68–70.

these exegetical data, we will then analyze the suggestions of the *Jubilee 2000*, Wright, and Yoder and suggest some key interpretive principles.

IV. JESUS' SYNAGOGUE PROCLAMATION

While there are other possible references to the Jubilee and its proclamation of liberty in the NT,¹⁷ the clearest reference to the Jubilee in the NT comes in Jesus' first synagogue sermon in Luke's Gospel.¹⁸ According to Luke, immediately after Jesus' sojourn and temptation in the desert, he returned to Galilee "in the power of the Spirit" (4:14) and began teaching in the synagogues. In the first part of the important events described in Luke 4:16–30,¹⁹ Luke reports Jesus teaching in his home city of Nazareth. Standing to read from the scroll of Isaiah,²⁰ Jesus found what we know as Isa 61:1–2a and read it aloud. In addition to reading from Isaiah 61, Jesus adds a line from Isa 58:6 to his proclamation.²¹

Luke only records one comment from Jesus after he gave the scroll back to the synagogue attendant. Jesus announced to the audience that Isaiah 61 was fulfilled in that day.²² In order to arrive at an understanding of the NT's emphasis with respect to the Jubilee, we must ask, what did Jesus fulfill and how did he fulfill it? To do so, we must first examine the OT data concerning this "proclamation of release" in the year of Jubilee.

¹⁷ In addition to Luke 4:18–19, NA²⁷ records allusions to Isa 61:1–2 in Matt 5:3–4; 11:5; Luke 6:20–21; 7:22; Acts 4:27; 10:38; and Rev 5:10. While all of these references are linked to Jesus' ministry, none specifically references "release" (ἀφεσις).

¹⁸ Although Mark 6:1–6 and Matt 13:53–58 refer to Jesus' sermon in Nazareth and subsequent rejection, only Luke records the content of the sermon and the allusion to Isaiah 61.

¹⁹ As many scholars note, Luke 4:14–30 is programmatic in Luke's presentation of Jesus' ministry. Joel B. Green points out five features of this text that hint at its significance in Luke's overall project: (1) it is a specific illustration of the summary statement in Luke 4:14–15; (2) it is the first account of Jesus' public ministry in Luke's gospel; (3) it is the only place where Luke describes the substance of Jesus' synagogue teaching and is therefore representative for all of Jesus' synagogue teaching; (4) it is linked with both previous and subsequent emphases on the Spirit and the Sonship of Jesus; (5) it is mentioned elsewhere in Luke-Acts (Luke 7:21–22; Acts 10:38; *The Gospel of Luke* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997] 207). For more on the programmatic significance of Luke 4:14–30 (or 4:14–21) see C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (BZNW 139; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006) 78–80; Ulrich Busse, *Das Nazareth-Manifest Jesu: Eine Einführung in das lukanische Jesusbild nach Lk 4,16–30* (SBS 91; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk); I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 177–78. For a summary of the rhetorical structure of Luke 4:17–30, see Patrick E. Spencer, *Rhetorical Texture and Narrative Trajectories of the Lukan Galilean Ministry Speeches* (LNTS 341; New York: T & T Clark, 2007) 63–70.

²⁰ For more on synagogue reading practices, see Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Literacy in Roman Palestine* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 81; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 452–57.

²¹ As is often noted, the record in Luke 4 is probably a summary of Jesus' teaching and not a direct quote (see Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994] 405).

²² As Rowe observes, the links between χριστός in Luke 2:11 and the anointing (ἐχρίσεν) in Luke 4:18 indicate that this Jesus self-identification with this text is probably a messianic claim (*Early Narrative Christology* 79). See also the discussion in Robert B. Sloan, Jr., *The Favorable Year of the Lord: A Study of Jubiliary Theology in the Gospel of Luke* (Austin, TX: Schola Press, 1977) 48–54.

V. LEVITICUS 25

The year of Jubilee is introduced in Leviticus 25.²³ Although references to the Jubilee also appear in Leviticus 26 and 27, most of the relevant data for this study is found in chapter 25. Therefore, we will focus our initial discussion here. This chapter, found in the midst of the “Holiness Code,”²⁴ begins with an explanation of Sabbath years. The basic principle of Sabbath years is found in verses 3–4: every seventh year, the people of Israel were to refrain from cultivating the land as a “Sabbath to YHWH” (v. 2).²⁵ Following this explanation, the rest of the chapter presents a general principle for the practice of the Jubilee year, followed by a series of specific instructions.

Every fiftieth year, on the Day of Atonement,²⁶ Israel was to sound the trumpet and declare a year of Jubilee.²⁷ The Jubilee command, at its simplest, is found in verse 10. Israel must consecrate the fiftieth year in order to “proclaim liberty throughout the land.” The nominal form of “liberty”

²³ We cannot discuss in any detail the development of Leviticus 25. This chapter is the subject of a intricate redaction-critical study in I. Cardellini, *Die biblischen ‘Sklenen’-Gesetze im Lichte des keilschriftlichen Sklavenrechts: Ein Beitrag zur Tradition, Überlieferung und Redaktion der alttestamentlichen Rechtstexte* (BBB 55; Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1981). For more history and discussion, see also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27* (AB 3b; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 2149–51.

²⁴ While most scholars assume that Leviticus 17–26 was an independent composition later inserted into the book of Leviticus, our discussion of this section in no way depends on such a theory. For an overview of the “Holiness Code,” see J. Joosten, *People and Land in the Holiness Code: An Exegetical Study of the Ideational Framework of the Law in Leviticus 17–26* (VT Sup 67; Leiden: Brill, 1996). For more on its place in the book of Leviticus, including an argument for the structural unity of the book, see Christopher R. Smith, “The Literary Structure of Leviticus,” *JSOT* 70 (1996) 17–32.

²⁵ The phrase here is שבת ליהוה. Although somewhat difficult to classify, this is likely, broadly speaking, a ל of relation (see Joüon §132c). See also Adrian Schenker’s comment: “The interruption of all production every seventh year reminds the inhabitants of the authority of the ultimate owner of the land” (“The Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves: The Road from Exodus to Leviticus,” *JSOT* 78 [1998] 25).

²⁶ The “year” of Jubilee actually begins in the seventh month of the year. Therefore, it seems likely that the year began in the seventh month of either the 49th or 50th year and extended until the seventh month of the 50th or 51st year. Allen P. Ross summarizes three major options for the chronology of the Jubilee: (1) the Jubilee took place at the end of the seventh Sabbath year, so that the land was not worked for two consecutive years; (2) the Jubilee and the seventh Sabbath year were simultaneous, and “fifty” is a general way of speaking about the 49th year; (3) the Jubilee began in the first month in the civic calendar but the seventh in the cultic, so that whether one considered it the 49th or 50th year depended on which calendar was being used (*Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002] 459). A fourth option is that the Jubilee was a shortened year, akin to our modern leap year (see Sidney B. Hoenig, “Sabbatical Years and the Year of Jubilee,” *JQR* 59 [1969] 222–36; followed by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979] 319). For more on this issue, see Robert S. Kawashima, “The Jubilee, Every 49 or 50 Years?” *VT* 53 (2003) 117–20; idem, “Once Again, the Jubilee, Every 49 or 50 Years?” *VT* 55 (2005) 121–25.

