


Missional precepts of the jubilee as an incentive to address poverty in South Africa and beyond

**Author:**Takalani A. Muswubi¹ **Affiliation:**¹Department of Missiology,
Faculty of Theology,
North-West University,
Potchefstroom, South Africa**Corresponding author:**Takalani Muswubi,
muswubi@gmail.com**Dates:**

Received: 31 Mar. 2024

Accepted: 30 May 2024

Published: 08 July 2024

How to cite this article:Muswubi, T.A., 2024,
'Missional precepts of the
jubilee as an incentive to
address poverty in South
Africa and beyond', *In die
Skriflig* 58(1), a3082.
<https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v58i1.3082>**Copyright:**© 2024. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work
is licensed under the
Creative Commons
Attribution License.

This article uncovers and articulates the missional precepts of the jubilee as an incentive in addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond. The jubilee is instituted as a special incentive not only of God's liberation (deliverance and salvation) but also for God's consecration (reconciliation and restoration). At the heart (centre) of jubilee is the gospel call that God fulfilled through Jesus Christ and his ministry. The main question is: what is an incentive of and for addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond? This article is set to discuss three main aspects of the jubilee as an incentive to address poverty in South Africa and beyond. Firstly, the basic point is the nature of the jubilee, which is defined in its inception; secondly, the critical point is the significance of the jubilee, which is distinguished in its conception in Israel's history; and thirdly as the ultimate point, the role of the jubilee, which is discerned in its reception in and outside the church, especially in addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond.

Contribution: This article seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the nature (inception), the significance (conception), and the role (reception) of the jubilee. Without the scriptural basis, the missional precepts of the jubilee as an incentive to address poverty is confused, conflicted, and contested that the poor and the needy are robbed of the missional precepts of the jubilee in addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond.

Keywords: Missional; biblical jubilee; incentive; slavery; globally.

Introduction

Cowling (2023) states:

As of 2023, around 18.2 million people in South Africa are living in extreme poverty, with the poverty threshold at 1.90 U.S. dollars daily. This means that 162,859 more people were pushed into poverty compared to 2022. (n.p.)

Poverty is one of the triple challenges, i.e. poverty, inequality and unemployment (PIU), which need urgent attention by diverse stakeholders in and outside South Africa, including policymakers, ever since 1994. It has been 30 years now, during which diverse attempts were made, including the Poverty and Inequality Report (PIR), the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR),¹ Accelerated and shared Growth Initiative (AcSGI), the Basic Income Grant (BIG), the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) on education, health, social security, welfare housing, sports, and recreation (cultural) programmes together with the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), and other programmes which were initiated and developed in South Africa and other ones that are in the process of developing (cf. Bond 2000:62).

The main question is: what is an incentive of and for addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond? This article is set to discuss three main aspects of the jubilee as an incentive to address poverty in South Africa and beyond, firstly as the basic point, the nature of the jubilee, which is defined in its inception; secondly, the critical point, the significance of the jubilee, which is distinguished in its conception in Israel's history; and thirdly the ultimate point, namely the role of the jubilee, which is discerned in its reception in and outside the church, especially in addressing poverty in South Africa and beyond.

1.To stop the vicious circle of poverty, the SA Government's GEAR presented an integrated macroeconomic strategy in 1996, with a market-based policy which is aimed at stimulating economic growth to create jobs, while not only reducing inflation and improving export, but also to do more savings and investment in human and capital resources. Through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), GEAR offers six national poverty relief programmes, namely education, health, social security, welfare, housing, recreation & culture (cf. the United Nation Development Programme [UNDP] 2003:57; RSA 1998:E3).

Read online:

Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

The basic point: The nature of the jubilee and its inception

The jubilee as a God-initiated year-long celebration

The jubilee is instituted as a special celebration not only of God's liberation (deliverance and salvation), but also of God's consecration (reconciliation and restoration). The term *jubilee*, means to *shout*, rejoice and to exalt or jubilate. The English term, *jubilee*, [יובל] *jubilo*, is derived from the French and Latin origins and is the LXX's equivalent, 'ἀφέσεως σημασία *afeseos semasia*' (Gerstenberger 1996:377 ff). Leviticus 25:43 linked the jubilee to the first exodus liberation from Egyptian slavery, but in history it continued to be linked to the second exodus liberation, namely the return of God's people from Babylonian's 70 years exile, and the second Temple Period during the post-Exilic period where the jubilee started to be viewed and developed as an eschatological event, pointing to the first and second coming of Jesus Christ.

God initiated, instituted (constituted) and directed the jubilee for his people. It was part of establishing the Israelites as a nation, at the foot of Mount Sinai (Horeb), whereby they were not only equipped for how they should live in the promised land (cf. Deist 1986:72 ff), but they were also taught that the holiness (priestly) code includes the year-long jubilee holiday part of Leviticus 17 to 26 (cf. Lowery 2000:4, 59; Nihan 2007:525 ff). In Leviticus 25:10 ff, God initiated two distinct, yet complementary, inseparable, and interwoven events: firstly, a celebration time for God's liberation, deliverance and salvation of his people, and secondly, a consecration time for God's people, to pledge their commitment to God who reconciled them to Himself and hence restored the broken relationship.

