

Is America in for a Shaking?
Jeremiah 25:1-14

Richard Tow 8.23.15

Since last Tuesday, \$ 1.3 Trillion has been wiped out in U. S. market values.¹ The Dow Jones Average fell 531 points Friday. That index has dropped 10% since May.² Other nations are having similar declines. During the last few months China's Shanghai market has lost one third of its value. Their index fell 11.5% Friday; and that's after it devalued its currency in an effort to turn the decline around.³ Nobody knows exactly where all that will go from here. But that should be enough to alert people to the significance of the times we are in.

A week from Tuesday, I will be meeting with a group of Jewish leaders to learn more about the Iran Nuclear Agreement and how it will impact the nation of Israel if approved. North Korea is rattling her swords; and ISIS is vowing to destroy us. I hope the church of America doesn't try to sleep through all this! I hope people realize that events are moving very rapidly around them. I don't think any of this should cause us to fear; but it should cause us to pray.

Rabi Jonathan Cahn has written two books, *The Harbinger* and *The Mystery of the Shemitah*, to alert people to the significance of the times in which we live. In those books he does two things: (1) he gives the historical and theological basis of Israel's dispersion: why God judged His chosen nation of Israel and sent them into captivity and (2) Rabi Cahn relates major events in America to biblical principles, particularly the Shemitah.

This morning I want to show you how Israel's judgment was tied to the Shemitah. As a minimum, Rabi Cahn is correct about that. So let me first talk about what the Shemitah is.

In the covenant with Israel, God established every seventh year as a Sabbath year. It was to be a year of release from debt and a year of restoration for the land. The Jewish term for that seventh Sabbath year is Shemitah. It comes from the Hebrew word for release. Deut. 15:1-2 says "*At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. 2 And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's release*" (NKJV).⁴ The Hebrew word translated "release" is Shemitah. The Hebrew word means release, remission of debt, or suspension of labor.⁵ Let me read Deut. 15:1-3 from the NIV. "*At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. 2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel the loan he has made to his fellow Israelite. He shall not require payment from his fellow Israelite or brother, because the LORD's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed.*"

¹ Adam Samson, "Drenched in Red: Wall Street plunges in worst weekly retreat since 2011, *Yahoo Finance*, <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/drenched-in-red--wall-street-plunges-in-worst-weekly-retreat-since-2011-2011140355.html> accessed 8/22/15.

²"Stock market suffers worst one-day drop since 2008," *Los Angeles Times*, <http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-0822-financial-markets-20150821-story.html> accessed 8/22/15.

³ Mark Maginar and Chao Deng, "China Shares Brush New Low Since Depth of Selloff," *Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/china-woes-spark-selloff-in-asian-markets-1440123741> accessed 8/22/15.

⁴ All Scripture quotes are in New International Version unless indicated otherwise.

⁵ OT:8059 (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

3 You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your brother owes you.”

So the command to Israel was that at the end of every seven years, they were to release any other Israelite from debt obligations to them. It only applied to those who were part of the covenant nation. If an Egyptian owed me \$ 50,000 I don't have to forgive his debt. He is a foreigner and not part of this covenant. If an Israelite owes me \$ 40,000 of a \$ 50,000 loan I made to him last year, then I have to forgive him the rest of the loan and wipe that \$ 40,000 off my books. Can anyone see why the Israelite people in power (over time) did not obey that command? I'm sure when the year of Shemitah came they were thinking about all the reasons why they needed that \$ 40,000 and were coming up with all kinds of loopholes for getting around the commandment.⁶ Historically, Israel did not honor that part of the covenant.

But why would God put that in His covenant with Israel? If a person makes a debt, shouldn't that person have to pay it back?

(1) I'm sure the primary reason God put that in the covenant was to deal with the greed in men's hearts. Every seventh year I get to make sure I don't love money more than I love God. I get to bless others with a release of their obligation to me and I stay free of covetousness and greed.