²⁷ The word usually transliterated “Jubilee” is יובל. Its literal meaning is “ram’s horn” or, from Phoenician, “ram” (BDB 285; KBL 371). As Francis Moloney notes, however, יובל is not etymologically related to the Latin word *jubilare*, from which we derive the English “Jubilee” (“The Scriptural Basis of Jubilee, Part I: The First Testament—the End of Servitude,” *ITQ* 65 [2000] 104).

(דָּרוֹר) appears six times in the OT.²⁸ Apart from Lev 25:10, דָּרוֹר occurs in Isa 61:1; Jer 34:8, 15, 17; and Ezek 46:17.²⁹ As we will see below, all of these references to liberty are likely related to the Jubilee principle.³⁰ Therefore, determining the meaning of this word in Leviticus 25 is crucial.

Milgrom points out three possible definitions for דָּרוֹר: “release,” “flow,” or “freedom.”³¹ We need not press too hard for distinctions between these terms, however, for the meanings are closely linked.³² Therefore, we will start with a rather general definition of דָּרוֹר as a release of some kind.³³ From this somewhat abstract definition, we must move to the concrete reality of how this release was to be put into actual practice. Fortunately, דָּרוֹר is further defined in two concrete ways in verses 10–11. First, property and persons were to be returned to their proper places. Second, the land was to be given rest.³⁴ These conditions were closely linked to YHWH’s instructions for Israel’s covenant life in the land, so the Jubilee restores the kinship and land tenure systems that were part of Israel’s covenant with YHWH.³⁵

1. *Jubilee injunctions.* After establishing the general principle that the Israelite economy must function in light of the Jubilee commands (vv. 13–17), the rest of Leviticus 25 is devoted to the explication of the dual command to return indentured servants to their tribes and grant the land a Sabbath rest. We will deal with each of these in turn.

a. *Rest for the land.* The command for the land to rest is given first. As noted above, the first part of Leviticus 25 is devoted to the details of the Sabbath rest. Since the Jubilee year occurred every seventh Sabbath year, the land was to be given its customary septennial rest. The principle is expanded in verses 18–22. Here, YHWH gives his assurance that if they are faithful to keep his command to give the land its rest, the Israelites will not lack food. Rather, YHWH will bless the crop of the sixth year so that it will produce a crop sufficient for three years (vv. 21–22). Thus, the crop of that year will provide for the year itself, the next year when the land is resting, and a third year, the first year of the new cycle, while the people are waiting for the crops to come in again.

²⁸ The word is a cognate with the Akkadian *andurāru*. This word was often associated with the edict of a newly crowned Babylonian king proclaiming a suspension of debt and indentured servitude (see Levine, *Leviticus* 171).

²⁹ The combination of דָּרוֹר and קָרָא (“proclaiming liberty”) appears in Isa 61:1 and Jer 34:8.

³⁰ As Erhard Gerstenberger points out, in other OT contexts דָּרוֹר is either related to the return of land, as in Ezek 46:17, or the release of slaves, as in Jeremiah 34 and Isaiah 61 (*Das dritte Buch Mose/Leviticus* [ATD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993] 345).

³¹ *Leviticus* 23–27 2167.

³² Milgrom comments, “One can easily see that the three meanings are related: whatever is released, flows and gains freedom” (ibid. 2167).

³³ See HALOT 230; BDB 422. Thus, the consistent LXX translation of דָּרוֹר as ἄφεσις is fitting.

³⁴ While the regulation of rest for the land was not exclusive to the Jubilee commands, it seems to be included in the proclamation of liberty here. Therefore, while recognizing that the Sabbath years also demanded a rest for the land, we will treat this command as part of the Jubilee.

³⁵ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* 199–200.

b. *Redemption of the land and release of servants.* Unlike the land Sabbaths, which were to be a regular event, the restoration of servants³⁶ and land was unique to the year of Jubilee. Leviticus 25:10 decrees that in the Jubilee year, all those who were forced to leave their extended families and land would return to their rightful place. Most of the rest of the chapter is devoted to the explication of this principle.³⁷ Although we cannot give a detailed account of the procedures described for the restoration of persons and property here, we will provide a general summary of these procedures.

The overarching principle for land ownership and tenancy is found in verses 23–24. The land is YHWH’s; the people of Israel were resident strangers on his land.³⁸ Therefore, they had no right to sell it irretrievably (לצמחה).³⁹ Thus, both buyer and seller were to recognize the temporary nature of their arrangement and anticipate the eventual return of the land to the seller or his family.

c. *Redemption of the land.* The instructions for land redemption appear first (vv. 25–34). If possible, kinship structures were to prevent the control of land from leaving the family.⁴⁰ If, however, land must be sold, it must be sold commensurately with the number of years remaining until the Jubilee, for in that year, the land is to be returned to its original owner.⁴¹

d. *Release of indentured servants.* The last part of the chapter outlines the principles for servitude in light of the Jubilee (vv. 35–55).⁴² If it becomes necessary for an Israelite (אִשְׂרָאֵלִי) to come under another’s authority as a tenant, this person is to be treated with compassion and released in the Jubilee year. However, if slaves are acquired from the surrounding nations, they are kept as property, and, presumably, not released in the Jubilee (vv. 44–46). Finally, if an Israelite farmer is indentured outside of his clan, a kinsman has the first right of redemption, and if this is not possible, then the farmer is to be released in the year of Jubilee.

³⁶ We cannot here enter into discussion of the intricacies of slavery and indentured service in the Ancient Near East. See Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 141; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

³⁷ Schenker argues that “possession” (אֲדוּמָה) and “family” (מִשְׁפָּחָה) are the key words in Leviticus 25 (“Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves” 25).

³⁸ For a concise summary of the theological importance of the land for Israel, see Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* 76–99.

³⁹ Levine points out that in Akkadian land contracts, *tsamit* means something like “finally handed over.” Thus, the sale is final and unable to be retrieved by the seller (*Leviticus* 174).

⁴⁰ If a kinsman were able to redeem the land, it would presumably remain in his possession until the next Jubilee, at which time it would return to the original owner(s) (so Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27 2191).

⁴¹ In walled cities, however, the Jubilee principles are different. If one is forced to sell his home in a city, one year is granted to redeem his home; at the end of that time, the house belongs to the purchaser. With the exception of Levites, it was not to be returned in the Jubilee year. More laws for Levitical cities are given in Numbers 35.

⁴² Gerstenberger calls the return of the land the release of servants “mirror images” (*Leviticus* 346). See also Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27 2205.

Twice in this chapter, YHWH explains that Israelites could not be permanent servants of others because they were servants of YHWH, for he freed them from their slavery in Egypt (vv. 42–43, 55). Just as the land ultimately belonged to YHWH, so did his covenant people; therefore, they could not be servants of another master. They were in covenant with YHWH and obliged to keep the terms of his covenant.