It is a celebration time for God's liberation from slavery

God's people are given the opportunity not only to celebrate God's liberation, deliverance and salvation, but also to respond to his mercy and favour, whereby God showed that He is pleased to accept the redemption payment for his people's sin and its effects and debts and any form of slavery (cf. Lv 26:43; Is 61:1 ff; Jr 34:8, 15, 17; Ezk 46:17; Wright 1990:123–128, 249–258). This God-initiated holiday was to continue the whole 50th year of celebrating liberty (liberation). The inauguration ceremony was started by the unmistakable loud sound of the blown trumpet of the Ram horn [שופר], blown (blasted) in a public arena so that all the Israelites could hear it and hence start a cultic celebration of their deliverance and liberty from that inauguration day onwards (cf. Barry 2011:874; Brueggemann 2001:20).

It is a consecration time for pledging commitment to God

Jubilee is a special consecration time whereby God's people pledge their commitment to God. Such a pledge is to be made by God's people in response to the forgiven sins by God when He accepted the atoning blood, which covers the mercy seat. This process is done to make people holy (consecrated)

and hence acceptable before God. It is initiated by the high priest, who atones his own personal sins and then the sins of the nation, so that God's wrath is appeased and satisfied (cf. Lv 25:8–10). God initiated these liberation [ἀφεσις] incentives as a missional incentive for the entire year. These incentives do not only serve as a compass which directs and leads (points) the whole creation (humanity and nature) to God and his word, but also as a gauge which measures and enhances the liberation process. There are five-fold missional incentives which are like a thread that is intertwined, knitted, and weaved together and they are and should be manifested during the entire (full) year called the jubilee year. On that basis, God's people are motivated to make a pledge in many ways, including in the five-fold ways, and the *R-acronyms* is used to clarify them. To realise their freedom from physical, psychological, socio-economic, and spiritual slavery, God's people are urged to do the following:

- *Rest, as a physical need* – to allow the land (nature) to lie fallow to sustain the well-being of the soil. It includes that they are not allowed to plant, reap, and gather crops on their farms. The main lesson is to learn to trust God.
- *Release as a psychological need* – It means while they are resting (i.e. they do not plant, reap, and gather crops on their farms, they are also urged: (1) to release the slaves; (2) to cancel debtors' debts; (3) to stop taking interest in subsistence (not on commercial) loans. The main lesson is to learn to forgive others.
- *Relieve as a socio-economic need*. Rest, release, and relief are distinct but inseparable aspects. It means that while they are resting and releasing the disadvantaged (underprivileged), they are to relieve both the overworked land and the diverse disadvantaged people for that entire year, which also means: (1) to allow the poor (needy) to eat the crops that grow on their own on the farms; (2) to give their bond labourers equitable wages or payments; (3) allow loans with no or minimal interest; (4) to allow equitable (fair) justice in courts of law to protect the disadvantaged (underprivileged) (cf. Ex 20:15, 17; Dt 5:19, 21; 15:9; 24:15; 19:18 ff; 27:17; Pr 22:28; Blomberg 1999:45; Berges 2000:227 ff); (5) even to untie, rescue, give them water and lead the enemy's ox or donkey (cf. Dt 5:14 ff; 24:18; Kinsler & Kinsler 1999:95). The main lessons are learned to trust God and to forgive others.
- *Return as a combination of physical, psychological, and socio-economic need*. Rest, release, relief, and return are distinct, but inseparable aspects. It indicates at least four main thoughts: firstly, it is not only to allow the overworked land (nature) to lie fallow to sustain the soil, but it is also to allow the *reinstatement* of the ancestral and inherited land (houses) to their original owners; secondly, it is not only to give their bond labourers equitable wages or payments (remuneration) for that entire year, but also to furnish them with the means of production (or productive resources) like a flock, a pair of millstones (to grind grain and corn on the threshing floor), a wine-press for wine and olive oil vineyards (orchards and field) and money; thirdly, it is not only to allow the slaves, the poor, and the needy to eat the crops that grows on their own

grace on the privileged (advantaged) ones' farms, but also to give them a substantial gift (present) and valuable and *intimate* items, which give them back a *respectful, dignified and healthy* life – it is like a cloak (used as a body covering cloth and as the sleeping blanket) and hence are to be returned before it is too late at night (cf. Ex 21:2 ff; 20 ff; 22:16 ff; 23:11; Dt 10:1, 17 ff; 12:1 ff, 15; 14:29; 15:1 ff; 12 ff; 22:28 ff; 23:19 ff; 24:6, 10 ff, 19–22; 27:17 ff; 28:12 ff, 43 ff; cf. Brandon 2010:8; Horsely 2009:42; Sider 1997:39, 117), and fourthly, it is not only to release the slaves on a temporary basis, but also to return them home permanently; and lastly it is not only to stop taking interest in subsistence (not on commercial) loans, but also to cancel the debts of all the debtors (cf. Muswubi 2017).

- *Restore as the spiritual need* – this is the combination of physical, psychological, and socio-economic needs. It means not only to renew *their* image and worth so that they regain personal, familial, tribal, and national dignity, but also to restore the main four relationships, namely their personal relationship with God, with themselves (inward, and intrinsic), with others, i.e. with their family, tribe and nation, and with nature (cf. Gn 1:26 ff; 2:15; Ex 21:1 ff; 22:21 ff; 23:1 ff; 24:17 ff; 31:2 ff; Lv 19:13 ff, 25; 25:35 ff; Driver 1895:179 ff; Lowery 2000:103; Von Rad 1966:106; Wright 1990:148).

The critical point: The significance of the jubilee and its conception in Israel's history

The Israelites' failure to understand and fulfil the jubilee's call and its link to the Babylonian exile

God's jubilee call is still a scholarly debate as to whether the Israelites ever applied to the jubilee's radical call nationally and universally. God's blessing and curse were not only linked with their obedience and violation of the Torah (moral) laws, but also included laws regarding the jubilee (Sabbath) law and, hence, the Babylonian exile is directly linked with it (cf. Ex 21:2; 23:11 ff; Lv 19:15; 20:10 ff; 23:22; 25:1 ff; 26:33; Nm 15:32–36; Dt 5:15; 15:1 ff; 21:3; 23:16; 24:22; 34:5; 2 Chr 36:17–21; Jr 25:8–14; Hill & Walton 1991:128).

