



A Grassroots, Global-Local Alternative to Neoliberal, Corporate Globalization

Written by Lee Van Ham in collaboration with others
who are part of Jubilee Economics Ministries

Collaborators:

Marco Tavanti (Chicago), Dan Swanson (Chicago), and Victor Hernandez (Mexico City) have all contributed suggestions that have significantly improved this booklet.

Juanita Mangan-Van Ham (San Diego) designed and formatted the layout and cover art.

Gina Pitinni of Publicia Press Ltd. (San Diego) added final touches and editing.

Who We Are

We are a group of people from North America and Mexico who are growing in our conviction and practice of the biblical Sabbath-Jubilee because of its wisdom, and because we can no longer continue ways of living that support the economic system dominating the world today. For us, it is a choice to sustain life, rather than to destroy it. As *microeconomics*, Sabbath-Jubilee guides us in our lifestyle choices. We continually seek to discover the sufficiency of God's Enough rather than trusting The Market's¹ shouts of "More, more, more." As *macroeconomics*, Sabbath-Jubilee presents us with a real alternative to the macro-systems defined by capitalism and socialism, the two best known arrangers of economics in recent centuries. Most especially, it gives us an alternative to the current expression of capitalism's neoliberal globalization. In 1999, we formed Jubilee Economics Ministries (JEM) as a non-profit NGO (Non-Government Organization) in Chicago, IL, USA. Since then groups have also formed in Mexico City and San Diego, CA.

¹ Many words not usually capitalized are given capitals in this booklet to emphasize that in the culture of neoliberal, corporatized globalization these powers function as deities. They include *The Market, Dominant System, Dominant Culture, Powers, Kingdom of Death, and varying forms of these.*

Our motivation to live the Jubilee increased when we learned that sisters and brothers in Latin America were being drawn to it as a way to talk with North American Christians about discipleship with a strong economic component. As we heard it, many faithful Christians in Latin America, who daily feel the negative, impoverishing impact of neoliberal globalization, puzzled over how to talk with their sisters and brothers of the North who were benefiting from this economic system. They reasoned that people of the North, with a commitment to the bible, might choose an alternative to the Dominant System, if they were persuaded that an alternative was more biblical. This has proved to be true for many. Though the majority of church-going people in the North resist liberation from the privileges that the Domination System bestows on them, others are drawn to the challenge. Many of us are choosing to be in solidarity with those pushed deeper into poverty. JEM seeks out those in the North and the South who want to forge an alternative, historic economic way for our time.

Drawn as we are to the practices described here, we confess that our lives are far more compromised by the Dominant System than we want them to be. We wrestle continually with this reality even as we press forward in our resolve to practice Sabbath-Jubilee more faithfully.

Eight Ways Sabbath-Jubilee Economics² Differs from Neoliberalism

- **Way 1 – Sabbath-Jubilee facilitates cooperation instead of domination.** The system actively counters domination with rituals of leveling that are anchored in spirituality, scheduled in calendar seasons, and implemented in the relationships of a consenting community.
- **Way 2 – Sabbath-Jubilee vigorously promotes community.** Community is valued more highly than private property rights or than market expansion. Restoration to community is valued more highly than retribution, which is regarded as a tool of control and domination.
- **Way 3 – Sabbath-Jubilee redistributes resources in order to counter economic inequities.** Assets are redistributed in intervals of 7 and 50 years so that community-life, in which
- **Way 4 – Sabbath-Jubilee implements structural adjustments that foster economic justice.** The structural adjustments of Sabbath-Jubilee are not to be confused with those used by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). (See the section on “structural adjustments” that follows later in this booklet.) As a strategy, structural adjustment recognizes that social and economic justice cannot be left simply to the good will of people. Such ongoing transformation must be structured and systemic.
- **Way 5 – Sabbath-Jubilee is an economics of nonviolence.** The practice of Sabbath-Jubilee fosters partnership instead of animosity. It sees wisely that when we practice strategies that vigorously share and justly distribute the world’s resources, then adversarial relationships are diminished. The need for police and military actions falls off dramatically.
- **Way 6 – Sabbath-Jubilee practices lifestyles of Enough rather than accumulation and**

all participate fully, takes precedence over wealth accumulation. Sabbath-Jubilee does not tolerate a growing rich-poor gap.