2. *Summary of Leviticus 25.* So we see that in Leviticus 25, three significant procedures were associated with the year of Jubilee. First, the Sabbath rest for the land was observed. While this procedure was in continuity with the normal seventh year rest, properly speaking, it is a part of the Jubilee so it must be considered along with it. Second, the proper distribution of land among the tribes, clans, and families was to be re-established. Third, Israelites were to be freed from servitude they may have been forced to submit to in the previous cycle of 49 years. Thus, the economy is “reset” to avoid endemic oppression.

The economic effects of the Jubilee practice would have been profound.⁴³ As Wright points out, while the redemption of people and property could be practiced anytime and was primarily intended to keep land from leaving the clan, the Jubilee was only practiced every fifty years and returned the land to the smaller “households” or familial units. Thus, clan lands could not be controlled by one or two powerful families.⁴⁴ Therefore, oppression would have been severely limited. Furthermore, YHWH’s covenant stipulations for the land would have constantly been brought to mind, for every economic transaction related to the land would have been executed in light of the coming year of Jubilee. Unfortunately, however, there is little evidence that either Sabbath years or the Jubilee were ever consistently practiced, if practiced at all.⁴⁵

Ross suggests the following as a summary of the Jubilee regulations in Leviticus 25: “The acceptance of God’s sovereignty over his people and all their possessions leads to the magnanimous and compassionate treatment of the poor and the destitute, because at the end of the age everyone will be released from bondage.”⁴⁶ While we cannot dispute the truth of this statement, summarizing Leviticus 25 in this manner seems to exclude a crucial component: the centrality of the covenant. The reason that Israel was to treat the poor among them with compassion was not simply out of magnanimous

⁴³ For a more detailed economic analysis of the Jubilee, see John E. Anderson, “A Biblical and Economic Analysis of Jubilee Property Provisions,” *Faith and Economics* 46 (2005) 25–41.

⁴⁴ *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God* 204–5.

⁴⁵ Fager argues that there is no evidence in the biblical literature for the actual practice of the Jubilee. Furthermore, he points out that whereas early Christians tended to interpret the Jubilee allegorically and/or messianically, the Talmud assumes the practice is more literal and historical, although it could no longer be practiced (*Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee* 34–36). Mark Rooker, however, suggests that some form of the Jubilee was practiced in the Second Temple Era (*Leviticus* [NAC 3a; Nashville: B & H, 2000] 302–3).

⁴⁶ *Holiness to the Lord* 463.

spirit, but as a demonstration of their loyalty to YHWH, their understanding of their own place as his redeemed people, and their trust in his care for them.⁴⁷

Wenham may well be right to suggest that the Jubilee was intended to reestablish “something of the relationship that existed between men at their creation.”⁴⁸ To this we could add, the Jubilee may have been intended to renew other relationships as well. It seems that in Leviticus 25, the proclamation of liberty is closely related to the careful maintenance of the order that YHWH established between his people and the land.⁴⁹ That is to say, “liberty” is the restoration of the proper order among the covenant people, the covenant land, and the covenant God.⁵⁰

VI. JUBILEE ELSEWHERE IN THE PENTATEUCH

Although the word “Jubilee” does not appear in other law codes in the Pentateuch, similar concepts are present elsewhere. Outside of Leviticus, both Deut 15:1–6 and Exod 23:10–11 refer to the Sabbath years. The stipulations in Exodus 23 relate primarily to the land rest in the Sabbath year. Therefore, while it may contribute to our understanding of the Sabbath year, little or nothing that is specific to the Jubilee is found in this passage. Furthermore, any links between Exodus 23 and Luke 4 are tenuous and likely mediated through other passages. Therefore, we will not directly address Exodus 23 in this study.

Deuteronomy 15, however, provides regulations for the poor and indentured servants. Therefore, these laws are similar to the specific Jubilee commands.⁵¹ While Deuteronomy 15, like Leviticus 25, commands a “release” for

⁴⁷ With respect to the Jubilee, Eugene Merrill concludes, “No clearer statement could be found to affirm the role of Israel as the blessed, if undeserving, vassal whom God had graciously brought into covenant fellowship with himself” (*Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* [Nashville: B & H, 2006] 373; cf. Rooker, *Leviticus* 305).

⁴⁸ *Leviticus* 317.

⁴⁹ Although the land allotment is not specified until one reaches Josh 13:1–21:45, the tribal allotments are mentioned in Num 18:21–24; 26:52–56; 32:1–42; 33:50–56.

⁵⁰ Milgrom points out that a key feature of Israel’s Jubilee proclamation that distinguished it from her neighbors’ liberty proclamations was that it was cyclical and therefore not contingent on the impulses of often capricious kings (*Leviticus 23–27* 2168–69). For more on other ancient Near Eastern “clean slate” proclamations, see *ibid.*; Michael Hudson, “Proclaim Liberty Throughout the Land: The Economic Roots of the Jubilee,” *BR* 15 (1999) 26–33, 44; Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge* (JSOTSup 155; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 25–27.

⁵¹ However, as Schenker points out, both the timing and debt principles are framed differently in the Jubilee year and the Sabbatical years (“Biblical Legislation on the Release of Slaves” 36). Furthermore, the phrase ליהוה, which appears in both Lev 25:2, 4 and Deut 15:2, clearly links the Sabbath year and the commands of Deuteronomy 15. As Milgrom notes, Deuteronomy 15 instructs Israel to enact “release” for both land and debts, “because both have been proclaimed as Yahweh’s” (*Leviticus 23–27* 2245). For a more detailed comparison of Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 25, and other Pentateuchal passages, see Bernard M. Levinson, “The Manumission of Hermeneutics: The Slave Laws of the Pentateuch as a Challenge to Contemporary Pentateuchal Theory,” in *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (VTSup 109; ed. André Lemaire; Leiden: Brill, 2006) 281–324.

the poor, שְׁמֵטָה rather than דָּרוּר is used to describe the release.⁵² However, in the LXX, both words are translated as ἄφεσις, which is central in Luke 4. Therefore, while recognizing the different roots in Hebrew, we will briefly examine the function of the release in Deut 15:1–11.

In Deuteronomy 15, instructions are given for the cancellation of debts every seventh year.⁵³ Whether and how this event relates to the Sabbath years described elsewhere in the Torah is debated. However, the stipulations of Deuteronomy 15 have several points in common with Leviticus 25. For our purposes, we can note three important similarities.

First, both texts refer to “release” or “liberty” for the poor. The release in Leviticus 25, however, is oriented more toward agrarian settings and Deuteronomy 15 is geared toward urban settings.⁵⁴ Second, both Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 stipulate that the release is to occur in the seventh year. However, Leviticus 25 commands that the release of land and servants is only to occur in the seventh-seven, the Jubilee year. Finally, Deuteronomy 15, like Leviticus 25, legislates a certain level of economic egalitarianism. Israel’s economy was to operate in a way that prevented systemic oppression by giving the poor the opportunity to escape their poverty through the cancellation of debt, provided the covenant stipulations were observed.⁵⁵ However, as verses 7–11 seem to indicate, the economic ideals of verses 1–6 would not always, or ever, be the reality in Israel.⁵⁶ Therefore, these verses provide more concrete details for treating the poor. In short, the poor should be treated with compassion and generosity.