Misconceptions of God's jubilee missional call with poverty as a case study

There are serious misconceptions of God's jubilee missional call. At the centre of these misconceptions is the misreading (misinterpreting) of the jubilee's missional call. One of the instances is found in Leviticus 25:25, 35 and 39. The use of the conditional clause indicators is at the centre of the controversy and had serious implications in understanding the jubilee's missional call. Hebrew's conditional clause indicator ׀ [im], which means 'if', is not used to introduce Leviticus 25:25, 35 and 39. The wrong interpretation of the conditional clause 'when', as 'if', suggests the condition and position which are not real and certain. This led and continues to lead to diverse misconception, misreading or misrepresentation of the position and condition of the poor

and other marginalised people, but also to the apathy and indifference about their positions and conditions, which is the direct opposite of what is intended in Leviticus 25:25, 35 and 39; Boerma 1979:7; Guinan 1981:15 ff).

In short, the positions and conditions of poverty and slavery are not only postponed or spiritualised as a future (*eschaton*) issue which needs a heavenly solution, but also relegated and ignored, if not rejected, as a general (universal) issue which does not need their personal attention or their specific address (solution) (cf. Bouma- Prediger & Walsh 2008:12, 24). In that way, the jubilee's gospel call became open for speculations, debates, and excuses. This includes the following:

Spiritualised poverty exposed the misconception of the jubilee's missional intention and goal: The wrong interpretation of the conditional clause, i.e. 'when' as 'if', leads to spiritualisation which is the postponement of poverty (slavery) into the spiritual sphere (reality) and avoids, if not rejects, the physical, social, and psychological reality thereof. Hence, people somehow find an excuse, or turn a blind eye to the positions and conditions of poverty and slavery.

Generalised poverty exposed misconception of the jubilee's missional intention and goal: The wrong interpretation of the conditional clause 'when', as 'if', leads to a generalisation which is to globalise, as a general or universal problem, which can easily be ignored, if not rejected. Hence since it is not a specific reality, it does not need a specific solution in specific ways in each context. Practically it means that it becomes none of their business because if it is general (universal), it is not meant, or directed to them.

The negative implications of misconceptions of the missional call of God's jubilee

As part of the jubilee call, those who are privileged and advantaged are urged not to take advantage of their position and condition, and hence refuse or abuse those who are disadvantaged (underprivileged). They make excuses, such as: (1) to spiritualise the jubilee call by postponing it to be a heavenly reality and not an earthly reality; and (2) to generalise it by relegating it to a universal responsibility, which has nothing to do with them. In that way, they failed to obey God's jubilee call and poverty and slavery could not be radically addressed. There are many implications regarding the misconceptions of the jubilee's missional call, including the following:

The first implication is that the misunderstanding of the jubilee's missional call is illustrated by the Jewish audience who felt offended by Jesus Christ when He quoted the first phrase of Isaiah 61:2 in Luke 4:18–24 about 'the Lord's year of favour' that is part of the jubilee call. This even included or applied to God's enemies and strangers, but He omitted the second phrase about 'a day of vengeance', and as a result thereof they drove him out of the city (cf. Lk 4:25–30).

The second implication is that the privileged (the advantaged) people can take advantage of the position (condition) of the poor and the debtors and perpetuate unjust practices, like the following: (1) moving the boundary markers (cf. Dt 19:14; 25:5; 27:17; Job 24:2; Pr 22:28; Hs 5:10); (2) using unjust weights and measures (Lv 19:35–37); (3) charging high interest on the subsistence loans (cf. Ex 22:25–27; Lv 25:17–22); (4) using human beings as chattel (or properties), or using them permanently (cf. Ex 21:2–4; 15:12; Lv 25:39, 40 ff.); (5) harvesting even on the fields' margins, and hence denying the poor and strangers an opportunity to glean the harvest left-overs (cf. Lv 19:9–12; 23:22). In this context, God responds to the petition, prayers, complaint, call, outcry, and plight for justice of the poor and needy, by executing his righteous justice and measures towards the cause of the less fortunate in and outside Israel (Lv 19:35 ff; Am 8:5; Pr 11:1; Ac 17:24–29).

The third implication: God's people served and are still opting to serve their own interests (cf. Am 5:21–24; 8:3–6; Ja 2:14–26). The sacrifices, prayers and celebration that form part of the jubilee not only manifest the incomplete worship of God by his people, but also indicate a manipulative profession of the creed.

The ultimate point: The jubilee's restoration in the ministry of Jesus Christ

The continued missional intention and role of the jubilee from the Old to the New Testament

Leviticus 25:43 connects the jubilee's missional intentions and role to the first (immediate) exodus, the liberation from the Egyptian slavery. In the history it continued to be traced and linked to the second (mediate) exodus liberation, namely the return of God's people from the 70 years of exile in Babylon and the second Temple Period during the post-Exilic period, where the jubilee was viewed and developed as an eschatological event. This call of the jubilee was seen by connecting Leviticus 26:43 and Isaiah 61, whereby the jubilee's missional call not only points to sin as the real root-cause of physical sufferings (poverty, slavery, captivity, blindness, oppression, debts, etc.), but also to the Redeemer of the sin. This missional intention of the jubilee is what Jesus Christ put at the centre of his ministry, as is well articulated in Luke 4:18–19. The Ratsah referred to sin as the spiritual root-cause, and to debts as the physical effects of and for sin. The scope of the jubilee encompasses the religious direction which is central (of which sin is misdirecting), and the effect of sin, which is manifested in the socio-economic and political justice, et cetera. Jesus fulfils the intention and the role of the jubilee (cf. Muswubi 2017).

