

The Jubilee Gospel: The Jubilee, Spirit and the Church

By Kim Tan

Reviewed by Kristen Cooper
Gordon College

The Jubilee Gospel, by Kim Tan, is recommended as an addition to a devotional library or collection of resources about social holiness or biblical community living. Tan's central claim is that the Gospel message is truly a proclamation of Jesus' "Jubilee mission" of redemption, and Christians ought to take seriously the "social holiness and justice" (p. 2) aspects of Jubilee practices. The book may be best described as a personal reflection on years of scriptural study; Tan writes from personal conviction and his experience living in an intentional Christian community for eight years.

The book does not approach the topic of Jubilee from an academic discipline, but it is likely to be useful for those interested in Biblical integration in business or the social sciences. It is moderately useful for a focused study of the Sabbath, although the practice of Sabbath is not developed as fully distinct from Jubilee. However, Tan's integration of these topics is helpful. For example, true Sabbath is not merely resting oneself but also allowing rest for servants, land, and animals. The book's usefulness as a scholarly resource is likely to be more limited, partly due to its habit of using "Jubilee" as an adjective without further definition. Terms such as "Jubilee actions and attitudes" (p. 93), "Jubilee communities" (p. 107), and "Jubilee distribution of wealth" (p. 138) are introduced but undeveloped. The scarcity of footnotes is also evidence that the book is not intended to be a fully cited piece of research or theological exposition.

The book's best use is likely to be as a resource for group discussion, and it is well suited for a discussion-based, upper-level undergraduate course. For example, Tan's observation in Chapter 7 that the church has returned to a focus on tithing, and thereby returned to the letter of the law instead of the spirit of the law, could be a lively topic for debate. Chapter 9's discussion of how modern church and business practices could be more aligned with Jubilee principles is particularly useful, although limited to ten pages. The book could be more useful for personal application if it focused more on how

Christians in today's economy can apply the biblical economic issues discussed. The author is clear on some issues, such as private property being appropriate for Christians if the property is used to benefit others as needed. However, it is not clear how the features of "God's Kingdom," including a kinship-based welfare system and a decentralized government with no income tax (pp. 47-49), relate to modern Christians, and Jesus' disapproval of private loans with interest (p. 83) is not explained. The suggestions of Chapter 9 and the encouraging claim that Jesus' victorious death is "effective over the power of consumerism" (p. 94) could especially be more developed.

Weaving a dense biblical narrative, Tan successfully challenges his readers to see that repentance is a social action, not just an inward spirit.