² *Sabbath-Jubilee Economics will most of the time be shortened to Sabbath-Jubilee, but it is the economics of the biblical Sabbath-Jubilee that is the focus throughout this booklet.*

More. Security is placed in relationships and in God's sufficiency rather than in private assets which are regarded as more transient and less secure.

- *Way 7 – Sabbath-Jubilee has cosmological origins.* Sabbath-Jubilee is much more a gift from the cosmos than it is a human construction. It is a gift for us to discover and practice. Sabbath-Jubilee's wisdom is anchored in the mystery of the web of life. The more we choose to live into this mysterious gift, the more God, the giver of the gift, becomes known to us and stirs in us an awe so strong that we are able to trust the Great Economy of Sabbath-Jubilee as the best practice for our lives — indeed, for the whole human family. In contrast, the economics of capitalism and socialism as practiced in the 20th century are examples of re-engineering the gift of the cosmos for the advantage of some over others. Such practices are a “fall”, rather than the mark of an advanced civilization.

- *Way 8 – Sabbath-Jubilee sustains life ecologically.* It discerns how to live in harmony with Mother Earth. Sabbath-Jubilee's cosmo-vision, like that found among indigenous peoples, has a place for all

people and life forms within one world.

Where does the concept “Sabbath-Jubilee Economics” come from?

In the bible we can see how indigenous economic ways were adapted by the Hebrew people to fit their religious calendar of sabbaths and seasons. The name Sabbath-Jubilee comes from the use of their calendar. The Sabbath-Jubilee economic framework is structured by periods of time measured in sevens:

- 7 days
- 7 years
- 7 clusters of 7 years equaling 49 followed by the 50th year, the year of Jubilee

Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word for the last or seventh day of the week (Exodus 16:22-30). *Jubilee* comes from the word *yobel*, a Hebrew word for the trumpet that was sounded on the Day of Atonement, the day on which the Yobel-ee year, the Jubilee Year, began (Leviticus 25:8-9).

The Ancient Origins of the Sabbath-Jubilee Economy

The origins of Sabbath-Jubilee are known only in part. Searching

conventional history for the origins does not bring clarity because histories are written by the Dominant Culture, and Sabbath-Jubilee did not originate in the minds or schools of dominating societies. But both biblical and anthropological sources can be identified. When we come to know indigenous cultures, we discover in many of them a vision of the cosmos that is so interwoven that only a non-dominating economic arrangement, such as Sabbath-Jubilee, would satisfactorily put it into daily practice.

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The origins of Sabbath-Jubilee lie in the “traditional ways” of hunter-gatherer people, indigenous people. The Hebrew people, priests, prophets, and kings lived in tension between dominating and non-dominating economies. The biblical story reveals their repeated attraction to dominating ways. Spiritual leaders were continually raised up by God to counter this attraction and to call them to non-domination. No one did this more eloquently than Jesus. We note, however, that most of what is taught about Jesus omits the political-social-economic content of his message. In Jubilee Economics Ministries, we join those who are reclaiming this wonderful, liberating content of Jesus’ life and teaching. We

practice it as good news for the poor and as release for all from oppressive systems and controlling ways.

Some of the bible’s descriptions of Sabbath-Jubilee are best understood as priests adapting “traditional ways” and ritualizing them for the purposes of their people. The priests

codified them to fit the agricultural and quasi-nomadic lifestyles of the people (See Exodus

16, Leviticus 25, Deuteronomy 15). They knew it required a strong, intentional effort to live differently from the Domination Culture of ancient Egypt, Babylon, and other Empires which repeatedly marginalized them and forced them into service as their slaves.

Also in the bible, reform-minded prophets of the Hebrew people invoked Sabbath-Jubilee whenever they called the people to live out their radical roots rather than to live seduced by the Dominant Culture (See, for example, Isaiah 58, 61:1-2, Jeremiah 34:8-22). The prophets criticized their country’s monarchs for imitating the imperial cultures of Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt, all of which had dominated them at one time or another. Sabbath-Jubilee was, for the prophets, an alternative

economic path – one that *resisted* the Dominant Culture’s imperial excesses and exploitation, and one that *integrated* with the sacred web of life which God has gifted to our planet.