In spite of the differences noted above, Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 are both focused on “release,” and both texts relate this release to the people of Israel’s relationship with both God and each other. Both also envision a

⁵² HALOT gives the following range of meaning to the verb שָׁמַט: in the qal, “to untie, remove”; in the piel, “to loosen, make wide; absolve sin” (4:1557). The nominal form שְׁמֵטָה is defined as “year of remission” (4:1558). שְׁמֵטָה appears in Deut 15:1, 2, 9, and 31:10 and the qal verbal form שָׁמַט appears in Exod 23:11. Derivations of this root only appear elsewhere in 2 Sam 6:6; 2 Kgs 9:33; Jer 17:4; Ps 141:6; and 2 Chr 13:9. None of these latter references are related to the Jubilee laws.

⁵³ The phrase in verse 1 is “at the end of seven years” (מִקֵּץ שִׁבְעֵי-שָׁנִים). Daniel Block suggests four possible interpretations of this phrase: (1) it is an ambiguous reference to a selected time in the seventh year; (2) it refers to the start of the year; (3) it refers to the end of the year; (4) it refers to the Festival of Booths during the seventh year (*The Gospel According to Moses: A Commentary on Deuteronomy 12–26: Volume 1, Chapters 12–18* [forthcoming] 16–17).

⁵⁴ For more on this point, see John Sietze Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (VTSup 115; Leiden: Brill, 2007) 124–26.

⁵⁵ Peter C. Craigie observes that although verse 11 states that there will always poor among the people, verses 4–5 indicate that “there need not be poor people in the land, for the Lord will certainly bless you” (*The Book of Deuteronomy* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 237, emphasis original). Therefore, the responsibility for the continual presence of poverty in Israel falls squarely to the people, or better, the leaders who fail to follow these prescriptions.

⁵⁶ Eugene Merrill suggests different situations found in verses 4 and 11 are “indicative of the gulf that exists between the ideal and the actual, what could be the case were God’s purposes carried out and what inevitably occurs when they are not” (*Deuteronomy* [NAC 4; Nashville: Broadman, 1994] 244). Block notes that the כִּי clause begins a new section that describes Israel’s “economic reality” (*Gospel According to Moses* 29).

compassionate and openhanded economic ideal for the covenant people as an expression of their trust in YHWH.

VII. JUBILEE ELSEWHERE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the prophets, the Jubilee proclamation of liberty is taken up and given added significance. Prophetic references to the Jubilee focus on the latter two principles outlined in Leviticus 25—the return of persons and property to their proper places. The references to the Jubilee in Jeremiah and Ezekiel have significant continuity with Leviticus 25; however, the proclamation of liberty in Isaiah 61 is somewhat different. Therefore, regardless of the actual chronology of the books, we will deal with Jeremiah 34 and Ezekiel 46 first, and then devote more attention to the proclamation of liberty in Isaiah 61.

1. *Jeremiah 34*. In Jeremiah 34, the word דָּרוּר appears four times.⁵⁷ The first three instances of דָּרוּר (vv. 8, 15, 17a) have a meaning quite similar to that which we have found in Leviticus 25. The release in view is the release of slaves, specifically Israelites who are enslaved to fellow Israelites. The fourth occurrence of דָּרוּר (v. 17b) is a play on words. Because of Israel's failure to “release” the slaves, YHWH will “release” the punishment commensurate with this failure.⁵⁸ While the prophet specifically condemns Israel for their failure to keep the stipulations of Deuteronomy 15, this failure is described with the terminology of Leviticus 25. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that, apart from the pun in verse 17b, the meaning of דָּרוּר and the stipulations attached to it are quite similar to those found in Leviticus 25. Determining how and whether the prophet has Deuteronomy 15, Leviticus 25, or both passages in view is not as important as recognizing that the stipulations have a basic continuity with the Jubilee commands. Therefore, Jeremiah 34 does not contribute to our understanding and application of the Jubilee commands as much as Ezekiel 46 or Isaiah 61.

⁵⁷ The word first appears in a word from YHWH commanding King Zedekiah to make a proclamation of liberty (דָּרוּר, v. 8). As Simeon Chavel notes, among other verbal parallels, both Lev 25:39 and Jer 34:9 refer to the ones to be freed as אָזַח (“Let my People Go!” Emancipation, Revelation, and Scribal Activity in Jeremiah 34.8–14,” *JSOT* 76 [1997] 90–91). See also Patrick D. Miller, “The Book of Jeremiah,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (ed. Leander Keck et al.; vol. 6; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 831; Moshe Weinfeld, “Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee” 41, n. 8. While initially obeying this command, they subsequently re-enslaved their brothers and sisters (v. 11). Therefore, in verse 12, YHWH again spoke to Jeremiah, and told him that Israel had failed in the past to keep the stipulations of Deuteronomy 15. For more on the lexical and stylistic links between Deuteronomy 15 and Jeremiah 34, see Nahum Sarna, “Zedekiah's Emancipation of Slaves and the Sabbatical Year,” in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of his Sixth-fifth Birthday* (AOAT 22; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1973) 143–49.

⁵⁸ Since Israel failed to keep these stipulations of the covenant and to “proclaim liberty” (v. 17a), YHWH will “proclaim liberty” (v. 17b) to the sword, to pestilence, and to famine. In other words, because Israel failed to keep the covenant and grant “release” according to the stipulations of the Torah, YHWH would “release” the covenant penalties on Israel.

2. *Ezekiel 46*. In Ezek 46:17, we find an application of the year of Jubilee in the context of an idealized⁵⁹ temple and kingdom.⁶⁰ The application of the Jubilee commands here is that if the prince⁶¹ leaves his servants property as an inheritance, they may keep it until the year of “release” (דָּרוּר), when it will return to the prince’s sons. According to this passage, the Jubilee will continue to have a role in a restored Israel.⁶² Specifically, covenant stipulations for the return of property will continue to be enforced.⁶³ As elsewhere, the proclamation of liberty is found in the context of YHWH’s covenant with Israel. In Ezek 46:17–18, as in Leviticus 25, there seems to be a concern both to prevent oppression of the poor and to limit the power of the wealthy. In this text, the limitation is specifically applied to the royalty (v. 18).

3. *Isaiah 61*. The last OT proclamation of דָּרוּר that we will discuss appears in Isa 61:1. Here, in the midst of the prophet’s vision for the eschatological restoration of Israel, the anointed agent acting on YHWH’s behalf⁶⁴

⁵⁹ While later interpretations of Ezekiel 40–48, particularly in the Apocalypse, indicate that these chapters were understood eschatologically, Block notes the lack of typical eschatological expressions, such as “on that day” or “in the latter days” indicates that Ezekiel 40–48 is “ideational” (*The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 505). This does not preclude later eschatological fulfillment, but maintains a proper distinction between this text and other more explicitly eschatological texts.