Principle 1: God owns hearts, hands, and lands

The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you reside in my land as foreigners and strangers. (Lv 25:23, NIV) ... Throughout the land that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land. (Lv 25:24, NIV)

Leviticus 25:23 offers the theological basis, foundation, or reason of and for Leviticus 25:24, namely the use or handling of what was entrusted as his tenants for the benefit of both humanity and nature, because God owns the universe: nature (land), humanity (hands) and his covenant people (hearts). By creation a motif, rights, and dignity as his image-bearers, both the capitalist and the communist-led people are reminded that they have not only the same Maker (God) and the same make (all created in God's image), but also the same God who gave them his cultural mandate to serve his creation (humanity and nature). In that way He revealed Himself to Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites through Moses and to the rest of the faith community among others, as God, as El Shaddai, that is, God who owns creation as his belonging (entitled property; cf. Gn 17:1; Lv 25:17, 23, 36–43, 53–55). Yahweh who legislated the covenant, is just, right, holy, powerful to redeem, free and deliver, from Egypt and from Babylon (symbol of slavery of sin) and He empowered and capacitated (gifted) his people by his Word, his Spirit and his grace, so that they can enter the promised land as a symbol of his sphere of rule, love and peace (cf. Ex 6:3; Dt 6:12; 15:15; Harris 1996:61; Nihan 2007:567).

God freed his covenant people to free others

Remember that you were foreigners in Egypt. Do not mistreat any widow or orphan. (Ex 22:21 ff)

God freed, called (gathered) and equipped slaves and strangers in Egypt to be his people, the Israelites, so that out of gratitude, they are expected to free, invite, and equip other strangers and slaves. This Exodus motif constantly and repeatedly professes who God is, what He says and does (God's indicative just and right actions) to all his people, not only as his image-bearers, but also as redeemed people who are called to execute the God-initiated five-fold (R-acronyms) liberation incentives to all God's image-bearers, especially to the marginalised and disadvantaged people, due to religious-cultural prejudices or *socio-economic and political injustice* in a concrete (given) context (cf. Gn 47:11; Ex 19:3–6; 20:1–2; 22:21; Lv 25:25–26, 55; Dt 5:6; Pr 16:10; Jr 21:12; 22:2 ff.; Mi 3:9–11; Harrison 1980:226; Kinsler 1999:396; Lowery 2000:103).

God blesses the privileged and powerful to bless others

Tidball (2005) declares:

Jubilee sets ... limits on the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. (p. 301)

Based on a creational and redemption motif, right and dignity, God urges his people with questionable and injustice-perpetuating views and actions in and outside the church, to be his collaborators. The collaborators include those who are in a better position and condition, that is the privileged and the powerful (like rulers, masters, owners or employers, etc.), but also the advantaged and well-resourced (as the rich élite, creditors and employers, etc.), whose worldview is either capitalist-led or communist-led. They are reminded that the jubilee call is a call for the test of their professed faith (creed). This is an indication of how

they view and treat four main relationships, namely with God, themselves, God's people and nature. Firstly, they *profess* their Christian credo, yet use it to cover their manipulative views and actions, their empty worship sacrifices and prayers, while accumulating their resources by taking advantage (or at the expense) of the poor and slaves, while disregarding their creational right and dignity to be loved, defended and protected; secondly, they *view* (depict) and *treat* (owned) bond servants (slaves) as chattel (property or commodity), because they fail to treat them as humans who are of common make (as God's image-bearer in their original identity) and with their common Maker (i.e. the Creator, to whom all respond and account). Hence, they not only fail to lose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, but also to execute the five-fold liberation incentives to the benefit of the poor, Levites, widows, orphans, slaves, strangers and other disadvantaged and marginalised people (cf. Lv 25:13, 23, 30, 38, 42, 46, 55; Dt 1:8; 6:10; 7:13; 8:1; 9:23; 19:8; 28:11; 31:7, 20 ff; Eskenazi & Weiss 2008:753; Erasmus 2016; Lowery 2000:59 ff.; Sider 2005:179; Trocme 2007:26). They are urged to firstly trust, profess, and reflect Him and his nature (who He is) and his character (what He does), by being and doing just and right things, including *obeying God*, responding, or accounting to his word (terms, and conditions) even in issues regarding equitable trade. Hence secondly, to view and treat themselves not as the *absolute owner* with absolute title rights to God's land and hands (bond workers), but only as his owned tenants (stewards) of God-given and leased (lent) resources. Thirdly, they should manage (regulate) their God-given resources (land) and time (opportunities) as such for efficient (effective) delivery of production and distribution of ideas, services, and products. Then fourthly, they should execute God's initiated five-fold (R-acronyms) liberation incentives to defend and contend the poor, the marginalised and the disadvantaged people, while they look after their individual (family) needs (cf. Lv 25:13–17).

