

Deuteronomy Chapter 15

Verses 15:1 – 16:17: Actually (14:28), begins a new section which extends through (16:17). This portion is related to the fourth commandment, dealing with the Sabbath day observance. (Exodus 23:10-14, the covenant code, and Leviticus chapter 23 and 25:3-8), concerning the law of holiness, have both already connected the Sabbath law and the seventh year of sabbatical rest (or the great pilgrimage festivals). There are five points in the section:

- (1) 14:28-29 has the triennial tithe for the Levite, alien, orphan, and widow, and is identical in form to the sabbatical year regulations of (15:1-11);
- (2) The sabbatical year regulations (15:1-11);
- (3) The release of all Hebrew slaves in the sabbatical year (15:12-18);
- (4) The law of firstlings that are not to be worked (15:19-23), and
- (5) The Passover festivals (16:1-8), the Feasts of Weeks (16:9-12), and the Feast of Booths (16:13-17).

There is a principle of priority repeated in (16:11 and 14), of son and daughter, male or female servant, Levite, stranger, fatherless and widow.

Verses 1-11: This year of release typified the grace of the gospel, in which is proclaimed the acceptable year of the Lord. And by which we obtain the release of our debts, that is, the pardon of our sins. The law is spiritual, and lays restraints upon the thoughts of the heart. We mistake, if we think thoughts are free from God's knowledge and check. That is a wicked heart indeed, which raises evil thoughts from the good law of God, as theirs did. Who, because God had obliged them to the charity of forgiving, denied the charity of giving. Those who would keep from the act of sin, must keep out of their minds the very thought of sin. It is a dreadful thing to have the cry of the poor justly against us. Grudge not a kindness to thy brother; distrust not the providence of God. What thou doest, do freely, for God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7).

Deuteronomy 15:1 "At the end of [every] seven years thou shalt make a release."

Not of servants, for they were not to be dismissed from their service until they had served six years, as is directed to in a following law. For if they were to be set free whenever a sabbatical year came, they might be discharged when they had not served more than a year, or than half a year, or than a month or two. Indeed, when the year of jubilee intervened, they were released be it at what time it would. But not in a sabbatical year, which was a year of release of debts, as the following verses show, as well as there was then a rest of the land from tillage (Lev. 25:2).

This release seems to be a year that the creditor is to not exact the payment from the borrower. The borrower would probably not be able to pay, because of letting the land rest for a year.

Verses 2-3: "The Lord's release": Scholars differ as to whether the "release" meant the total remission of the indebtedness or merely the suspension of it for that year. The following verses suggest that a total cancellation of the debt was intended, since the seventh year of release and the jubilee year of liberty together belonged to one symbolic unit. This pointed prophetically to the future redemptive action of God, anticipating the messianic reign of mercy to the poor and helpless (Psalm 72). Foreigners still had to pay, for unlike sojourners who were permanent members of the community, foreigners were temporary and commercial visitors. This would have certainly helped to keep poverty out of the nation.

Deuteronomy 15:2 "And this [is] the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth [ought] unto his neighbor shall release [it]; he shall not exact [it] of his neighbor, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release."

Not by an absolute discharge of the debt, but by passing over that year without exacting payment. The relief was temporary and peculiar to that year during which there was a total suspension of agricultural labor.

"He shall not exact it": Of his brother, that is an Israelite, so called in opposition to a stranger or foreigner.

"Because it is called the Lord's release": The reason for acquitting a debtor at that particular period proceeded from obedience to the command, and a regard for the honor, of God. An acknowledgment of holding their property of Him, and gratitude for His kindness.

This is a Sabbath for the land, and also a Sabbath for the borrower. It is a time when labor is to cease. The creditor received his money in payments from the labor of the borrower. If the borrower did not labor that year, he would have nothing to pay with. This is the LORD's requirement. The lender should take this into consideration when he loans.

Deuteronomy 15:3 "Of a foreigner thou mayest exact [it again]: but [that] which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release;"

Either on the seventh year, or after it.