So Sabbath-Jubilee is not an invention of a society as much as it is an expression of deep, archetypal wisdom. It is designed into creation like a DNA code of sustainable, evolving life. For example, productivity is balanced with rest and restoration in creation’s excellence and self-regulation. It is as if heaven and earth join in speaking of Sabbath-Jubilee to all who have ears to hear her. Most do not hear. Yet, various expressions of this economic way have existed throughout history in non-dominating cultures and continue today. In particular we raise up many of the world’s tens of thousands of indigenous peoples who continue to live the gift of this “Great Economy.” They do not call it “Sabbath-Jubilee,” but include it in part or whole in their “traditional ways.”

Because the bible has so often been used by Dominating Cultures to enslave and exploit some people and some parts of the earth, it is important to recognize that the economic way of Sabbath-Jubilee is urged upon us in the bible. JEM rejects all interpretations of the bible that have been and continue to be

used by people to give them control over others or over ecosystems. We insist that God’s gifts are for all, not only for the advantage of some and, thus, the disadvantage of others. No, the Sabbath-Jubilee arranges for the just distribution and continual redistribution of God’s gifts to sustain all in a graciously sufficient, cosmic web of life.

Why is Sabbath-Jubilee not practiced more widely?

The Sabbath-Jubilee is not practiced more widely, because people, businesses, and governments so commonly seek advantage, power, and control. The framework of Sabbath-Jubilee goes against what they are looking for. Sabbath-Jubilee has different aspirations. It focuses in participation by all without partiality. All are to share in the resources of the earth, and to do so with ecological reverence. Power, too, is to be shared and passed around. Sabbath-Jubilee undermines conquest or domination by some over others through regularly scheduled redistributions. People who want to build Domination Systems and Empires engineer economic frameworks with hierarchies. Sabbath-Jubilee levels hierarchies. Nonetheless, the practice of Sabbath-Jubilee is far wider than most people realize. The practice remains “hidden“ from

histories, written and taught, because they are mostly written and taught from the perspective of the dominating cultures. Among various peoples and places on earth, Sabbath-Jubilee is always being practiced in a variety of expressions.

Making the Choice to Live Sabbath-Jubilee Today amid a Culture of Domination, Empire, and Large Systems Adversarial to It

When we make the choice to live Sabbath-Jubilee today, we are choosing to live free of oppression amid a world culture of oppression. So our first focus is to live an alternative to the current Dominant System, not to reform it. In living this alternative, a Jubilee community embodies an economic practice that cooperates with the Dominant System very selectively, resisting it in many, many ways. Conflict in various forms results, even though Sabbath-Jubilee communities do not seek it. Co-existence with an oppressive system, when we have decided not to be oppressed, requires much of us.

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Second, everyone in a Sabbath-Jubilee community needs to understand both the imaginative vision and the concrete practices by which the community survives and thrives. The ingenuity and gifts of all are needed in order to create and maintain life-sustaining patterns for everyone in the community. These life-sustaining patterns relate reverently and sacredly with Mother Earth on the one hand. But on the other hand, these patterns scramble to survive and thrive amid the Dominant Culture.

Third, we must connect to the Center that is within each of us, within the collective community, and within Mother Earth. By connecting to the

Center, we learn again and again that God is there – at the very Center of reality. Unless the

ways we think, individually and communally, are constantly renewed by God’s Spirit, we will think under the influence of the Spirit of this Age, a spirit of domination. Then our choices will lead us away from the regenerating activity of the cosmic God. It is there that the truth that we need to live resides naturally – not among the worldly Powers. By living this truth, we expose the lies

upon which Empire survives. So prayer and ritual, in their many forms, are essential.

Fourth, out of the sustaining resources of an alternative community, we engage the Dominating Powers in order to redeem them, not just to oppose them. We call them back to their true purpose of justly distributing God's resources and power, to seek Life and to join us in resisting human and planet death.

Work, Workers, and Rest in Sabbath-Jubilee

Work by which we produce our livelihood strengthens us. Important as fruitful, creative work is, so too is rest from it. The ancient wisdom of Sabbath-Jubilee tells us to rest one day in seven and one year in seven. And then, every 50th year as well – a once-in-a-lifetime year of rest, redistribution, and strengthening of relationships in an all-inclusive community.