God provided the equitable price regulations of the land compensations

Case 1: *When the principle of price regulation is needed:* The Bible set the redemption price to be in proportion to or based (depend) on the quality (soil value) and quantity (number) of the production (harvest or crops) left, before (prior to) the next 50 years (jubilee year). The more the years of the projected production is left before the next jubilee year, the higher the price. The price becomes less as the year gets closer to the jubilee year, for instance if the projected production is estimated to be worth R50 000 and only 5 years are left prior to the jubilee year, it means the R250 000 (R50 000 × 5 years) lump sum of money should be paid in advance (up front) as the redemptive price (cf. *The Interpreter's Bible* 1953:122; Harrison 1980:225; Walter 2012:234).

Case 2: *When the payment is made satisfactorily:* This happens when the poor, the debtor, their next-of-kin, a *kinship redeemer* from the extended family, or even a friend pays the compensation satisfactorily to remit (repay) all their debts (sins), so that they can go free at any time before the end of

the 6 years or earlier than the jubilee year (cf. Lv 25:39–41, 48–55), or when their master considers the age and the ability of his slaves (cf. Ex 21:7–11; Dt 21:14). The lost land (resources) and properties are to be return from the masters (owner) to the original owners so that they can use, manage, and maintain their own land or properties, to revive their dignity, position and condition (cf. Brueggemann 1977). This is an equitable opportunity (time and efforts that the five-fold liberation incentives are aiming at) advocated by the Sabbath day, Sabbatical year, and the jubilee year.

Case 3: *When compensation payment, or the estimated price of the harvest (crops) is not satisfactorily:* that is when all the options fail, whereby the payment cannot be made as it exceeds the debts and no-one is able to pay the compensation; the last resort is to wait till the year of jubilee, when the land, house and other properties would be returned at the owner without compensation to the original owner as part of God's initiated-five-fold (R-acronyms) liberation incentives towards the people who lost them, like the poor, orphans, slaves, strangers, et cetera (cf. Lv 25:28, 35–37, 39,54–55; Dt 15:2, 19:6; 21:22; 22:28 ff; 25:11 ff; Nm 5:5 ff; Rt 4:1 ff; Jr 32: 6 ff; 1 Tm 5:16; Horsely 2009:37).

Case 4: *Sell property in a walled city:* The 5 'Rs' of the jubilee are applied on the land in an unwalled place in the country (outside the city walls; cf. Lv 25:25–28; 31–34) and since the Levites had no permanent land, they could sell ('lease') their homes in Levitical cities but could redeem the house at any time or wait until the year of jubilee when the house would be returned to their own use (Lv 25:29–34). A leased land, or property houses in a walled city, can be owned permanently when it is not redeemed after a year (cf. Lv 25:29–30). Bountiful harvests and profit each year remained in the hands of the lessee.

Case 5: *View and treat people not as chattel but as bond servants who work for money.* They are like hired servants so that they may redeem (repay) their freedom by paying money or property (cf. Lv 25:49; 2 Sm 9:5–10). This view is aimed at masters who are not only greedy when it comes to their productive resources, but who also take advantage of the poor and monopolise more lands and hands (cf. Is 5:8). They do not apply equitable justice to ensure that God's blessings (productivity, growth and fruitfulness) that are needed for food security and after meeting their own (and family) needs, should be equitably shared to meet the basic needs like food, clothes and shelter for those who are disadvantaged and in marginalised positions and circumstances (cf. Ex 20:12; 22–27; 26:1 ff; Dt 5:6; Lv 19:14, 32; 25:17, 29–34; 36, 39, 43, 55; Pr 1:9; Meyer 2005:7; Nihan 2007:465 ff).

Principle 2: Stewards are to regulate the master plan

... make him strong again. (cf. Lv 25:35 ff.)

God gave his directive on how to regulate God's resources (like capital, land, hands) and other properties or possession [אֲדָמָה]

or inheritance [רִכְזָה]. To God they are not for sale, even though the poor sold or lost their land (properties) and their hands (services), they still own it and maintain their permanent right as the original owners (cf. Gn 12:5; 13:6; 15:14; Lv 25:13–17, 44 ff; Nm 16:32; 27:7; 36:2; Dt 15:6, 9, 11; 1 Chr 29:28; 2 Chr 21:14; Jos 13:7; 23:4; Harris 1996:70). The privileged masters and advantaged creditors should enable or activate the poor or the debtors, who are disadvantaged or marginalised not only with rights and privileges, so as to provide a return debtor and a poor's lost collateral (like their family land, house, fields, vineyards, olive orchards to feed the hungry, the orphans and the needy as they embodied their dignity and resource to make a living, cf. Dt 15:11–15; 24:14–21).

Its cultural mandate with the Equitable Economic Empowerment framework

The God-initiated five-fold (R-acronyms) liberative incentives are tools that are designed and directed to be used in many and diverse ways, including firstly, that they are designed and directed to all human beings created in his image who are particularly in need, that is, who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; secondly, flowing from the first point, they serve as a moral compass to direct the affected people to four main relationships (towards God, the self, others and nature); thirdly, they also serve as an equitable gauge to measure the just (fair) and right moral decision and actions on the production and distribution of God-given resources and services towards the image-bearers who are in need (vulnerable and disadvantaged) and who need to be acquitted (freed and protected) and to be equipped (cared and provided for) as God's image-bearers (cf. Mt 20:8; Lk 6:3; Rm 16:23; Pt 4:10; Claerbaut 1983:13).

