

Deuteronomy 23:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel.

Analysis

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel.

This verse permits travelers to eat from neighbors' vineyards while prohibiting harvest for commercial purposes or storage. The Hebrew *ke'avkha* (כְּאַפְּחַת, 'thy fill at thine own pleasure,' literally 'according to your appetite') grants generous permission for immediate consumption to satisfy hunger. However, using a *keli* (כְּלֵי, 'vessel' or container) to collect grapes for later use or sale was forbidden. This balanced hospitality and property rights, providing for travelers' needs while protecting owners' livelihood.

This law embodied covenant community values:

1. recognition that God ultimately owns the land and its produce (Leviticus 25:23)
2. obligation to share abundance with needy neighbors
3. respect for property rights and others' labor
4. trust that generosity doesn't impoverish but invites divine blessing.

The regulation assumed a society where travelers might be hungry and needed sustenance but shouldn't exploit kindness by harvesting for profit. It created a culture of sharing that met genuine needs without enabling exploitation.

Jesus's disciples invoked this law when Pharisees criticized them for plucking grain on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:1-8, Luke 6:1-5). While Pharisees didn't dispute their right to eat from fields, they questioned doing so on the Sabbath. Jesus's response appealed to David eating showbread (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and declared Himself 'Lord of the Sabbath,' demonstrating that human need and divine compassion take precedence over rigid ceremonial interpretation. This law thus illustrates both God's generous provision for human needs and the danger of legalism that multiplies restrictions beyond God's intent, missing mercy's priority.

Historical Context

Hospitality to travelers was crucial in the ancient Near East where public accommodations were rare and journey safety depended on communal support. Unlike modern societies with commercial food sources every few miles, ancient travelers faced real hunger between settlements. Vineyards, grain fields, and fruit trees along roads provided the only food access during journeys. Cultural norms throughout the region recognized travelers' rights to reasonable sustenance, though specifics varied.

Archaeological evidence reveals that ancient Israel's agricultural economy centered on small family farms with vineyards, olive groves, and grain fields. Unlike later latifundia (large slave-worked estates), most Israelite families worked their own land. This created communities where neighbors knew each other, and allowing travelers to eat from roadside produce was manageable hospitality, not economically devastating charity. The law's specificity—eating but not harvesting for storage—prevented abuse while maintaining generosity.

The practice's survival into Jesus's time (evidenced by Gospel accounts) demonstrates its enduring cultural acceptance. Rabbinic tradition elaborated on the basic principle, specifying distances one could walk while eating, quantities permitted, and methods allowed. While such elaboration sometimes devolved into legalism, it also demonstrated desire to maintain community sharing while preventing exploitation. Historical evidence suggests this law functioned effectively in creating a society where travelers' needs were met through

community generosity rather than commercial transactions, modeling covenant mutual aid that prioritized relationships and welfare over maximum property protection.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this law balance genuine generosity toward those in need with appropriate respect for property rights?
2. What does this provision teach about creating communities characterized by sharing rather than protecting every possession?
3. How should Christians apply this principle of meeting immediate needs while preventing exploitation of generosity?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תְּבָא	בְּנֵם	בְּנֵךְ	אֶכְלָתִ
H3588	When thou comest	H3754	vineyard	into thy neighbour's
	H935		H7453	H398

עַתָּה יְמִ	כִּנְפְּשָׁת	וְאֵל	שְׁבַע בָּ	כָּלִיב	לְ
grapes	at thine own pleasure	thy fill	H413	any in thy vessel	H3808
H6025	H5315	H7648		H3627	

תְּמִ

but thou shalt not put

H5414

Additional Cross-References

Romans 12:13 (Parallel theme): Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

1 Corinthians 10:26 (Parallel theme): For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

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