(2) It was a way to level the wealth. There is an inherent power in money. Money has power to increase itself with just a little prudent management. You could invest it in a certificate of deposit and it would over time increase some.⁷ Had you invested it in stocks, it would have increased even more. If you're a good manager, you might build apartments and make even more money. Capital is a powerful element in prosperity. That's why most of the wealthy people in America were born that way. On the other hand, people who don't have wealth tend to get indebted. Sometimes they get in debt just through poor business decisions. Sometimes it's simply a lack of discipline.⁸ In other cases the person can't find a job and with nothing coming in it doesn't take very long to get into debt just to survive. The point is this. All other things being equal, because of the power of money, the rich tend to get richer and the poor tend to get poorer. But every seventh year some of that disparity gets corrected. A release from debt gives the poor Israelite the opportunity to work hard and get moving again. He gets a fresh start and has incentive to learn from past mistakes and work hard in the future.

In America we have wealth-leveling programs; but often they are poorly designed. Often they give the recipient incentive to not work but stay on the program. That tends to reduce productivity in a society. If we take this Deut. 15 text at face value we see two things: (1) there needs to be some wealth-leveling in a society (2) it needs to put responsibility and opportunity back on the individual.

In the long run, what happens to a society that has no wealth-leveling in the system? The disparity between the rich and poor grows. As it grows, the poor get more and more disillusioned and dissatisfied with the system. At some point the have-nots rebel and we have what history calls a revolution. The American Revolution was a rebellion against oppression by wealthy people in power in England. Those in power tend to be in a position to make the

⁶ In Mark 7:9-13 Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders for developing a loophole to get out of their biblical responsibilities to parents.

⁷ Matthew 25:27.

⁸ Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:14; 20:4.

rules; and when they make the rules they tend to make sure they come out alright in the process. So you're taping into some wealth in the New World. That's great; we pass a law that you pay this tax on all your tea. Well that's the last straw and we have a Tea Party in Boston that kicks off the American Revolution. Study the French Revolution; study the Russian Revolution and you will find the same principle in action. The people in power keep making rules that give them more money and more power until those on the bottom rung say, "I won't take it any longer." God's plan eliminated that kind of desperation and it kept a check on greed in the hearts of men.

Now go with me to Lev. 25:1-7 and let's get some more information about the Shemitah. *"The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. 3 For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. 4 But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. 5 Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. 6 Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you--for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, 7 as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten."*

From there Lev. 25 talks about the fiftieth year as a Year of Jubilee. Seven Shemitahs (49 years) are followed by a Jubilee year of additional release and rest for the land.

But why would God put this provision in His covenant with Israel. During the seventh year (the Shemitah) you will not work your fields. This was an agrarian culture. Farming was their livelihood. I've got this perfectly good field here and I can't work it for a whole year. Isn't that stupid? Our American mindset looks upon that as a foolish business decision. The way we make money is to squeeze the last drop of productivity out of the land and out of the workers.⁹ It's just smart business to squeeze those last drops because that gets all the way down to the profit line. Henry Ford became wealthy by creating a production line that produced more of the end product in less time.¹⁰ What I want us to see is this. We have accepted an American mindset that may or may not line up with God's way of thinking. We assume it's right because that's the culture that we grew up in; and after all, it all about the American Dream.

So what might be behind God instruction for the Shemitah? Why should the land lay uncultivated every seventh year?

(1) We could talk about environmental conservation; our stewardship of the world in which we live. I recently watched a documentary about the Dust Bowl that occurred in the 1930's. One man being interviewed was asked what went wrong. He said, "We just got too greedy. We were bringing in good harvests and we just kept trying to get more and more out of the land." Of course, we know they used some poor farming techniques. But when you have only one objective called money, you can trash a lot of good things trying to get more. How many men

⁹ David Green, CEO of Hobby Lobby, stands as an inspiring example of someone who built a successful business based on biblical principles. You can find some of his story at <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/inspirational-stories/how-founder-of-hobby-lobby-achieved-success?nopaging=1> accessed 8/22/15.

¹⁰ In all fairness to Henry Ford, by doing this he made the automobile affordable to Americans who could have never had that convenience under old production methods.

have trashed their marriages and family relationships trying to get just a little more? I personally believe capitalism is the best secular system available in the world; but it's far from perfect. When businesses are measured by only one thing, net profit, you're probably going to violate some other things in the process. Can you image a Senator in Congress proposing that in America we stop production every seventh year and give everybody a rest?

One reason God told Israel to rest the land, rest the workers, is because we are not machines. We need replenishment and the land needs replenishment. It's just good for the environment.