"But that which is thine with thy brother, thine hand shall release": A debt that lies between them, where the one is the creditor, and the other debtor, the creditor shall freely and fully forgive the debtor. So those only are released or forgiven by the Lord who are his own, whom he has reserved for himself, or chosen to everlasting life. Who are interested in the covenant of his grace, one article in which is the forgiveness of sins. And who are redeemed by the blood of Christ, a branch of which redemption is remission of sin. And who are called by grace, and believe in Christ, to whom pardon of sins is promised. But those who are foreigners and strangers, and are not the Lord's chosen, redeemed, and called people, have no share in this blessing of grace. Nor such who are rich in their own esteem, and need nothing. But those who are poor and unable to pay their debts, and are sensible of their spiritual poverty. And apply to the Lord for the forgiveness of their sins.

The foreigner would be able to work, and earn money that year. He could therefore, be required to pay. The release is for those who respect Sabbath.

Deuteronomy 15:4 "Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee [for] an inheritance to possess it:"

Then such a law could not take place, there would be no debts to be released. For this was never designed to screen rich persons from the payment of their just debts, or whoever were in a capacity of so doing. Only such as were really poor, and unable to pay.

"There shall be no poor among you": But then it must be understood conditionally. Others interpret this as the end to be answered by this law, "to the end there may be no poor among you". By observing this law, all debts being released once in seven years, it would prevent persons falling into distress and poverty, to such a degree as to be in want, and become beggars.

"For the Lord shall greatly bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it": Which is either a reason why there would be no poor, should they observe the commandments of the Lord. Or a reason why they should release the debts of the poor because they were so greatly blessed with a fruitful land. Which brought them such an increase, as enabled them to free their poor debtors, when in circumstances unable to pay them.

This is saying, that the blessings of God upon them will be so great, that his brother would not need to borrow. This is speaking of there being no poor in the land. In the chance that he loans to his brother, God will bless the lender if he follows the release of his brother.

Deuteronomy 15:5 "Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day."

In his word, and by his prophets. This being the case, there would be no poor among them. Or they would be so blessed of God, that they would be capable of releasing the debts of the poor, without hurting themselves and their families.

"To observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day": A phrase often used to put them in mind of the commands of God, and the necessity of keeping them, their temporal happiness depending thereon.

Blessings from God come upon them only when they keep His commandments.

Deuteronomy 15:6 "For the LORD thy God blesseth thee, as he promised thee: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow; and thou shalt reign over many nations, but they shall not reign over thee."

He is faithful that has promised, and he always gives the blessing he promises according to the nature of the promise. If absolute, and without conditions, he gives it without respect to any. But

if conditional, as the promises of temporal good things to Israel were, he gives according as the condition is performed.

"And thou shalt lend unto many nations, but thou shalt not borrow": Signifying they should be so rich and increased in goods, and worldly substance, that they should be able to lend to their neighboring nations round about, but should stand in no need of borrowing of any of them. This is sometimes said of the language of these people, the Hebrew language. That it lends to all, but borrows of none, being an original primitive language (see Deut. 28:12).

"And thou shalt reign over many nations": Which was fulfilled in the times of David and Solomon.

"But they shall not reign over thee": That is, as long as they observed the commandments of God. Otherwise, when they did not, they were carried captive into other countries, and other people reigned over them, as at this day.

If they keep God's commandments, the Israelites will not have need to borrow from anyone. They will be the lender to the rest of the world. They will not have an earthly ruler. Their King is God. They will not be ruled by other nations, but they will rule other nations.

Deuteronomy 15:7 "If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother:"

As there would be, according to the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem, if they did not keep the commandments of the law, and continue therein.

"Within any of thy gates, in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee": A native of the land was to be preferred to a foreigner. And a brother, whether in relation or religion, to a proselyte of the gate. And the poor of a city to which a man belonged, to the poor of another city, as Jarchi observes. Which he gathers from this phrase:

"Within any of thy gates": Thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy brother. So as not to pity his distressed case, and have no bowels of compassion for him, and feel for his want, and so as not to distribute to his necessities, and relieve him.

This is an encouragement to lend to their poor brothers, to help them get started. The person who has plenty, and does not need to borrow, must have compassion on those less fortunate and be willing to lend to them.

