



We are here to feast together. There are elbows bumping, plates clattering, children babbling, elders story-telling, and mouths “mmm”ing. There is deep belly joy. There is whole-hearted laughter and relief. This is the spirit of Jubilee that we feel beckoning us, that we hope carries through the pages that follow. And yet . . . We know that our stories of Jubilee today will not simply tell of celebration. We know that under that feasting table there are also tired feet and aching backs. Amidst the joyful ruckus there is a quiet longing for all that isn’t here yet. There are sighs of mourning for all the Jubilees deferred. – *Kateri Boucher, “Come Join the Jubilee Feast”*

STUDY GUIDE GEEZ 63: SOUND THE TRUMPET

ABOUT GEEZ

Geez magazine is a quarterly, nonprofit, ad-free, print magazine about social justice, art, and activism for people at the fringes of faith in Canada and the U.S.

Geez is committed to naming and raging against oppression while also offering the hope, beauty, and power alive in local communities doing their work.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

This biblical tradition occurred every 49 years, declaring all debts be forgiven, slaves and prisoners freed, and land laid to rest. First laid out in the book of Leviticus (and later referenced in the New Testament), Jubilee was the “Year of Release” that signaled the end of seven cycles of Sabbath years. Quaker minister Kristina Keefe-Perry called it a “cosmic reset button” – and we sure feel like we’re a couple thousand years overdue. In this moment of massive debt overload, mass incarceration, and rampant land destruction, we ask: What would this practice look like today? We dream together of reparations, debt forgiveness, prison abolition, land restoration, and a whole lot of radical rest.

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PART I SET THE CAPTIVES FREE

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 51 – Sweet Blossoming of Justice: A Rewrite of Isaiah 61 by *Kateri Boucher*

Page 22 – Shmita: Radical Jews Practice Release by *Jake Ehrlich*

Page 47 – Thinking Abolition Theologically An Interview with *Hannah Bowman*

DEFINITIONS

Shmita: Meaning “release” in Hebrew, shmita refers to the Biblical institution of the sabbatical year, when the land is to lay fallow and unharvested for the duration of the year.

Prison abolition: A political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment (as defined by Critical Resistance).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Both Hannah Bowman and Jake Ehrlich name the Biblical traditions and passages that inform their radical political work. Are there certain texts (Biblical or otherwise) that you regularly turn to in your work for peace and justice?
2. When asked if she considers the Bible an abolitionist text, Hannah tells us it’s complicated. “If we tried to reduce it to only saying one thing, then we’re not doing justice to the fact that it’s a 3,000 year-old document written over the course of more than a thousand years. And I think it’s important for us to realize that it’s not always going to say what we want it to.” Do you agree with Hannah? What are the challenges of searching for specific messages in a complex elder text like the Bible?
3. There are multiple ways of understanding the call to set the captives free. Thinking both materially and spiritually, what people, places, objects, or ideas are being held captive in our society? What parts of yourself or your life might be held captive right now? What would collective liberation from these chains look like? Feel like? Sound like?

ACTIVITY

1. Find a way to sit with Isaiah 61. Read it alone and aloud. Read it over a dinner meal. Study it in a group. Let it seep into the corners of your body.

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PART 2 LET THE LAND LAY FALLO

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 13 – Can the Biblical Jubilee Pattern be Useful to Our Time? by *Arthur Waskow*

Page 46 – Food and Land in the Shmita Year: A Release from Old Paradigms by *Carly Sugar*

Page 19 – Echoes of the Green Corn Ceremony by *Joshua Hopping*

2. Hannah Bowman said in the interview “If there won’t be any prisons in the reign of God, why are we committed to visions of reform that say we’re going to have to have prisons in the meantime?” Find a way to take an act toward prison abolition. Read a book. Become a pen pal with a person who is incarcerated. Join a local Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee or Critical Resistance group.

DEFINITIONS

Diaspora: The dispersion of a group of people from their homeland, in this case referring to the “scattering” (from the Greek term π) of Jewish people from Israel.