⁶⁰ For more on the history of interpretation, structure, and purpose of Ezekiel 40–48, apart from the commentaries, see Steven Shawn Tuell, *The Law of the Temple in Ezekiel 40–48* (HSM 49; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992); Kalinda Rose Stevenson, *The Vision of Transformation: The Territorial Rhetoric of Ezekiel 40–48* (SBLDS 154; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Michael Konkel, *Architektonik des Heiligen: Studien zur zweiten Tempelvision Ezechiels (Ez 40–48)* (BBB 129; Berlin: Philo, 2001).

⁶¹ For more on the “prince” (נָשִׂיא) in Ezekiel, see Paul M. Joyce, “King and Messiah in Ezekiel,” *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 270; ed. John Day; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 323–37.

⁶² While some argue that this text refers to Deut 15:12, Walther Eichrodt points out that since a seven-year cycle of release diminishes the worth of the inheritance, דָּרוּר is more likely to refer to Leviticus 25 here (*Ezekiel: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970] 578). To this we might re-emphasize that while דָּרוּר does not appear in Deuteronomy 15, it is a key word in Leviticus 25. Furthermore, as Block points out, the fact that the vision of Ezekiel 40–48 takes place in the twenty-fifth year of exile indicates that the entire section may be linked to the Jubilee (*Ezekiel 25–48* 495–96).

⁶³ However, as Block notes, the Pentateuch did not include stipulations for “crown lands,” as seems to be the case in Ezekiel 46 (*ibid.* 679).

⁶⁴ Although not explicit in this chapter, the anointed agent of YHWH has much in common with the servant of YHWH as described in Isa 42:1–4 and 49:1–6. Immediately apparent is the fact that both figures have the spirit of God placed on them (cf. Isa 42:1 [נָתַתִּי רוּחִי עֲלֶיךָ] and Isa 61:1 [רוּחַ אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה עָלַי]). Furthermore, as Claus Westermann points out, both figures proclaim a message of salvation and have “mediatorial functions” (*Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 365). John N. Oswalt straightforwardly calls the figure a “Messiah/Servant” (*The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* [NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998] 562). Brevard Childs argues that the link between the anointed one in Isaiah 61 and the servant is less precise, because the servant figure is “fluid.” Therefore, the links to the servant in Isaiah 56–66 could be references to the servant’s “offspring” as described in Isa 44:2–3 (*Isaiah* [OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001] 504–5). For this study, it is sufficient to note the links between the two figures and leave their precise relationship an open question.

proclaims that the Spirit of YHWH has anointed him in order to accomplish five tasks: (1) to bring good news to the poor; (2) to bind up the brokenhearted; (3) to proclaim liberty (דָּרוֹר) to the captives and freedom to those who are bound⁶⁵; (4) to proclaim the “year of YHWH’s favor” and the day of his vengeance; and (5) to comfort those who mourn (vv. 1–2).

Of particular interest to this study are the third and fourth tasks, for although the references to the Jubilee stipulations are not as explicit here as they are in Jeremiah 34 and Ezekiel 46, it is likely that Leviticus 25 is also the source for this proclamation of liberty. Apart from the presence of the word דָּרוֹר, which may be sufficient to establish a link between Isaiah 61 and Leviticus 25, the explicit reference to a year connected to the proclamation of liberty makes the connection to Leviticus 25 difficult to deny.⁶⁶

Like the references to דָּרוֹר in Jeremiah 34, Isaiah 61 explicitly refers to the release of slaves. In Jeremiah, however, the release is simply an application of Leviticus 25 in more or less normal conditions; in Isaiah, the Jubilee is applied in a restored Israel. In this respect, Isaiah 61 is more closely related to Ezekiel 46, for both passages are part of prophecies looking forward to YHWH’s restoration of the covenant with his people.⁶⁷ Those who mourn *in Zion* will be comforted (v. 3); while those outside of the nation will serve the people, the members of the covenant themselves will be called “priests of YHWH” (vv. 5–6). These references in the immediate context, coupled with the wider context of Isaiah 56–66, in which YHWH’s covenant people Israel is the recipient of the promised blessings of restoration, make it clear that the proclamation of דָּרוֹר for the captives in Isaiah 61 is, like Leviticus 25 and subsequent references to it, a proclamation of release or liberty for the oppressed members of the covenant community.

Although both texts refer to YHWH’s restoration of Israel, the reference to the Jubilee in Isaiah 61 is applied in a different way than it is in Ezekiel 46. In both Leviticus 25 and Ezekiel 46, land returns to its proper managers in the Jubilee year. In Isaiah 61, however, the proclamation of liberty is part of a more general proclamation of Israel’s restoration. As Sloan has demonstrated, the proclamation of Isaiah 61 probably reflects YHWH’s kingly

⁶⁵ Of the 25 occurrences of the word פָּקַח in the OT, 24 clearly refer to the opening of the eyes or mouth. Shalom M. Paul argues that in Isa 42:7, the opening of the eyes is a metaphor for freedom from slavery, and in Isa 61:1, דָּרוֹר is equivalent to פָּקַח קוֹחַ (“Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions,” in *Essays in Memory of E. A. Speiser* [AOS 53; New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1968] 182). Thus, while the literal translation of the phrase in Isa 61:1 is “the opening of the eyes of the bound,” (as the LXX translates it: καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν), it can also be rendered “the freedom of the bound,” as most English versions translate it. For more discussion of this phrase and its translation, see James A. Sanders, “From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4,” in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty* (ed. Jacob Neusner; 4 vols.; SJLA 12; Leiden: Brill, 1975) 81–84; R. T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and his Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1971) 252–53.

⁶⁶ Commentators who note the link between Leviticus 25 and Isaiah 61 include Motyer, *Isaiah*, 500; Westermann, *Isaiah* 367; Childs, *Isaiah* 505; Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66* 565, n. 19.

⁶⁷ The proclamation in both chapters 60 and 61 are clearly pointed toward a restored Israel. See Isa 60:1, 15, 22; 61:7, 11. See also Westermann, *Isaiah* 366.

ascension in the day of Israel's restoration.⁶⁸ While the "year of YHWH's favor" probably refers to the Jubilee year, it does not seem to be confined to one year out of every fifty; rather, the "year of YHWH's favor" refers to the entire new age, when Israel and her covenant are restored.

It is also noteworthy that the release of prisoners is not an uncommon theme in the latter part of the book of Isaiah. Part of YHWH's restoration of Israel, particularly through his "servant," includes the release of captives.⁶⁹ Therefore, in Isaiah 61, the Jubilee is seen as a pointer to the eschatological restoration of Israel, when all of God's people will be permanently free from their captivity.⁷⁰ Whether this captivity is literal or, as it was often later interpreted, metaphorical, is debated. However, as we move forward into the Second Temple and NT eras, the metaphorical meaning gains prominence.