Deuteronomy 15:8 "But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, [in that] which he wanteth."

And give him bountifully and liberally; in order to which the heart must be first opened, the affections moved, and a willing mind disposed to give generously.

"And shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth": Enough to answer his present exigencies, but not to cause him to abound, or to supply him with things needless and superfluous.

The person lending must not be tight-fisted. They must be open-handed to lend to those who need. Those who are blessed with wealth, must be quick to lend to those who have needs and wants.

Deuteronomy 15:9 "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee".

A potential creditor might be unwilling to make a loan to a poor man because the proximity of the year of release would in effect make it a gift.

This is saying, that just because the year of release is near is not a reason (in the sight of the LORD), not to lend to the needy. The heart full of greed is also, a heart full of sin. God judges the heart of man.

Deuteronomy 15:10 "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou putteth thine hand unto."

Or lend to him. Though lending in such a case and circumstances, that person being extremely poor, and the year of release at hand, is the same as giving. Jarchi remarks that money must be given him, even a hundred times if he asks it. But the limitation is to what he wants, and what is sufficient for his present wants (Deut. 15:8).

"And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him": Grieved at parting with his money he has little or no hope of seeing again. Grudging it to him to whom it is given. When, on the other hand, it should be given freely and cheerfully, for God loves a cheerful giver.

"Because that for this thing the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all thou putteth thine hand unto": That is, for lending or giving largely, liberally, and cheerfully, to persons in distress (see Prov. 11:24).

To receive blessings of abundance from God, they must bless those in need around them. Let's look at what is said in the New Testament about this very thing.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;" "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

Deuteronomy 15:11 For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.

There would be always such objects to exercise their charity and beneficence towards (John 12:8). Which is no contradiction to (Deut. 15:4), for had they been obedient to the laws of God, they would have been so blessed that there would have been none; so the Targums. But he foresaw that they would not keep his commands. And so this would be the case, and which he foretells that they might expect it, and do their duty to them, as here directed.

"Therefore I command thee, saying, thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother": Not give sparingly, but largely, in proportion to the necessities of the poor, and according to the abilities of the lender or giver. And this must be done to a brother, one that is near in the bonds of consanguinity, and to him a man must give or lend first. As Aben Ezra observes, and then "to thy poor"; the poor of thy family, as the same writer.

"And to thy needy in the land": That are in very distressed circumstances, though not related, and particularly such as are in the same place where a man dwells. For, as the same writer remarks, the poor of thy land are to be preferred to the poor of another place.

Look what Jesus said about the poor.

Mark 14:7 "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always."

We must always help those who cannot help themselves.

Deuteronomy 15:12 "[And] if thy brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee."

"Sold": The release is extended to bondservant and bondmaid alike, thus enlarging the provisions of Exodus (21:1-6).

Poverty in the day this was written, was one of the reasons for slavery. If a person could not pay what he owed, he worked the debt out as a slave.

Proverbs 22:7 "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower [is] servant to the lender."

The Hebrew slave was to be released on the seventh year. Other slaves were not released, until jubilee.

Deuteronomy 15:13 "And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty:"

When he discharged him from his servitude, and made him a free man.

"Thou shall not let him go away empty": Without anything to support himself, or to put himself in a way of business. He having in the time of his servitude worked entirely for his master, and so could not have got and saved anything for himself.

This is saying, they should give them something to get started with, so they will not be right back in slavery again.

Deuteronomy 15:14 "Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: [of that] wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him."

Not only to supply his present wants, but for his future use, and to set him up in the world. "Loading thou shall load him", so some render the words; give him as much as he can carry, and well stand up under. The word used has the signification of chains wore about the neck for honor or ornament. And so may signify he should be very honorably dismissed, with plain marks of honor and respect. And the order is, to supply him.