The Equitable Economic Empowerment plan promotes the fullness of life

The EEE plan is a God-given original intention that He initiated not only to promote the dignity of his people, Adam and Eve, who represent humanity and the fertility of his Garden of Eden, which represents nature, but also to restore the fullness of life of the entire person in all the aspects of life, including one's position and condition after the fall into sin, so as to establish themselves while finding their way towards four relationships, i.e. towards God, the own self, and others as members and citizens who want opportunities again to belong to and to participate productively in and outside their faith (g)local community and hence to enjoy this temporal reality of their own generation and hence secure the permanent (perpetual) inheritance (possession) for their generations to come in this life and the life to come (cf. Gn 1:26–28; Ex 22:25; 23:25; Lv 25:25–28; Dt 7:11; 8:7–18; Ps 107:36–43; Mi 4:4; Brueggemann 1989:61; Davis 2003:127; Harris 1996:79; Sider 2005:68; Tidball 2005:296; Wenham 1979:317).

Principle 3: Jubilee as a beneficial incentive

In the history of revelation, God used the jubilee as an incentive (tool) to benefit his people as individuals (organism) and as corporates (institution) in diverse ways, which include the following ways: firstly, to address sin to renew (repair) his

creation; secondly, to reap God's blessed promises and needs to be a cheerful Sower (giver) (cf. 2 Cor 9:6 ff). The role of this is to execute the God-initiated, liberative incentives which were pointed out, among others, by God's three initiated holidays as a collective, namely the Sabbath day, the Sabbatical year and the jubilee year – this is done to restore the four main relationships (with God, the self, others, and nature) (cf. Ex 21:2; Dt 15:16; Weinfeld 1995:48).

The two-fold love for God and for others

The Tanakh's teaching is not only intended (pointed) to, but also hangs (depends or is based) on the two-fold loves, that is to love God and to love others. The teaching of the Tanakh [תנ"ך] is an acronym from the first Hebrew letter of the three traditional subdivisions of the 24 canonical Jewish texts or Old Testament, namely: (1) the Torah, i.e. the five books of Moses which include the Decalogue or the 10 moral laws and the Sabbath day, the Sabbatical year and the jubilee laws; (2) *Nevi'im*, the Prophets; and (3) *Ketuvim*, the Writings, that is, the teaching focus of both the Old and the New Testament. Such intention was fulfilled by Christ through his Spirit when the hearts and life of God's people were too hardened and blinded by sin to enable them to see such an original intention (cf. Dt 24:1; Mt 19:8). In principle, God expects the humanity, that is the *goyim* (Israelites and the non-Israelites), not only to keep the same Old Testament laws (cf. Ex 12:49; Lv 24:42; Nm 15:16; 35:15; Dt 1:16; Westerbrook (ed.) 2003, but also to love (not to oppress) each other, including the resident foreigners (cf. Lv 19:34; 25:44 ff; Dt 10:19; 24:14; Ps 82:3; Is 1:17; Jr 34:14; Lk 13:15; 14:5; Lowery 2000:9; Weinfeld 1995:65, 170).

The two-fold love mitigates all of creation

All people, whether they are Jews (insiders or faith community) or Greek (outsiders or the Gentiles), are created as God's image-bearers. It is the base of and for one's two-fold love, namely: to love God who created them and to love others who are created like them. This two-fold love not only frees and restores them to be and to have a common or united view (attitude or spirit), and the solidarity expression (or treatment) of and for one's four main relationships, namely to God (vertical), personal (inwards), towards others and toward nature, but also to mitigate, melt, leaven, permeate and penetrate even the enemies of God's Kingdom (like an anarchist). The two-fold love is to lead all people to think (heart), to say (head) and to do (hands) everything out of love and dignity, including to view and to treat the poor and the bond servants as fellow or fraternal human beings (cf. Gl 3:28; Col 3:22–4 1; Eph 6:5–9; Rm 6:5–7, 16–18; Heb 2:14 ff; 1 Cor 6:20; 7:21–23; 2 Pt 2:1).

Principle 4 – Jubilee points to Jesus Christ – his nature (who) and character (what) He is

Brueggemann (1989) explains:

The inaugural message of Nazareth is both a point of arrival and a new point of departure. The kingdom is not only past event and future hope; it is present task and celebration – inauguration'

(cf. Arias 1984:47). The great revolutions of our time are an effort to redistribute land back into the hands of those who lost it. ... to redistribute land according to tribal conventions that have been gravely distorted in the interest of concentrated surplus. (p. 193)

Jesus fulfilled the jubilee call from the law of Moses and from the Prophets

This is fulfilled after 400 years of silence from Malachi (cf. Ml 3:1–3) till Matthew announced the Messiah's arrival after the Israelites failed to execute the jubilee (gospel) call. In Luke 4:14, after He spent 40 days in the wilderness with temptation, unlike the Israelites who failed, Jesus Christ triumphed over Satan and came to Nazareth, his hometown. On the Sabbath day He visited his hometown synagogue where He was raised. The Jewish leaders gave him the book of Isaiah and He stood up to read the Word (cf. Lk 4:16). He opened it to the place that announces the arrival of the Messiah (cf. Lk 4:18–19a; Is 61:1–2a). Jesus closed the book, gave it to the synagogue master and sat down and said to them, 'This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears.' Unlike Mark 6:2 and Matthew 13:54 who position this encounter somewhere in his ministry (Mk 4:1–34; 5:21–43; Mt 10, 2–42), Luke positions it just after He began his ministry in Capernaum, whereby his fame had reached Nazareth where the people said to Him: 'We have heard all that has happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside' (Lk 4:23). It was only Luke who provides the content of what Jesus Christ taught, the manner (how He did it), and how He repeated the jubilee text of Isaiah 61:1–2² in Luke 4:19 to fulfil the jubilee call (cf. Lv 25; Lk 4:16–30).