VIII. CONCLUSION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT

The proclamation of *יָרֵר* in the OT retains its close link to the Jubilee of Leviticus 25.⁷¹ In its original context, the proclamation refers to the restoration of property and persons as well as giving the land its rest. Later references to *יָרֵר* refer especially to the restoration of property and persons. In Jeremiah 34, a command is issued for the release of Hebrew slaves, but is ultimately disobeyed. In Ezekiel 46, there is a reference to the continued practice in the Jubilee laws in the restored or idealized Israel. In this case, when the "prince" gives some of his lands to his servants, that land is returned in the year of Jubilee. Finally, in Isaiah 61, YHWH's anointed one proclaims *יָרֵר* as part of the restoration of Israel. Here, the release is specifically related to captive persons and seems to point forward to YHWH's permanent restoration of his people and covenant.

Bergsma argues that in its OT development, the Jubilee, which was originally a legal stipulation, took on an eschatological/messianic significance.⁷² In our analysis, we have seen this to be generally true. The legal/economic significance of the Jubilee in Leviticus 25 certainly has an eschatological flavor in Isaiah 61 and perhaps Ezekiel 46. As we move briefly into the Second Temple period and return to the NT, this eschatological theme is intensified.

IX. EARLY JEWISH LITERATURE

Although Israel's relationship to the land has changed radically in the Second Temple period, the Jubilee concept has not been left behind. Through-

⁶⁸ Sloan, *Favorable Year of the Lord* 57–67.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Isa 42:7, 58:6 and the discussion in Moloney, "The Scriptural Basis of Jubilee, Part I" 108–10.

⁷⁰ For a similar conception of this passage, see Childs, *Isaiah* 505–7.

⁷¹ Sloan concludes that in the prophets, *יָרֵר* is a technical term referring to the Jubilee (*Favorable Year of the Lord* 37).

⁷² He also argues for a heightened chronological and cultic-calendrical significance for the Jubilee, best illustrated in the book *Jubilees (Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran 2–3)*. However, these meanings fall outside of the scope of this study.

out this period, the eschatological significance of the Jubilee continued to be exploited.⁷³ While we cannot devote much attention to Second Temple and early Jewish literature here, one Qumran text is particularly relevant to our investigation. In 11QMelchizedek (11Q13), we find a description of the “final days” (אחרית הימים, 11Q13.4).⁷⁴ As Joseph A. Fitzmyer notes, Leviticus 25 is woven throughout this document.⁷⁵ It is especially noteworthy that the proclamation of liberty (דורר) is interpreted as freedom from “[the debt of] all their iniquities” (11Q13.6). Furthermore, this text also alludes to Deut 15:2, thus strengthening the links between Leviticus 25 and Deuteronomy 15 in the Second Temple era.⁷⁶ Finally, Melchizedek is seen as YHWH’s anointed messenger who will free God’s people (11Q13.18–25). In this document, therefore, the Jubilee points toward an eschatological freedom for God’s people accomplished through an anointed agent. Furthermore, the freedom described is a freedom from the “debt of iniquity.” These themes, which are likely derived from Isaiah 61, are amplified in the NT.

X. LUKAN FULFILLMENT OF THE JUBILEE

As noted above, the clearest NT reference to the Jubilee is found in Luke 4, where Jesus applies the Jubilee proclamation of Isaiah 61 to himself. The following diagram illustrates both Jesus’ reading in the synagogue as recorded by Luke and the OT sources⁷⁷ of his reading.

In both Isaiah 61 and Luke 4, the “anointed one” is endowed with the Spirit of the Lord in order to accomplish several tasks. As noted above, the tasks in Isaiah are: (1) to bring good news to the poor; (2) to bind up the brokenhearted; (3) to proclaim liberty (דורר/ἄφεσις) to the captives and freedom to those who are bound; (4) to proclaim the “year of YHWH’s favor” and the day of his vengeance; and (5) to comfort those who mourn. In Luke, the tasks are: (1) to bring good news to the poor; (2) to proclaim liberty (ἄφεσις) for the captives and sight to the blind; (3) to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor; and (4) to set the oppressed at liberty (ἄφεσις). Thus, Luke omits the second

⁷³ Another prominent Second Temple text linking the Jubilee and the eschatological restoration of Israel is *Psalms of Solomon* 11. See Heerak Christian Kim, *The Jerusalem Tradition in the Late Second Temple Period: Diachronic and Synchronic Developments Surrounding Psalms of Solomon 11* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007).

⁷⁴ The text can be found in Florentino García Martínez, Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, and Adam S. van der Woude, “11QMelchizedek,” in *Qumran Cave 11.II: 11 2–18, 11Q20–31* (DJD 23; Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 221–30. For more on its history and translation, see Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran* 277–80.

⁷⁵ “Further Light on Melchizedek from Qumran Cave 11,” *JBL* 86 (1967) 29.

⁷⁶ Bergsma, *Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran* 281.

⁷⁷ The bold face texts are from Isaiah 61, and the italic texts are from Isaiah 58; furthermore, the references to the Jubilee are underlined.

⁷⁸ Charles A. Kimball argues that although Isa 61:1–2 and 58:6 are linked by the word ἄφεσις only in the LXX, Jesus himself may have quoted the text in Greek or the verses may be a summary of his reading in the synagogue (*Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* [JSNTSup 94; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994] 104). See *ibid.* 98–115 for a fuller argument in favor of the authenticity of this account.

Chart 1

Isa 61:1–2 MT	Isa 61:1–2 LXX	Luke 4:18–19	Isa 58:6 MT	Isa 58:6 LXX
יהוה רוח אדני יהוה עלי יען משח יהוה אתי לבשר עניים שלחני לחבש לנשכרי- לב לקרא לשכרים דרוך ולאסורים פקח-קח לקרא שנת- רצון ליהוה ויום נקם לאלהינו לנחם כל-אבלים	¹ πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ οὐ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς ἀπέσταλκεν με ἰάσασθαι τοὺς συντετριμένους τῆ καρδία κηρῦξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν ² καλέσαι ἐνιαιτὸν κυρίου δεκτὸν καὶ ἡμέραν ἀνταποδόσεως παρακαλέσαι πάντας τοὺς πενθοῦντας	¹⁸ πνεῦμα κυρίου ἐπ’ ἐμέ οὐ εἵνεκεν ἔχρισέν με εὐαγγελίσασθαι πτωχοῖς, ἀπέσταλκεν με, κηρῦξαι αἰχμαλώτους ἄφεςιν καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν, ἀποστεῖλαι τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει, ¹⁹ κηρῦξαι ἐνιαιτὸν κυρίου δεκτόν.	הלוה זה צום אברהו פתח רצבות רשע התו אגרות מוטה ושל רצוים כפשים וכל מוטה תנתק	οὐχὶ τοιαύτην νηστείαν ἐγὼ ἐξελεξάμην λέγει κύριος ἀλλὰ λῦε πάντα σύνδεσμον ἀδικίας διάλυε στραγγαλιὰς βιαίον συναλλαγμάτων ἀπόστελλε τεθραυσμένους ἐν ἀφέσει καὶ πᾶσαν συγγραφὴν ἄδικον διάσπα

and fourth tasks from Isaiah 61, shortens the third task, and adds a new task, taken from Isa 58:6. This new task, however, may be more faithful to the best understanding of the phrase פקח-קח רצון ליהוה than the LXX's καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν.⁷⁹ In any case, “liberty” (ἄφεςις) was clearly important enough to include an additional reference to it here. It seems that the additional reference to liberty (or perhaps re-insertion of the reference to liberty), makes a reference to the Jubilee all the more likely.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the parallel