Often, people caught up in the lifestyles of the Dominant Culture feel there is not enough time to do what is most important to them. Rest from labor in the Sabbath-Jubilee pattern of sevens gives us the gift of time in which the “really important” matters can have our attention. Furthermore, rest is an act of resistance amid a dominating culture

pushing for productivity and consumption seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. People enmeshed in the Dominant Culture demean Sabbath rest as “wasting time.” They are not likely to be convinced by our explanations that Sabbath rest is invaluable.

Work needs to be fairly and evenly compensated. The division of labor in Dominant Systems, where those most directly involved in producing goods and services are paid the least while those who supervise are paid more, is foreign to Sabbath-Jubilee. Such hierarchies regarding which work is more valuable fails to understand the biology of life and the spirituality of our souls in which all parts work together in essential, interdependent cells of organic Life.

The compensation awarded by Sabbath-Jubilee evolves from the practice of community that is democratic, secure, and life-sustaining for all people and the planet. When that very generous compensation becomes insufficient for us, then we are departing from the ancient-modern wisdom of Sabbath-Jubilee.

Accumulation and Distribution in Sabbath-Jubilee

Inevitably, some will accumulate more than others. Hence,

redistribution at regular intervals is necessary in order to maintain viable, inclusive, and egalitarian community. Sabbath-Jubilee redistributes every seven years because it regards that to be the maximum time that a truly democratic community can tolerate unequal distribution.

What does it cost to restore people to community? Less than it costs not to. The cost of restoration is the economics of Sabbath-Jubilee. Community is the prize, not the amount of private accumulation;

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common wealth, not private wealth. Our security, now and in the future, does not come from private accumulation, but from being woven into the tapestry of community. In-depth sharing devalues private accumulation. Restoring someone to community is not an expression of charity, but of justice. The redistribution at regular intervals engages everyone in the important practice of restorative justice. It recognizes that our strength and privileges increase as the whole, not just individual parts, is made stronger and healthier.

Balancing Productivity and Ecology in Sabbath-Jubilee

Sabbath-Jubilee asks us to love the earth and all her inhabitants. Such love fosters a deep trust that she, Mother Earth, will provide sufficiently for all, and that we, members of God's one human family, will design systems to distribute her provision to all. We take from the land what the land willingly gives in order to sustain life, for that is the purpose of the land. To extract

from the land in ways that a few may profit at the expense of the many violates the purpose of the land and its owner, God. It is a violence that goes against the nonviolence of Sabbath-Jubilee. It is sinful and empowers

evil upon evil.

Sabbath-Jubilee requires us to manage local and regional economies so that the earth's productivity is available for all people. This contrasts with Domination System economies which cannot distribute the earth's provision according to human need because they organize markets to serve social and economic hierarchies with those at the top getting the most. Such arrangements are anchored in a demand for continual, unrelenting growth, a demand that is greed in unbridled action. It is a system

that releases human appetites. The result is that some have more than they need. The corollary is that others will be deprived of what they need. In Domination Systems private accumulation is promoted without duly pondering its disruption to ecology and the human family of God. Sabbath-Jubilee is anchored in trust – trusting the abundance of God’s Enough. So Sabbath-Jubilee awaits and rejoices in the productivity of the earth and then reaps in ways that all receive daily bread.

The above paragraphs sound especially agrarian and serve well all who continue to live in rural cultures, close to the land. But because most people today live in urban centers and productive work is disconnected from the land, we need to apply the ancient wisdom of Sabbath-Jubilee to work in the industrial, services, and information sectors of societies. The disconnection from the land in these sectors is partly an illusion, since all workers and work in these sectors still depend on what the cosmos produces – energy, natural resources, healthy human beings and communities, and life-sustaining markets to name some. The current inability to make such connections with the land in the Domination Systems is resulting in disastrous trends aptly called a “kingdom of death” – ecocide and genocide

recur in first one segment of the globe, then another.

Every community needs to translate Sabbath-Jubilee into their own context. For example, non-agrarian communities with assets other than land can understand “land” as “assets.” Then assets, like land, need to be arranged cooperatively and communally, not hierarchically. To achieve this, cooperatives would be one Sabbath-Jubilee vehicle because they are better able to arrange economies to sustain life than are globalizing corporations. Another clue for us when we translate Sabbath-Jubilee into non-agrarian communities is to look for the often ignored biodynamic energy that exists between rural communities and urban centers. Such inter-relatedness is a trait of Sabbath-Jubilee economics in every context.

