

Deuteronomy 15:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release.

Analysis

And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD'S release. Creditors must release debts owed by fellow Israelites every seventh year. This radical provision prevented debt from becoming perpetual slavery and maintained economic mobility.

The phrase shall not exact it makes debt forgiveness mandatory, not optional. This was not encouraged charity but commanded justice. God's economic law required periodic cancellation of debts among covenant brothers, preventing creditor classes from exploiting the poor indefinitely.

The designation the LORD'S release reveals that debt forgiveness flows from God's character and authority. Just as God forgives His people's spiritual debts, they must forgive one another's financial debts. The principle anticipates the Lord's Prayer - forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

This creates economic system fundamentally different from surrounding cultures where debt slavery was permanent and exploitative. Israel's economy operated on grace and periodic renewal, reflecting God's redemptive character.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern economies commonly featured debt slavery where families lost land and freedom due to inability to repay loans. These debts could span generations, creating permanent underclasses.

Israel's sabbatical release prevented such exploitation among covenant members. While debts to foreigners were not forgiven, fellow Israelites received periodic financial fresh starts.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What does mandatory debt forgiveness reveal about God's economic justice?
2. How does the sabbatical release anticipate the prayer to forgive our debts?
3. Why did God distinguish between debts owed by Israelites versus foreigners?
4. What would contemporary society look like if periodic debt forgiveness were implemented?
5. How does God's character as forgiving creditor shape His economic legislation?

Interlinear Text

וְזֹה	H2088	וְזֹה	H1697	דְּבָר	H8059	שְׁמַטָּה	H8058	שְׁמַטָּה וְט	H3605	כָּל	H1167	בְּעֵל	
And this is the manner		of the release		shall release				Every creditor					
אֲשֶׁר	H4874	רִאשָׁוֹן	H3027	אֲשֶׁר	H834	וַיְשַׁלֵּחַ	H5383	רְעֵה הַוְיָה	H7453	לֹא	H3808	וְאֵשׁ	
that lendeth		it of his neighbour		it of his neighbour				it he shall not exact					
אֲתָה	H853	רְעֵה הַוְיָה	H853	וְאֲתָה	H251	אֲתָה יְהוָה	H3588	פִּי	H7121	קְרָב אֶל			
it of his neighbour		or of his brother		because it is called									
לִיהְיוֹה:		שְׁמַטָּה											
of the release		the LORD'S											

Additional Cross-References

Luke 7:42 (Parallel theme): And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?

James 2:13 (Parallel theme): For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.