⁷⁹ First, in the LXX's version of Isa 61:1, the phrase “and to the bound ones freedom” (ולאסורים פקח-קח) is rendered “and to the blind recovery of sight” (καὶ τυφλοῖς ἀνάβλεψιν). However, in Luke's version, the second task of the anointed one (“to bind up the brokenhearted”) is omitted and a phrase from Isa 58:6 is placed at the end of the reading. This phrase is similar to the omitted phrase פקח-קח רצון ליהוה in Isa 61:1. Surprisingly, many commentators fail to notice the link between the MT of Isaiah 61 and the added phrase from Isa 58:6. Bock suggests the line from Isaiah 58 may be a “targum-like rendering” of the lacuna in Isaiah 61, but does not consider it in detail (*Luke 1:1–9:50* 404). François Bovon, among others, suggests that the allusion to Isa 58:6 is added on the basis of the shared word ἄφεςις (*Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002] 153). While these suggestions are possible, a link to the MT of Isaiah 61, which may be quite close to the text Jesus would have been reading in the synagogue, seems to be just as, if not more, likely to explain the additional phrase.

⁸⁰ John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20* (WBC 35a; Dallas: Word, 1989) 197.

phrase, which in the MT continues the liberty theme but in the LXX shifts to the recovery of sight to the blind, is reinserted through a quotation from Isa 58:6. Therefore, it is quite clear that in Luke’s account of this event, liberty (ἄφεσις) is emphasized. Given the links to the Jubilee year in Isaiah 61, it is quite likely that Luke’s emphasis on liberty has a similar link to the Jubilee. Finally, the quotation in Luke 4 ends with the mention of the Lord’s favor and omits the parallel reference to retribution from the Lord found in Isa 61:2b.

In short, the anointed one in Luke 4 is to bring good news of ἄφεσις to the poor, blind, captives, and oppressed. If the task of the anointed one is to bring liberty to these downtrodden groups because of the year of the Lord’s favor, we must then ask two questions. First, who are the poor, blind, captives, and oppressed? Second, what is included in the liberty that they are given?

In answering the first question, we must look to the rest of Luke’s narrative in this Gospel and in Acts. Joel Green rightly notes that in Luke-Acts, the poor and the blind have both literal and symbolic meaning. For example, while Luke 18:35–43 recounts the story of blind beggar receiving sight, Luke also refers to the receipt of salvation as “seeing” (Luke 1:78–79, 2:9, 29–32; 3:6).⁸¹ Also, while Luke 18:22 and 19:8 certainly refer to the physically or socially poor,⁸² Luke 6:20 and 7:22 may be referring to those who are spiritually poor.⁸³ To this we can also add that captives and oppressed may function similarly.⁸⁴

Furthermore, Green also argues for multiple meanings for ἄφεσις in Luke-Acts. While the most familiar meaning is the forgiveness of sins, Luke 13:10–17 speaks of “release” from demonic oppression. Green also suggests a link between the release of those who have debts against us (παντὶ ὀφείλοντι ἡμῖν)

⁸¹ *Gospel of Luke* 210–11.

⁸² Whether the poverty is social or economic, the main point seems to be that the poor in this category have a lower status with respect to their fellow men and women. For a summary of the concept of poverty in the ancient and modern worlds, see Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999) 185–203.

⁸³ For a more detailed study on this question, see S. John Roth, *The Blind, the Lame, and the Poor: Character Types in Luke-Acts* (JSNTSup 144; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997). Roth concludes that the blind, lame, and poor are “character types” who direct Luke’s readers to see Jesus as the eschatological agent of God’s salvation. While they may indeed function as rhetorical character types, it seems that Luke still intended these figures to be understood as both literally and figuratively blind, lame, poor, etc. Marshall suggests that the poor are “the people who are most in need of divine help” (*Gospel of Luke* 183). From an analysis of Luke 4:18; 6:20; and 7:22, Warren Heard argues that in Luke’s Gospel, the poor are “the righteous within Israel who have not compromised the Torah, but who instead have remained faithful and have suffered as a result” (“Luke’s Attitude Toward the Rich and Poor,” *TrinJ* NS 9 [1988] 57).

⁸⁴ While the participle τεθραυσμένους here is the only occurrence of the verb θραύω in the NT, other places in Luke-Acts indicate that “oppression” may refer to demonic oppression and thus spiritual oppression. See Acts 10:38, where the verb καταδυναστεύω is used to describe demonic oppression. In the LXX, the Hebrew verb צָרַח, which is translated θραύω in Isa 58:6 LXX, is translated as θραύω three times and as καταδυναστεύω four times. Therefore, for Luke, oppression can probably take the form of both physical affliction and spiritual torment by demons, and, as is the case with the other categories listed in this passage, the literal and metaphorical/spiritual meanings may overlap. See also Kimball, *Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* 104; Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 408–9.

in Luke 11:4 and the Jubilee.⁸⁵ However, the release of debts in Luke 11:4 is also tied to the forgiveness of sins. Elsewhere in the Gospels, physical debt may also symbolize forgiven sin.⁸⁶ This symbolism, however, must not be seen as altogether excluding a literal release from physical debt and/or economic relief. Far too often either forgiven sin or physical/economic relief is unnecessarily excluded in favor of the other.⁸⁷

Therefore, it is likely that in Luke 4, the proclamation of ἄφεσις for the downtrodden refers to forgiveness of sins that results in or is closely linked to release from economic and/or demonic oppression.⁸⁸ Therefore, the metaphorical use of captivity as the “debt of iniquity” found in 11QMelchizedek may also be reflected in Luke-Acts.

We are now in position to return the question of how Jesus’ claim to fulfill the Jubilee might function in Luke 4. Above we noted that the Jubilee references in Isaiah 61 operate differently than other prophetic references to the Jubilee. Whereas there is significant continuity with the normal operation of the Jubilee laws and the references to them in Jeremiah 34 and even in the idealized state described in Ezekiel 46, the year of YHWH’s favor in Isaiah 61 seems to be a permanent state. Thus, in Isaiah 61, the Jubilee itself is a pointer to Israel’s eschatological restoration and the permanent freedom of God’s people.⁸⁹

Jesus’ claim to “fulfill” Isaiah 61 must be seen as a claim to inaugurate the eschatological Jubilee of God’s people, the time when their freedom from captivity and oppression would be permanent.⁹⁰ However, as noted above, Jesus stops short of mentioning both the retribution of YHWH and subsequent comfort for those who mourn in the midst of that retribution as found in Isaiah 61. Therefore, it seems that the fulfillment of the Jubilee through Jesus’ ministry was an inauguration, but not completion, of the eschatological Jubilee. The main feature of Jesus’ fulfillment of the Jubilee in Luke 4 is the proclamation of ἄφεσις, which in Luke-Acts probably refers mainly to forgiven sin and secondarily to release from physical/economic oppression.⁹¹ This pattern may also be evident in the church’s pattern of sharing physical

⁸⁵ *Gospel of Luke* 212.