Dealing with the Quiet Violence of Debt and Interest

Debt and interest are powerful economic vehicles. They can be used to create accountability; but very quickly they become vehicles of oppression, moving money from those with less to those with more. Long term debt enslaves. Recognizing both its legitimate use and its great danger, Sabbath-Jubilee communities schedule the cancellation of all debt every 7 years. This term limit

on debt accurately recognizes that:

1. debt is a primary means of domination by those with more over those with less, and that
2. debt undermines community by making debtors subservient to creditors. As such, debtors are less free to participate fully in community. Sabbath-Jubilee economics requires community and thus cannot tolerate debt for more than 7 years.

The release from debt after no more than 7 years prevents the unhappy scenario in which debtors, if unable to repay, lose their own possessions; then they are required to offer their labor which becomes ever cheaper until some form of enslavement results. Participatory community in the radically democratic form intended by Sabbath-Jubilee is thus destroyed, replaced by a hierarchy of those with more who rule those with less. But debt's debilitating power goes well beyond interpersonal debt. If not corrected, in time one community will dominate another, and then one nation will rule over another. Debt and domination go hand-in-hand in the pages of human history – which is the story of nations today.

The nations of our world today are in an apartheid structure, divided between rich and poor, with debt as a major instrument of oppression

used by creditor institutions and nations over debtor nations. This debt is institutionalized. It is arranged between governments and international financial institutions without the consent of their people who, nonetheless, have to pay for it, and pay dearly. International institutions such as the World Bank and IMF refer to “sustainable debt,” implying that the debt is at a level that a country can make payments rather than default. But this ignores the truth that “sustainable debt” will never be repaid. Contrast this to the Sabbath-Jubilee approach to debt cancellation and we can see why Jesus (Luke 4:16-18) said he was bringing “good news to the poor.”

For similar reasons, no interest is charged in a Sabbath-Jubilee economy. It, too, erodes community by increasing the disparity between those with more and those with less.

Debt and domination go hand-in-hand

Sabbath-Jubilee correctly recognizes that debt and interest

are subtle, relentless powers in the hands of creditors over debtors which inevitably create oppressor-oppressed relationships through hierarchy and domination.

We must not be fooled by the use of the word “credit” which permeates neoliberal globalization. For example, credit cards are not called

debt cards, though people become debtors the moment they use one. To be “credit-worthy” has a positive sound to it, a kind of affirmation of our economic capacity. But mostly it is a seduction for going into debt. The credit being extended to people, businesses, and countries today through the Domination System has no term limit. The structures of credit are designed to maximize interest and debt servicing. Millions of people are today captives and slaves to the Dominant System through debt and the costs of servicing the debt. That reality makes proclaiming the Sabbath-Jubilee as revolutionary as it is important for human freedom.

Crime and Restorative Justice in Sabbath-Jubilee

In Domination Systems, those at the top of power and privilege hierarchies determine who is criminalized, for what, and for how long. Those at the bottom typically receive the harshest treatment. The legal and judicial processes do not serve them well. Due processes fail them, and thus they become excluded from society. Though officials may speak about restoring those convicted to society once they are released, the system makes such speech lip service only. Once convicted, the record is hardly ever left in the past. Restoration

is left to the good will of individuals and to organizations motivated by religious faith or humanitarian compassion.

In Sabbath-Jubilee, criminalization happens through consensus of the community because it is the whole community, not just a private individual or entity, that has been violated. With the consciousness that life can be sustained and secured only in community, crimes are understood and defined out of a different framework than what happens in Domination Systems which are focused

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largely in individual and property rights. Criminalization fractures community; it doesn't just punish the criminal or rid the community of crime. Restoration involves not only restoring to full participation in community that person who has offended the community, it also involves the community healing from however it was torn, broken, and violated. When everyone involved can proceed to that moment where full participation of all in communal life is restored, then justice has happened. Sabbath-Jubilee opts for restorative justice in all dealings with human behavior regarding others, possessions, and the earth.