"Out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress": With sheep or lambs out of the flock, with corn out of the floor, wheat, or barley, or both. And wine out of the winepress. Which take in all the necessaries and comforts of life. Of that;

"Wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shall give unto him": Be it what it will, and in proportion to it, as of money as well as goods. It is asked, how much shall be given to him? Not less than the value of thirty shekels, whether of one kind or whether of many kinds. According to the thirty shekels for the price of a servant (Exodus 21:32). All this may be an emblem both of the servitude the people of God are in to sin, Satan, and the law, while in a state of nature. And of their freedom from it by Christ, and of the sufficiency and fullness of food and raiment, and large measures of divine grace. Even all things richly to enjoy. All things pertaining to life and godliness, which are given to them when brought out of that state. Who otherwise come out of it destitute of all good things, having neither food nor clothes. Nor money to buy either, but have all from Christ freely and fully.

This goes further into detail about what they should give the slave, when he or she is released. Remember, they are fellow Hebrews. This means he gave him or her, enough to start up their own household.

Deuteronomy 15:15 "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day."

"Remember that thou wast a bondman": Similar words are used in Deuteronomy to encourage the people to the proper behavior expected of them (5:15; 10:19; 16:12 and 24:18). As "children of the Lord" (14:1), they should bear His character.

This should not be difficult for them to do, when they remembered they were slaves in Egypt and God delivered them. He did not deliver them empty handed either. They spoiled the Egyptians,

and carried provisions with them into the wilderness. Every time they kept this commandment, they could remember how God helped them get out of bondage.

Deuteronomy 15:16 "And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee;"

Where they were used hardly, and their lives were made bitter in hard bondage. And therefore should show the greater compassion to servants, whose case they could not but sympathize with, and have a fellow feeling of.

"And the Lord thy God redeemed thee": From the house of bondage and state of slavery, after they had been in it many years.

"Therefore I command thee this thing today": To release their servants at the end of six years, and not send them away empty, but generously contribute to them at their release. Since when he redeemed them he gave them the spoil of Egypt. And of the sea, as Jarchi remarks; they came out of their bondage state with jewels, and gold, and silver, and raiment, even with great substance. And at the Red sea their spoil was increased which they took from Pharaoh and his host when drowned there. Now as they came out of their servitude not empty but full, being sufficiently paid for their hard service. So they should remember to give to their servants liberally, when they made them free.

The slave may choose to stay, after the master had released him. This may have become home for the slave, and he learned to love the family so much, he does not want to leave. He must not be forced to leave against his will.

Deuteronomy 15:17 "Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust [it] through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise."

Not of his master's house, but of the Sanhedrim, or court of judicature, according to the Targum of Jonathan. Before whom he was to be brought, and declare his desire to continue with his master (see note on Exodus 21:6).

"And he shall be thy servant for ever": That is, unto the jubilee, as the same Targum. For then all servants were released, and so Jarchi calls it the ever of jubilee.

"And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise": Not bore her ear, for, as both Jarchi and Aben Ezra, and others say, she was not to be bored. Though some are of opinion that a maidservant who was willing to continue with her master was to be bored as a manservant. But this respects the manner of dismissing her, or letting her go free. When she was not to go empty, but to be liberally furnished and supplied, as a manservant was.

This servant has chosen to belong to this family forever. In this case, the he or she is marked with an awl. This makes them part of this family forever. They will serve them as they did in the past, but forever.

Deuteronomy 15:18 "It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant [to thee], in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest."

He should not grudge him his liberty, nor what he gives to him when he dismisses him.

"For he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee in serving thee six years": Since a hired servant a man is obliged to pay him wages for his work, besides his food, whereas a bondservant received no wages. Aben Ezra remarks, that this proves that a man might not hire himself for more than three years. Or however, whereas a hired servant was sometimes hired for so many years, and this is the longest time of any we read of, a servant serving his master six years. His service must be worth double the service of a hired servant, which at most was but three years.

"And the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thou doest": Thus well using thy servants, whether menservants or maidservants.

In 6 years' time, they should have grown fond of the servant. They would be happy for his release, to start a new life on his own. This is speaking of the servant who wants to be released. The master should not hold a grudge against him.

Verses 19-23: The firstborn of animals belonged to the Lord, but they had to be without blemish (Mal. 1:8, no lame, torn, blind, or blemished), in order to be accepted by God (compare 22:29; Num. 18:17-18).

