

Deuteronomy 24:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:

Analysis

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy—The Hebrew *lo ta'ashoq sakhir ani ve-evyon* ("you shall not oppress a hired servant poor and needy") uses *ashaq* (oppress/defraud), which means to withhold what is owed, particularly wages. This isn't charity but justice—paying fairly for labor rendered. *Sakhir* (hired servant/day laborer) describes someone without land who depends on daily wages for survival, making prompt payment crucial.

Whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates—The law extends to both Israelites (*achekha*, "your brothers") and foreigners (*gerekha*, "your sojourners"). God's justice transcends ethnic boundaries, protecting vulnerable workers regardless of nationality. This radical inclusivity distinguished Israel from surrounding cultures where foreigners had few legal protections.

James rebukes oppressive employers using this law's language: "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth" (James 5:4). Paul affirms: "The labourer is worthy of his reward" (1 Timothy 5:18), applying this principle to ministerial support.

Historical Context

In ancient agrarian economies (circa 1406 BCE), day laborers were the poorest class—landless workers who depended on daily wages to buy that day's food. Delays in payment meant their families went hungry. Harvest seasons created temporary labor demand, and unscrupulous landowners might exploit workers' desperation. This law, coupled with Leviticus 19:13 ("the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning"), mandated same-day payment. This protection exceeded most ancient Near Eastern legal codes, which typically favored property owners over workers.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's concern for prompt and fair payment of poor workers challenge modern employment practices and attitudes toward minimum wage, contract workers, and economic inequality?
2. In what ways does the law's extension to foreign workers reveal God's heart for justice that transcends national and ethnic boundaries, and how should this shape Christian engagement with immigration and labor issues?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תַעֲשֶׂה קִ	שָׂכָר יִר	עָנִי י	וְאֶבִי וֹן
H3808	Thou shalt not oppress	an hired servant	that is poor	and needy
	H6231	H7916	H6041	H34
מֵאֵה יִרְ	אִו	מִגֵּרִב	אֲשֶׁר ר	בְּאַרְצֶב
whether he be of thy brethren	H176	or of thy strangers	H834	that are in thy land
H251		H1616		H776
בְּשַׁעְרֵיב:				
within thy gates				
H8179				

Additional Cross-References

Malachi 3:5 (Parallel theme): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Proverbs 14:31 (Parallel theme): He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

Proverbs 22:16 (Parallel theme): He that oppresseth the poor to increase his riches, and he that giveth to the rich, shall surely come to want.

Amos 4:1 (Parallel theme): Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink.

Luke 10:7 (Parallel theme): And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house.

Amos 2:7 (Parallel theme): That pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and turn aside the way of the meek: and a man and his father will go in unto the same maid, to profane my holy name:

Amos 8:4 (Parallel theme): Hear this, O ye that swallow up the needy, even to make the poor of the land to fail,

Ezekiel 22:7 (Parallel theme): In thee have they set light by father and mother: in the midst of thee have they dealt by oppression with the stranger: in thee have they vexed the fatherless and the widow.

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