

Celebrating Liberty

“And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof” (Leviticus 25:10).

Inscribed on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia are the words from Leviticus 25:10, *“Proclaim Liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof...”* If you attended the 2008 Advance at the Cove you will recognize this reference to the Year of Jubilee. As we celebrate our liberty in America during the week of July 4th, perhaps we should recall some truths God teaches through the hallowed fiftieth year celebration and remember how these truths point to freedom in Christ. How did the Liberty Bell come to be and what did our forefathers have in mind when the inscription was put on the bell?

The bell's creation and purpose date back to 1751, a quarter century before the first Independence Day. Philadelphia was growing and a large bell to alert citizens was needed for the State House bell tower. The need coincided with an important anniversary. The bell was ordered by the Assembly of the Colony of Pennsylvania to commemorate the 50th anniversary of William Penn's 1701 “Charter of Privileges,” which is a clear statement of religious liberty. The speaker of the assembly, a Quaker named Isaac Norris, Jr., chose the inscription from Leviticus 25.

The bell was cast in England by the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, and arrived in Philadelphia in September 1752. At the first trial ring in March 1753 the bell cracked. American workmen recast the 2,080-pound bell twice after that. It hung for years in the building later renamed Independence Hall and became identified with the Colonial Revolution against England.

Under the threat of British occupation in 1777, it and other local bells were hidden at the Zion Reform Church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, to prevent capture by the British. The colonists feared the British army might turn the metal into cannons.

The Bell was used to celebrate many patriotic events until it cracked around 1835, most likely at the funeral procession of John Marshall, our first Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court. It was in 1839 after a poem entitled, *Liberator*, written by William Lloyd Garrison, was published that the State House bell was named the **Liberty Bell**.

Leviticus 25:10 speaks of the Year of Jubilee which God instigated in the Old Testament and brought to fulfillment through His Son. It is also referred to in scripture as the Year of the Lord's Favor. It began at the end of the 7th cycle of Sabbatical Years and was to be observed every fifty years. During this year slaves and prisoners would be freed, debts would be forgiven and the mercies of God would be particularly manifest. No matter how the land was lost – be it through mismanagement, the fates of fortune or even legal sale – the land was returned to its original owner. The goal was to restore the land to its “rightful” owners: the original Israelite families who received their land distribution from Moses' successor, Joshua. By this ordinance God teaches that no land belongs to any person, but all is His land, only loaned to the inhabitants. Through the Jubilee God protected the nation against materialism and greed as the Sovereign Rule.

As we reflect on the significance of the bell of liberty for our nation, let us examine our own hearts with the truth inscribed upon the bell. The biblical Year of Jubilee called for the release of slaves, for a reclaiming of one's possessions, for a period of rest when the land could be restored to productivity. It reminded the people in the land to trust God for every provision.

Is there something that has you enslaved? God wants to release you. Have you lost something in your relationship with God which you should reclaim today? Is your walk with God vital and filled with joy as it once was? Has your love for Christ grown cold? You can reclaim what is yours in Christ today. Are you weary and in need of rest? Come to Jesus as you celebrate your liberty in Him. Pray for a fresh anointing of the Spirit of God.

“And where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (II Corinthians 3:17b).

May your prayers include intercession for America. One pastor observed:

Today's America is producing men without chests, without passion and without excuse, “because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them” (Ro. 1:19). Where are the sons of freedom called by God to become His architects of a present reformation? Why are sons of Glory refusing to move with singleness of purpose? Do they not know that Christianity is America's most effective social program?

As you humble yourself and pray and seek God's face (II Chronicles 7:14) ask for revival fires to sweep our nation. Pray for a spirit of repentance and a returning to God. Pray that the church of will be set free in Christ to reclaim what is hers as the bride of Christ. Pray that the Church will truly be the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring the Light of Christ to a dark world; that we will no longer be pressed into the likeness of the world but will be transformed into Christ-likeness. Pray for a Year of Jubilee in Christ for America!

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

The year of Jubilee was ushered in by the blowing of the shofar, as the people were called to a sacred assembly on the Day of Atonement. On that day the nation examined their hearts before God, repenting of sin and entering into a year of trust and freedom in the God who owns it all. In fact the word “jubilee” has its root in the Hebrew word “yobel” which means *ram*.

Would we have the ears to hear the sound of God's shofar? Could He be calling His people to a sacred assembly and the nation to a Year of Jubilee in Christ? Will we have the courage to throw off our culture's yoke of slavery and be the vehicle through which God moves to revive and restore a people gone astray?

*Our fathers' God to Thee, Author of liberty, to Thee we sing;
long may our land be bright with freedom's holy light, protect
us by Thy might, Great God our King.*

America (fourth verse)
by Samuel Francis Smith