(2) The main reason I think God included the provision to not cultivate the land every seventh year was again to protect his people from the tyranny of covetousness. It's easy to get a mindset that if I could just make a few more dollars, everything would be ok. That is seldom the case.

(3) The Shemitah was an opportunity for Israelites to exercise faith. They couldn't rely upon their own hard work to make that seventh year pay off. They had to rely on God's goodness and fidelity to the covenant. Look what God says to Israel in Lev 25:18-22 "*Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live safely in the land. 19 Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live there in safety. 20 You may ask, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant or harvest our crops?" 21 I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year that the land will yield enough for three years. 22 While you plant during the eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.*"

So God is promising to take care of them if they will just do what He tells them to do.

In Lev. 26 God goes into more detail of how He will bless them if they will simply obey His commands and trust Him. Verse 3 "*If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, 4 I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. 5 Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.*" That passage continues on to describe the blessing that will come upon them.

But what does God say will happen if they disobey?

Lev 26:14 "*But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, 15 and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, 16 then I will do this to you: I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. 17 I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.*

18 "*If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. 19 I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. 20 Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.*"

This passage goes on to describe the judgement that comes with disobeying what God has said to do. If you study it, you will see the pattern in which He brings some judgement, hoping for repentance. When they don't respond to the chastening, He increases the intensity: "*seven times over.*"

I want you to particular observe what He says to them in Lev 26:32-35

“I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. 34 Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”

So God says, “I’ve given you the Shemitah (year of rest) as a blessing from Me. If you honor it, I will take care of you and provide everything you need. But if you don’t honor it, then the disobedience turns it from blessing to judgement. *“I will scatter you....”* And of course that is exactly what happened. The judgement came in waves so they would have opportunity to repent. In about 6th Century BC to final scattering occurred.¹¹

Look again at how Lev. 26:34-35 ties the judgement back to the Shemitah. *“I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. 34 Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.”*

The Shemitah will happen; but since you didn’t obey, it will happen through judgement. And the length of the judgement (the dispersion) is directly tied to the years you failed to honor the Shemitah.

Turn with me to Jer. 25:1-14

“The word came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, which was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. (about 605 BC) 2 So Jeremiah the prophet said to all the people of Judah and to all those living in Jerusalem: 3 For twenty-three years--from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day--the word of the LORD has come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

4 And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. 5 They said, "Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your fathers for ever and ever. 6 Do not follow other gods to serve and worship them; do not provoke me to anger with what your hands have made. (MATERIALISM) Then I will not harm you."

7 "But you did not listen to me," declares the LORD, "and you have provoked me with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves."

8 Therefore the LORD Almighty says this: "Because you have not listened to my words, 9 I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon," declares the LORD, "and I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy them and make them an object of horror and scorn, and an everlasting ruin. 10 I will banish from them the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, the sound of millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 This

¹¹ CAPTIVITY (from The New Unger's Bible Dictionary. Originally published by Moody Press of Chicago, Illinois. Copyright (c) 1988.)

whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

12 "But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the LORD, "and will make it desolate forever. 13 I will bring upon that land all the things I have spoken against it, all that are written in this book and prophesied by Jeremiah against all the nations. 14 They themselves will be enslaved by many nations and great kings; I will repay them according to their deeds and the work of their hands." Those 70 years were fulfilled when Cyrus issued a decree in 538 BC allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem.¹² Daniel read Jeremiah's words while he was in captivity in Babylon and prayed for the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in Daniel 9.

So what does all this have to do with us today? The covenant God made with Israel in the Old Testament was not to the gentiles. We are not directly under that covenant. However, the God of the Old Testament is the same God we serve. He did not change into a different God in the New Testament. He simply gave to us (the church) a better covenant. What we see in the passages that we have read this morning are some principles about God that have not changed.

- (1) The unrelenting pursuit of greed and materialism is idolatry. Paul tells us that in Col. 3:5.
- (2) When God has revealed Himself to people and in the light of that revelation, they by choice give themselves to idolatry, it will bring judgement on them.
- (3) Obedience to God (regardless of what covenant we're associated with) brings blessing and disobedience brings judgement on any people.
- (4) Regardless of what people's imagined concept of God and His love, He has clearly revealed in both the Old Testament and New Testament that He judges sin. Listen to what Heb. 10:27-31 says about that. *"Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people." 31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

Some people think that since they are not under the Old Covenant there will be no judgement of sin. This passage says the judgment is more severe.