Deuteronomy 15:19 "All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep."

According to the law in (Exodus 13:2; see notes on Exodus 13:2; 13:12-13).

"Thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock": As to plough or tread out the corn with it, which were done with other heifers.

"Nor shear the firstling of thy sheep": Nor was the wool shorn of it to be made use of. One of the Jewish canons runs thus, "if any man weave a hand's breadth of the wool of a firstling into cloth, the cloth is to be burnt."

They are to get no profit from the firstling of the flock, because they belong to God. The first of the flock was to be carried to the temple, or the place of worship, and offered to God.

Deuteronomy 15:20 "Thou shalt eat [it] before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household."

Which, if understood of male firstlings, as in connection with the preceding verse, only priests might eat of them, being devoted to the Lord. So Jarchi says, to the priest he speaks. But if this respects the Israelites in common, then they must be understood either of female firstlings or second firstlings. Which the people voluntarily separated, and which they were not to eat in their own houses.

"But in the place which the Lord shall choose": Which was the city of Jerusalem (see Deut. 12:5).

"Thou and thy household": The household of the priest, as Aben Ezra interprets it. But if it designs the same as in (Deut. 12:17), then the Israelites and their families are meant.

They were first offered in sacrifice and then eaten, while they were in the sanctuary. Once a year, they were to do this.

Deuteronomy 15:21 "And if there be [any] blemish therein, [as if it be] lame, or blind, [or have] any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God."

In the firstling, as if it be "lame or blind", or have:

"Any ill blemish: thou shall not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God": Blemishes in any beast made it unfit for sacrifices which were required. And so all peace offerings, vows, and freewill offerings, were to be free from any blemishes (Lev. 22:19). Such were not fit for a holy sacrifice or a holy feast.

This is stating that any blemish at all on the animal, would make it unacceptable as a sacrifice to God. It symbolized the body of the Lord Jesus, so it had to be without spot or wrinkle.

Deuteronomy 15:22 "Thou shalt eat it within thy gates: the unclean and the clean [person shall eat it] alike, as the roebuck, and as the hart."

Though it might not be sacrificed, nor eaten as a Eucharistic feast at Jerusalem, it might be eaten as common food in their own houses.

"The unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike": Such as were ceremonially unclean, by the touch of a dead body or the like, might partake of it with those that were clean, no difference was to be made.

"As the roebuck and as the hart": Which were clean creatures, and used for food, though not for sacrifice (see Deut. 12:15).

Since it was not sacrificed, all who desired to could eat of it, as they did with any other meat they cooked.

Deuteronomy 15:23 "Only thou shalt not eat the blood thereof; thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water."

Of the firstling.

"Thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water" (see notes on Deuteronomy 12:16; 12:23; 12:24).

The blood was to be soaked up by the earth, as water is on the ground. They were forbidden to eat blood at all.

Deuteronomy Chapter 15 Questions

1. How often were they to make a release?
2. What is the release speaking of?
3. This is the Sabbath of rest for the _____.
4. Who requires this release?
5. Why is it alright to require a stranger to pay that year?
6. What time is verse 4 speaking of?
7. Blessings from God come upon them only, when they keep His _____.
8. They shall lend to many _____.
9. How shall they feel about their poor brothers?
10. A person lending must not be _____.
11. What were they warned against thinking in verse 9?
12. God judges the _____ of man.
13. How will they receive abundant blessings from God?
14. What did Jesus say about the poor in Mark 14:7?
15. If they buy a Hebrew man, or woman, to serve them, how long shall they serve?
16. What shall they do with them in the seventh year?
17. What shall they do for this servant, when they release them?
18. What shall they remember about their bondage in Egypt?
19. What if the servant does not want to go, does he have to leave?

20. What will be done, to show that he is to stay longer than the 6 years?
21. Whose choice is this?
22. How should they feel about the servant that desires to leave?
23. Who do all of the firstling males of the flock belong to?
24. After they are sacrificed, who eats them?
25. What happens to the firstling, that is not perfect?
26. What is the one restriction about eating it?