People with Less and People with More in Sabbath-Jubilee

Some inequity in distribution is inevitable. Furthermore, because every household has particular needs, some inequity is necessary. The maxim is that those with more do not have too much and those with less do not have too little. This is not defined in terms of amounts, but in terms of livelihoods of Enough. If those with less have no needs, then they live in the abundance of God’s Enough. Likewise, if those with more have no needs, then they do too. But if anyone has a health emergency or an accident keeps them from their productive tasks in the community, then the community provides the needed security for the one affected, be it someone with more or less.

Inequity, however, quickly becomes a source of division and **o p p r e s s i o n** . Discernment is required to know what is “need” and what is “appetite.” So, to assure that the gap between those with more and those with less does not undermine community, scheduled redistributions rearrange the assets of the community. Basically, this happens every seven years within the context of cultural-social festivals and religious celebrations and rituals.

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But even the every-seven-years redistributions may not be sufficient to maintain the radical process called Life – Life in the fullness of its interlinking web. Therefore, every 50th year, additional redistribution happens as an expression of spiritual faithfulness, of trust in one another and in God for the fullness of Life. So, if some of us have to neglect some things for a few years, we know that it will be only a short time before we have the resources to address them. We can count on it. In that way, the entire community is strengthened as is everyone in it.

Structural Adjustments Built into Sabbath- Jubilee

The structural adjustments of Sabbath-Jubilee every 7 years and every 50 years must be practiced faithfully for the economy to regenerate itself.

Without them, Sabbath-Jubilee will evolve into some other economy of domination.

The power of structural adjustments to change economic and social patterns is used vigorously and negatively today by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In over 100 of the world’s 200 countries the IMF makes structural adjustments the conditions for loans

in countries desperate for cash because of excessive debts. In country after country, the IMF shows us how their fundamentalist style of using structural adjustments systematizes injustice. The systemic revisions privilege a few and marginalize most.

The Sabbath-Jubilee counters all aspects of IMF structural adjustments. Accordingly, Sabbath-Jubilee allows people, who have become excluded economically, politically, and socially from the community, to be assured that they will be restored to full participation in the life of sustainable community.

Likewise, people who have become accumulators of assets and power to the point where they are lifted up over community are assured that they will be restored to the rich relationships of redistributed response-ability. By contrast, the IMF structural adjustment programs arrange economics to give preference to the countries, businesses, and people with wealth – engaging in economic aggression against the poor. Sabbath-Jubilee’s structural adjustments give preference to communities, cooperatives, and people struggling valiantly with the forces of oppression and domination.

The Sabbath-Jubilee adjustments are structural and systemic, not just individual or personal. However,

the people of the community must *do* them. They are not imposed hierarchically from outside the community. The communal covenant is lived out when people in the community who have received some economic or social advantages during the time since the previous adjustment release those advantages. Likewise, people who have been disadvantaged shift to a different kind of response-ability. The minds and hearts of both those who have become advantaged and those disadvantaged must undergo an internal “structural adjustment” to

.. adjustments are structural and systemic, not just individual or personal.

go along with the systemic adjustments socially and economically. In this way, all – whether

advantaged or disadvantaged — can be restored to full participation in the community.

Such restoration cannot be left merely to the goodwill of people individually. Rather, it is done collectively. It is a communal act needed to maintain the community. It regenerates communal life and avoids the pitfalls of acquiring too much or having too little on an individual bases.

Structural adjustments regularly revisit the revolutionary nature of living in a non-dominating

economic community amid a world in which dominating economies have become “normal.”

The weekly practice of Sabbath breaks the rhythm of productivity and consuming for a day of reflection, relationship, worship, and spiritual regeneration. This day is the cornerstone upon which the structural adjustments of Sabbath-Jubilee are built. As we practice Sabbath personally and communally, we all grow in the awareness of our appetites and desires which put ourselves over others. These must be continually recognized, confessed to one another, and yielded to God so that we might be released from them. Without such liberation, we become a threat to the community and to Mother Earth. Both require us to be people continually transformed by such liberation in order to practice faithfully the life-sustaining, regenerating Sabbath-Jubilee economy. Without the spirituality that is nurtured in the true practice of Sabbath, the communal economics of Sabbath-Jubilee will soon be displaced by 20th century capitalisms and socialisms, or some other dominating system.