Jesus fulfilled the jubilee call with an equitable jubilee justice framework

In Luke 4:18–19 at Nazareth (Nazarene congregation) Jesus Christ defines his messianic mission. He quotes the first phrase: Liberate his own *Lord's year of favour*. He announced the jubilee year as a year of favour. It was his positive 'implicitly universal' message of Isaiah 61:2. He omitted the negative message – the second phrase, *a day of vengeance*, to punish his enemies in Isaiah 61:2. The Hebrew words *mispat* and *tsedaqah* are equivalent to *apokatastasis*, which means to restore, to recover and to re-establish to the previous state, like the Israelites did when they entered Canaan or returned to Jerusalem (cf. Harri 1996:70). He threatens the status quo of the Jewish, the rich and the powerful (cf. Lk 4:16–21) and hence the Jewish audience in Nazareth attempted to kill Him (Lk 4:28–30; Yoder 1994:69). However, Jesus's jubilee call gave the early and the entire church not only her identity (nature) and mission (ministry), including the normative liturgy, preaching and teaching in all aspects of life, but also gave her solidarity (selling and sharing property, fields, and wealth), breaking bread together and restoring both the Church and society (cf. Ac 2:43–46; 4:32–37).

²Jesus took the role of the herald to announce the jubilee call whereby, like the earthly king, Yahweh – Lord of Israel, He has the authority (royal decrees) to proclaim the jubilee release of all those who were caught in a vicious cycle of debt-servitude-herald. So, Christ's gospel is rooted in Israel's Sabbath-jubilee tradition (cf. Lk 4:16–30).

Jesus's jubilee call is the same as that of Moses and the prophets

The Old and New Testament gospel message is the same message (intertwined threads; words from Gn to Rv) to the church and the stranger: once-a week on the seventh day, 1 year after the 7 years' circle on the 7th year and 3 years after the 49 years. The call for the celebration follows the call for liberty (*aphesis*) and freedom (from sin as the spiritual root-cause and the physical effects like sickness) and the correct fasting as a call to 'let go' of wealth and property and to think about the dignity of others (second chance), then to 'release and return' (slaves), 'rest and return' the land to the original owners, to home. It echoes Moses's call in Exodus 9:1 and Leviticus 25:10, Isaiah's call in Isaiah 58:5–6; 61:2 and what Jesus Christ added to and confirmed and amplified in the jubilee call in Luke 4:18–19; 24:47.

Jesus's jubilee call fulfils the three motifs that reveal who God is, says and does!

The jubilee manifests the Messianic role whereby He fulfils the three motifs, namely the creation (*imago Dei*) motif, the Exodus (covenant) motif and the Deuteronomic motif. The creation motif reminds that all human beings are created in God's image. We have the same make-up (identity) and the same Maker (origin). Such creation rights give us dignity, responsibility, and accountability to love and live before God, and hence to provide and protect humanity and the rest of creation (neither exploit, nor oppress those who are in a vulnerable position and condition like poverty and slavery; Mt 5:48; 6:21, 24; 10:42; 18:6; Col 1:18b; Muswubi 2023). The *Covenant moti* reminds us (cf. the preamble in Ex 20:1–2) that the Israelites (and the church) are not only freed, saved and called from slavery in Egypt (from sin) to be in a covenant relationship with Him, but are also equipped with gifts, privileges and resources, to be God's agents to view and treat other human beings as the potential recipients of the God-given redemption (salvation and deliverance) (Ex 3:8; 5:23; 6:6; 18:4, 8–10; 20:1; 22:21; 23:9 ff; Muswubi 2023). The Deuteronomic motif reminds us (cf. the preamble in Dt 5:1–3) that the Israelites (and the church) embodied the creed (what they believe) to not only consistently and repeatedly rehearse, recite and relive the recorded creed (confession), but also to use it as a guide of faith and life (conduct), as a way of showing gratitude to and to glorify God (cf. Dt 5:14; 6:12; 15:15; 16: 9–17; 11; 23:15 ff; 24:17 ff; 26:11; 28:43; Jude 6:9; 1 Sm. 10:18; 22:2; 25:10; Mi 6:4; Harris 1996:61; Muswubi 2023).

Conclusion

At the heart (centre) of the biblical jubilee is the gospel call that God fulfilled through Jesus Christ and his ministry. God's intention of initiating the jubilee celebration of the exodus liberation from Egyptian slavery and of the return of God's people from Babylonian's 70 years of exile was a missional call to his people of all time, so that they should realise and respond in thanksgiving that they are redeemed

from sin. This is the real root-cause of physical sufferings (poverty, slavery, captivity, blindness, oppression, debts, etc.), in and through Jesus Christ, as articulated in his ministry (*manifesto*) in Luke 4:18–19. The Ratsah referred to sin as the spiritual root-cause and to debts as the physical effects of and for sin. God in Christ by his Spirit addressed both sin (the spiritual root-cause) and sin's effect, which is manifested in the socio-economic and political justice. Such conception of the jubilee is a base which offers a platform and opportunity to individual Christians and the corporate church to trust God in doing or practising the following God-given missional projects in and outside of the church's context:

- *Rest (a physical need)* – allowing the land (nature) to lie fallow to sustain the soil's well-being.
- *Release (a psychological need)* – to forgive others: to release slaves; to cancel debts (interests).
- *Relieve (a socio-economic need)* – practising equitable justice to the disadvantaged poor and labourers.
- *Return (reinstate)* the dignity of the disadvantaged by offering them the means of production.
- *Restore (a spiritual need)* – to restore the main four relationships, namely the personal relationship with God; with themselves (inward and intrinsic); with others, that is, with their family, tribe, and nation; and with nature.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, to the triune God be all glory (1 Cor 10:31 & Col 3:17). Secondly, to Alvinah (my wife for her Pr 31 support), to Ms Blanch Carolus (academic support) and my children (Vhuhwavho, Mufulufheli, Wompfuna, Thamathama, Lupfumopfumo and Tshontswikisaho for family support).