⁸⁶ While the parable in Matt 18:23–35 links physical debt and forgiveness of sin, Jesus’ conclusion in verse 34 indicates that in the parable, physical debt is intended to symbolize forgiveness of sin. See also the discussion in John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 755–57.

⁸⁷ N. T. Wright argues that for the first-century Jew, the primary meaning of the forgiveness of sin is not individual, but national (*The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1: *Christian Origins and the Question of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992] 273). For our purposes, we need not press too hard to distinguish the two meanings.

⁸⁸ For a similar position, see Francis Moloney, “The Scriptural Basis of Jubilee, Part II: The Second Testament—At What Price?” *ITQ* 65 (2000) 232–33.

⁸⁹ See Busse, *Das Nazareth-Manifest Jesu* 34; Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50* 407.

⁹⁰ And, as Sloan argues, probably constitutes a messianic claim (see *Favorable Year of the Lord* 67).

⁹¹ While Kimball is right that Jesus did not declare a Jubilee year in the same sense as it is found in Leviticus 25, his claim that “Jesus’ ministry brought an eschatological redemption rather than a social and political reform” is an overstatement (*Jesus’ Exposition of the Old Testament in Luke’s Gospel* 103–4).

goods in Acts (see Acts 2:44–45; 4:32). But it should be noted that these activities were preceded by Peter’s admonition to repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν; Acts 2:38).

Although Jesus’ proclamation of ἄφεσις in Luke-Acts is not as clearly linked to the restoration of God’s covenant with Israel as it is in the prophetic books, Jesus’ ministry is clearly linked to the proclamation of the kingdom of God. The forgiveness of sins and the release from demonic oppression can both be defined as “kingdom activities” in Luke.⁹² Therefore, although the context and the application of the proclamation have certainly changed, the Jubilee proclamation in the NT is closely related to God’s kingdom building and covenantal activity.

In the NT, the economic aspects of the Jubilee, although not altogether absent, are of a piece with the forgiveness of sin. In this way, Jesus’ claim to fulfill the Jubilee is closely connected to the eschatological reality of the Jubilee in Isaiah 61. He claimed to fulfill the role of YHWH’s anointed agent, and perhaps, in his authoritative proclamation of the year of God’s favor, claimed to fulfill the role of YHWH himself. While other aspects of Jubilee, particularly physical and economic relief, are present in the ministry of Jesus, they are pointers to a greater reality, namely, the forgiveness of sin and the restoration of the relationship between God and his people.⁹³

XI. SUMMARY OF BIBLICAL MATERIAL

Although the Jubilee year is introduced as part of Israel’s economic structures for the Promised Land, it is always vitally linked to the covenant between God and his people. As the people’s relationship to the land changed and the covenant developed, the Jubilee concept was not left behind. Specifically in Isaiah, there was an expectation of a “release” for the people of God in the eschatological future.

In the NT and especially in Luke, Jesus claimed that through his ministry eschatological release was launched. However, the release or forgiveness of sin is foundation to any subsequent aspect to this release. The economic aspects of this freedom became symbols of a greater release—the release of the “debt of iniquity,” to use the words of 11QMelchizedek.

XII. CONTEMPORARY SIGNIFICANCE

In light of the biblical data, it seems that a general principle for applying the “Jubilee” is that the further we move away from the emphasis on forgiven sin and the restoration of the relationship between God and his people

⁹² For the link between forgiven sin and the kingdom, see Luke 11:2–4. For links between exorcism and the kingdom, see Luke 11:20.

⁹³ Wright observes, “Exile will be undone when sin is forgiven” (*New Testament and the People of God* 273). Although we cannot enter into the larger debate about when and how the exile was to end, he is right to note that the final and full restoration of the relationship between God, his people, and the creation is linked to forgiven sin.

found in the NT, the less faithful we are to the meaning of Jesus' Jubilee fulfillment. Thus, we can now return to the three proposals outlined above and ask by way of evaluation; do they give the "release" of sin in the Jubilee sufficient attention?

The theological basis in *Jubilee 2000* emphasizes the link between economic/political freedom and the freedom to live as God intended. This concept seems to be in great continuity with our findings. Furthermore, this document even emphasizes the necessity of forgiveness between conflicting human parties. However, the need for divine forgiveness is not explicit. Whether or not Tom Wright is right in calling third world debt "the Number One moral issue of our day,"⁹⁴ we cannot disconnect the forgiveness of debt from the forgiveness of sin and call it "Jubilee." Therefore, while the theological basis of the document is on the whole sound, a clearer emphasis on the primary need for forgiveness from God would serve to strengthen it.

There is no doubt that most, if not all, of Christopher Wright's suggestions for the church's application of Jubilee in *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* are laudable. In addition to the debt-forgiveness issue discussed above, Wright's emphases on economic and social equality are worthy goals for the people of God. However, while Wright does note the connection between forgiven sin and economic debt in Luke 4,⁹⁵ the latter is primary in his discussions of Jubilee. I have argued above that while we must not neglect the economic and social aspects of the Jubilee, these are of a piece with a greater reality—the restoration of a proper relationship between God and his people through the forgiveness of sin. Therefore, while Wright's suggestions ought to be practiced more consistently by the church, the only point that I would reemphasize is that our practice of the economic/social aspects of the Jubilee must be grounded in the spiritual/covenantal aspects.

Finally, it should be clear by now that Yoder's proposal to interpret Jubilee "forgiveness" as a primarily economic reality in *The Politics of Jesus* misses the greater reality of this image in Luke's Gospel. While the economic application of this term is certainly legitimate, it must be seen as secondary to the greater reality to which it points. Therefore, Yoder's suggestion that the command to forgive our debtors demands that we "erase the debts of those who owe us money"⁹⁶ fails to account for the full picture of Jesus' ministry.⁹⁷

XIII. CONCLUSION

In spite of my reservations about forgiving sin through papal indulgence, I commend the long tradition in the Roman Catholic Church that links the Jubilee and the forgiveness of sins. What these proclamations fail to see, however, is that through Jesus' own ministry, the Jubilee was inaugurated

⁹⁴ *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007) 228.

⁹⁵ *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* 210.

⁹⁶ Yoder, *Politics of Jesus* 62.

⁹⁷ Although we cannot pursue the point, Doug Moo helpfully pointed out to me that Yoder's proposal may also be based on an overly inaugurated eschatological scheme.

and no new proclamations need to be made. Furthermore, both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestants such as myself have all too often failed to proclaim Jubilee in the way that the NT teaches: striving for an economic and social justice that points to the reality of forgiven sin and the reconciliation of God, his people, and the world.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Thanks to Doug Moo, Nicholas Piotrowski (along with Daniel Block and the other members of the OT Ethics doctoral seminar at Wheaton College), and the Tyndale Fellowship NT Study Group for reading earlier drafts of this paper and saving me from several errors. Of course, any errors that remain are entirely my own.