In 1 Cor. 10 Paul reminds New Testament Christians that the Old Testament revelation is there for our instruction and benefit. The exact provisions of the Shemitah were a part of the Old Covenant and are not specifically required of Christians. But the underlying principles that we have discussed in this message still apply. God commanded Israel to not covet; he commands the same of Christians (Col. 3:5). Follow with me as we read 1 Cor. 10:6-10. *"Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. 7 Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.' 8 We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did-and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. 9 We should not test the Lord, as some of them did-and were killed by snakes. 10 And do not grumble, as some of them did-*

¹² Jer 25:9-11 (from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press).

and were killed by the destroying angel. 11 These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.”

The last day of the Shemitah is on the 29th of the Hebrew month, Elul. In his books, Rabi Cahn tracks God’s dealings with America and shows how the timing often corresponds with the Shemitah. For example, Wall Street crashed on September 17, 2001 as a result of 9/11. That was Elul 29 and 2001 was a Shemitah year. Seven years later in September 2008 Wall Street crashed again during the Shemitah. That was the beginning of the Great Recession.¹³ Another seven years have passed and Sept. 13, 2015 is Elul 29 of this Shemitah. Rabi Cahn does not say what will happen; he simply alerts us to the pattern that goes back much further back than what I’ve shared this morning.

As events are transpiring consistent with the previous pattern, many have asked Rabi Cahn what they should do. I like the answer he gave in his message a couple of weeks ago. He said the most important thing you can do right now is make the decision that no matter what, you will follow God without compromise, without wavering, all-out for God.¹⁴

We don’t know exactly what will happen next; but we can examine the trends and patterns. We can know from Scripture the ways of God and how He deals with people and nations. We can see by just reviewing what has happened over the last three or four months that times are changing rapidly. All of that should cause us to give God our full attention and pay careful attention to what He is saying!

¹³ Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2011) p. 171.

¹⁴ Jonathan Cahn in video at <http://www.wnd.com/2015/08/harbinger-man-the-time-is-now-to-prepare/> accessed 8/22/15.

OUTLINE

Is America in for a Shaking?

Richard Tow 8.23.15

Intro

- A. Since last Tuesday \$ 1.3 trillion wiped out in U.S. market values.
- B. Rabi Johathan Cahn: *The Harbinger* and *The Mystery of the Shemitah*

I. God's provision of the Shemitah in His covenant to bless Israel

- A. Deut. 15:1-3
Shemitah means "release, remission of debt, or suspension of labor."
Release of debt at end of every seventh year
- B. Why would God put that in His covenant with Israel?
Deal with greed in the heart
A wealth-leveling instrument
- C. Lev. 25:1-7 Rest for the Land
Environmental conservation
Freedom from tyranny of Covetousness
Opportunity to exercise Faith (Lev. 25:18-22)
- D. Blessing of obedience (Lev. 26:3-5)

II. Israel's violation of the covenant and the consequences

- A. Warning (Lev. 26:14-19)
- B. Shemitah (designed for blessing) tied to judgement (Lev. 26:32-35)
Shemitah will happen even if you won't obey; but will come via judgement.
- C. Jeremiah 25:1-14
70 years of captivity assigned
Dan. 9:1-2

III. Application to America today

- A. Covenant of Moses was with Israel not gentiles.
- B. Principles involved remain because God Himself does not change.
1 Cor. 10:6-10
- C. Elul 29 (September 13, 2015) last day of this Shemitah
- D. Events are transpiring rapidly: Give God your full attention.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think events in America (moral & financial) during the last three months point toward a shaking in America? What do you see happening now and what do the trends indicate for tomorrow?

2. The Old Testament covenant was with Israel not the gentiles. So how does the Old Testament speak to us today? What can we know about God by reading about His dealings with Israel (1 Cor. 10:6-11)?

3. What parallels do you see between Israel's response to God and America's response to God? What parallels do you see in God's dealings with Israel and America?

4. Given your understanding of what is happening in America, what do you think Christians should do in response to the events and trends?