Where in the bible do we read about Sabbath-Jubilee?

The usual reading of the bible finds

Sabbath-Jubilee in a limited selection of passages, the following being the most common.

From the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament)

Exodus 16, 21:2-6, 23:10-11

Leviticus 25

Deuteronomy 15:1-18

From the Old Testament Prophets

Nehemiah 5:1-13

Isaiah 58, 61:1-2

Jeremiah 34:8-22

From the Gospels and Acts in the New Testament

Matthew 5:3-10, 6:9-13

Luke 4:16-30

Acts 2:43-47, 4:32-37

When Sabbath-Jubilee is perceived in only these passages, the common conclusion is that Sabbath-Jubilee was an ideal too utopian to ever be really practiced except in a few moments of renewal, all of which soon faded away. Such a conclusion reinforces the thinking of the Domination Culture. In other words, Sabbath-Jubilee is an impractical, utopian notion that doesn't merit much attention.

But today many who have studied the bible carefully are concluding the reverse. Even these limited passages come from many different authors over centuries of time and report on an even greater span of history – more than a millennium,

and one during which the people of the bible saw a succession of Empires – Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, Greece, and Rome.

The succession of Empires underscores an important context for reading the bible more correctly, namely, the bible is written mostly from the perspective of an oppressed people. This helps us read it with different eyes. From this vantage point, we see how the people in the bible strayed from Sabbath-Jubilee, because the seductions of the Domination Systems and Empire were so alluring. The Torah, the Prophets, and Jesus are all, then, understood as urging people to trust the practicality of Sabbath-Jubilee and the trustworthiness of Yahweh, the God who has given it as guidance for true Life. Yahweh and the Sabbath-Jubilee sharply contrast with the gods and economics of the Dominating Systems. Such a reading not only makes far more sense out of the Torah, the Prophets, Jesus, and the early Church, it speaks differently to the oppressor-oppressed dynamics of our world today. It calls us to resist the contemporary Empire, most especially by living out a more just alternative to it. But it is precisely this reading of the bible that eludes most religious people in Empires.

So the Sabbath-Jubilee is an economic framework that lies behind and infuses the whole message of the bible. Seeing it, however, requires reading with

the eyes of the oppressed and the eyes of Sabbath-Jubilee.

Hope and the Sabbath-Jubilee

The Sabbath-Jubilee's continual practice among non-dominating and dominated peoples of history shows its durability. It is part of the archetypal life-force of the cosmos, so it is a light that can neither be put out nor comprehended by the darkness of dominating systems. Indigenous peoples continue to bear witness to their conviction that the Divine Spirit has given to them the task of preserving the earth. This conviction has not been diminished by 500 years of domination. In fact, the current neoliberal globalization's acceleration toward destruction makes it daily more likely that God's new humanity will require the full inclusion of indigenous wisdom. Sabbath-Jubilee, then, will survive the current economic fundamentalism that is taking over the globe with its rigid implementation of structural adjustments and cult-like authoritarianism by the rich and powerful. The Sabbath-Jubilee affirms without equivocation that God hears the cry of the oppressed, and that both the exodus from domination and the resurrection from death are not only past events, but future ones too.

Learning more about Sabbath-Jubilee

Jubilee Economics Ministries (JEM) has more resources on the Sabbath-Jubilee. We respond to invitations for further dialogue and mutual learning. We also provide leadership for gatherings. We seek to learn from many whose thought and practice encourages our own.

JEM also links with other groups who focus in one or more aspects of the Sabbath-Jubilee. If your group would like to be linked with us, please propose it.

Other sources:

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How to Contact Jubilee Economic Ministries

Jubilee Economics Ministries (JEM) is a faith-based organization, one of the many non-government organizations worldwide who are joining together today to foster a civil society amid the aggressive economics and actions of corporate-controlled globalization and Empire. You can receive copies of these booklets, inquire about other resources, and learn about the popular education experiences offered by contacting one of JEM's three centers of coordination:

2300 S. Millard
Chicago, IL 60623
justicejubilee@yahoo.com

3295 Meade
San Diego, CA 92116
jemsandiego@yahoo.com

V. Carranza 20, Col. Centro
Naucalpan, Edo. De Mexico 53000
herramv@hotmail.com