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced writing this research article.

Author's contribution

T.A.M. is the sole author of this research article.

Funding information

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the article.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of

any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for the results, findings and content of this article.

References

- Arias, M., 1984, 'Mission and liberation: The Jubilee – A paradigm for mission today', *International Review of Mission* 73(289), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1984.tb03249.x>
- Barry, D., 2000, 'Bishop forgives \$118 million', *New York Times*, 11 December, viewed 26 May 2023, from <https://www.nytimes.com/search?query=new+york+region+bishop+forgive+118+million+in+debt>
- Berges, U., 2000, 'Armoede en haar bestrijding in de wetten van het Oude Testament', *Tijdschrift Voor Theologie* 40(3), 227–250.
- Blomberg, C.L., 1999, *Neither poverty nor riches: A biblical theology of possessions*, Intervarsity, Downers Grove, IL.
- Boerma, C., 1979, *Rich man, Poor man, and the Bible*, SCM Press, London.
- Bond, P., 2000, *Elite Transition: From Apartheid to Neoliberalism in South Africa*, University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg.
- Bouma-Prediger, S. & Walsh, B.J., 2008, *Beyond homelessness*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Brandon, G., 2010, *Free to live*, SPCK, London.
- Brueggemann, W., 1977, *The land: Place as gift, promise, and challenge in biblical faith*, Fortress, Philadelphia, PA.
- Brueggemann, W., 1989, *The land*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
- Brueggemann, W., 2001, 'Living with a Different Set of Signals', *The Living Pulpit*, vol. 14–15, Fortress, Minneapolis, MN.
- Buttrick, G.A., 1953, 'The Interpreter's Bible', 1st edn., Vol. 2: *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, Tennessee.
- Claerbaut, D., 1983, *Urban Ministry*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Cowling, N., 2023, *Demographics*, viewed 26 May 2023, from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1263290/number-of-people-living-in-extreme-poverty-in-south-africa/>.
- Davis, E.F., 2003, *Scripture, culture, and agriculture*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.
- Deist, F.E., 1986, *Narrative texts, in Words from afar – The literature of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, Tafelberg, Cape Town.
- Driver, S.R., 1895, *The International Critical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, T & T Clark, Edinburgh.
- Erasmus, S., 2016, 'Rich man, poor man', *Fin24*, viewed 26 May 2022, from <http://www.fin24.com/Opinion/rich-man-poor-man-20160422-2>.
- Eskenazi, T.C. & Weiss A.L., 2008, *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*, Union for Reform Judaism [URJ], New York, NY.
- Gerstenberger, E.S., 1996, *Leviticus: A commentary*, The Old Testament Library, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY.
- Guinan, M.D., 1981, *Gospel poverty: Witness to the Risen Christ*, Vesuvius Press Incorporated, Phoenix, USA.
- Harris, M., 1996, *Proclaim jubilee*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY.
- Harrison, R.K., 1980, *Leviticus (AIC)*, Intervarsity, Leicester.
- Hill, A.E. & Walton, J.H., 1991, *A Survey of the Old Testament* Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Horsely, R., 2009, *A covenant economics*, Westminster John Knox, Louisville, KY.
- Kinsler, F.R., 1999, 'Leviticus 25', *Interpretation* 53(4), 395–399. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439905300408>
- Kinsler, R. & Kinsler, G., 1999, *The biblical jubilee and the struggle for life*, Orbis, Mary Knoll, New York, NY.
- Lowery, R.H., 2000, *Sabbath and jubilee*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, MS.
- Meyer, E.E., 2005, *The jubilee in Leviticus 25*, LIT Press, Stellenbosch.
- Muswubi, T.A., 2017, 'Reflection of glocal worshiping in missiology in the context of the marginalized, yet never silenced, African worship music', *Missionalia* 45(1), 5–28. <https://doi.org/10.7834/45-1-90>
- Muswubi, T.A., 2023, 'Reviewing Calvin's eradication strategy to poverty biblically from a *Missio Dei* perspective', *In die Skriflig* 57(1), a2960. <https://doi.org/10.7832/45-1-90>
- Nihan, C., 2007, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study of the Composition of the Book of Leviticus (FAT 2/25)*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen.
- Ringe, S.H., 1985, *Jesus, liberation, and the biblical jubilee*, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- RSA 1998, *Budget review*, Department of Finance.
- Sider, R., 1997, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 2nd edn., Hodder & Stoughton, London.
- Sider, R.J., 2005, *Rich Christians in an age of hunger: Moving from affluence to generosity*, Nelson, Nashville, TN.
- Tidball, D., 2005, *The message of Leviticus*, Intervarsity Press, Leicester.

Trocme, A., 2007, *Jesus and the nonviolent revolution*, Plough, Farmington, PA.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2003), *South Africa Human Development Report 2003; The Challenge of Sustainable Development: Unlocking People's Creativity*, Oxford University Press Southern Africa, Cape Town.

Weinfeld, M., 1995, *Social justice in ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Fortress, Minneapolis, MI.

Wenham, G.J., 1979, *The Book of Leviticus (NICOT)*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.

Wright, C., 1990, *God's people in God's land: Family, land, and property in the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

Von Rad, G., 1966, *Deuteronomy: A commentary (The Old Testament Library)*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky.

Yoder, J.H., 1994, *The politics of Jesus*, 2nd edn., Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.