

Online Bible Study Discussion Starters  
Gleaning from Leviticus, Number 11  
July 5, 2007

Leviticus 25:23-28 (NRSV)

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

**24. Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land.**

**25. If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next of kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold.**

**26. If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so,**

**27. the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned.**

**28. But if there are not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of jubilee; in the jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned.**

Leviticus 25 spells out requirements for the sabbatical year (every 7<sup>th</sup>) and the jubilee year (every 49<sup>th</sup>, a sabbath of sabbaths). The sabbatical year is one of rest for the land itself, the jubilee a time when all land (except houses within walled cities) is restored to the family, clan, or tribe to which Yahweh apportioned it. I am making no attempt here to analyze either of these mandated traditions in depth, looking at practice as well as theory. The foundational statement comes in verse 23. The land belongs to Yahweh God. Human beings, even the covenant people of Israel, are only *gerim* (resident foreigners) and tenants.

Redemption has its roots in the idea of restoring to the family what Yahweh had given to the family but which was somehow lost, usually through economic hardship. The ancient idea of redemption has its bloody side in the figure of the kinsman redeemer who is the avenger of blood, restoring the family's honor through revenge for murder (or even accidental killing). It also has its poignant side we see in the story of Ruth and Boaz. Here in chapter 25, we find redemption's application to the land of the covenant people which truly belongs to Yahweh.

Here lies the reason Naboth will not sell his vineyard to King Ahab, a faithfulness to Israel's tradition that costs Naboth his life (I Kings 21). The story makes it clear that Ahab listens to his wife Jezebel rather than to Yahweh.

“We give Thee but Thine own, what'er the gift may be. All that we have is Thine alone, a trust, O Lord, from Thee.” That song, which was once used regularly to dedicate church school offerings, expresses something of the idea in Leviticus 25. Life is given to us in trust. Children are given to us in trust, whether our own or the children of our community, nation, and world. Love is

a capacity given to us in trust. In this sense, I have no right to anything; but, also, whatever I have rightly, it is given to me in trust by God. So, I do not claim ownership in order to deny generosity, but neither do I take from someone else, claiming falsely that her or his right to it is something that can be disregarded. We are not to take what God has given in trust to someone else, not even by legal means.

Here we have stewardship in its truer, deeper sense of holding everything from life itself to the day at hand in trust for God. Since life, love, children, friendship, hope, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the ministry and mission of the church are all gifts we hold in trust, belonging truly to God, no wonder Jesus asks of us the question he does (Luke 16:10-13). If we cannot be faithful with even something so sordid and trivial as money, how can we be expected to be faithful with anything that truly matters?

That question turns our society upside down. To our society, the purpose of education is the making of money. One of our presidents said the business of America is business. We will fight to protect our interests, but what are those interests we value so highly that we will have our children kill and die for them? What are God's interests?

The jubilee year failed in the actual history of Israel and Judah. One of the prophets declares:

Ah, you who join house to house,  
who add field to field,  
until there is room for no one but you,  
and you are left to live alone  
in the midst of the land!  
The LORD of hosts has sworn in my hearing:  
Surely many houses shall be desolate,  
large and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. (Isaiah 5:8,9)

Once the barter system gave way to a money economy, the idea that the land belonged to Yahweh seemed quaint, and archeologists have found the ancient equivalent of McMansions for the affluent in Israel starting in the 8<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. Today the very earth itself is threatened by the unchecked expansion of our interests and our lack of stewardship.

How can we live as responsible stewards in a world of owners and would-be owners of everything? Fashionable eco-sense (called sarcastically "light green" shopping) won't do it. Stewardship is about everything from education to immigration, from poverty to pollution, from our definitions of "our children" to the openness of our churches. Stewards "own" nothing but hold everything in trust. What do we do with such a concept?