Yovel: According to Everett Fox, the acclaimed best translator of the Hebrew Bible, yovel was the melody on the shofar or “ram’s horn” that shepherds blew to bring the sheep home in the evening. He translates yovel as “homebringing.” (As explained by Arthur Waskow)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Arthur Waskow references Leviticus 26, in which the Torah asks, “What happens if you refuse to let the land observe the Shabbat to which it is entitled?” The idea of the land having its own rights is reflected in many Indigenous cultures, and is most recently being advocated for by the Rights of Nature movement. How does/might this understanding of land inform our practices of Jubilee or our work towards climate justice?
2. In “Echoes of the Green Corn Ceremony,” Joshua Hopping writes of the Cherokee practice that relates to the Biblical Jubilee. In your ancestral lineages, do you know of other land-based practices that may have echoed the tradition of Jubilee? Are there practices in your communities today that evoke this tradition?

ACTIVITY

1. For most of our Geez readers, this winter season is when the land rests. Go put your body in an empty vegetable garden or on the dirt where one day daffodils will emerge. Spend time with this resting land. Remember that the bulb and seeds and soil are resting below you and that life is alive there.
2. Cook something. Give thanks for the ingredients and the places they came from and the people who touched them along the way. Savor the smells and the work of your hands. Feel the land get into your body. Give some away.

PART 3 FORGIVE ALL DEBTS

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 26 – Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is by *Andrew Yang*

Page 36 – Forgive us our Debts, Foreign and Domestic by *Dean Dettloff*

Page 33 – Woe to you Landlords by *Fernando Marti*

DEFINITIONS

Eviction moratorium: A period of time when landlords are prohibited from removing a tenant who is not paying rent.

Papal bull: An official public decree by the Pope. (Not to be confused – although sometimes overlapping – with Papal bullsh*t.)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Dean Dettloff reminds us, “Global debt is not an accident, but is intentionally mediated through financial institutions and the way that capitalism distributes wealth.” In what ways do those in power attempt to mask the fact that this debt is intentionally created? Did his article teach you anything new about the workings of global capital?
2. Reflecting on the story of his church’s experiment in wealth redistribution, Andrew Yang writes, “To the extent that it was only happening among our church community members, it was symbolic justice and not true justice.” Does this distinction resonate with you? What could be helpful about referring to these experiments as “symbolic justice”? What could be misleading? Do you see your work as falling into that category, and why?

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ACTIVITY

1. If you are able, put some money (perhaps \$5, perhaps \$1,000) towards debt relief or redistribution. You likely know a great place in your own local community. Otherwise, here are some suggestions: [Resource Generation](#) (for young people with class privilege), [National Bail Out](#), and [Debt Collective](#).
2. Journal: What is your personal and ancestral relationship with debt?

PART 4 ALLOW OUR BODIES TO REST

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 40 – If an Undocumented Chinese Restaurant Worker Took a Sabbatical by *Liuan Huska*

Page 42 – Blessing for a Rest by *Kate Suffling*

Page 43 – Rest as a Sacred Ceremony by *Owólabi*

PRAYER

For the Snails by *Hannah Renglich*, page 46

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read through Katie Kulla's correspondence with Wendell Berry. What emotions were brought up for you while reading? Do you also have a beloved author who you've wanted to challenge or invite into further decolonization and anti-racism work? Who would you write to and what might you say?
2. What did you learn from your family about food growing up? If you have access to information about your ancestors' lives, what do you know about their relationships to land and food? What lessons do you want to carry with you from your family's history with food, and what traditions need to be changed?

ACTIVITY

3. Research and write a detailed acknowledgement for the land that you are on or that your family is from. Learn about #LandBack campaigns and make a plan to bring your acknowledgement one step closer to reparation.
4. Resist. Join a food justice/climate justice march in the streets. Plant a garden. Disrupt the system. Divest from agrobusiness at your grocery store.
5. *Tip for collective survival:* Invest in mutual aid.