

Deuteronomy 24:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.

Analysis

At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it—Be-yomo titten sekharo ve-lo tavo alav ha-shemesh ("on his day you shall give his wages, and not shall set on it the sun") mandates immediate payment before sunset. The day laborer's survival depends on daily wages; delayed payment equals oppression. This echoes Leviticus 19:13's parallel command.

For he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it—Ki ani hu ve-elav hu nose et-nafsho ("for poor he is, and to it he lifts up his soul") reveals the psychological and spiritual weight of wages for the poor. Nose et-nafsho (literally "lifts up his soul/life") describes desperate longing and dependency—these wages represent not just money but survival, dignity, provision for children. Withholding them crushes hope.

Lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee—God hears the oppressed worker's cry (yiqra alekha el-YHWH). This echoes Exodus 22:23-24: the cries of the oppressed reach God's ears and provoke His judgment. Haya bekha chet ("it shall be sin in you") makes wage theft a serious covenantal violation, not merely an economic dispute. James 5:4 declares such cries "have entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth."

Historical Context

The immediacy of payment requirement reflects the harsh reality of subsistence economies. Day laborers lived hand-to-mouth; no payment meant no food. The phrase "setteth his heart upon it" captures desperate waiting—will the employer pay fairly, or find excuses? Archaeological evidence from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel shows workers often received rations (bread, beer, oil) as wages. This law protected both monetary and in-kind payment. The theological grounding ("lest he cry.. unto the LORD") elevates labor justice to covenant relationship with God.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does the phrase "setteth his heart upon it" deepen your empathy for those whose economic survival depends on timely and fair payment, and what responsibility does this create for employers and consumers?
2. What does God's attentiveness to the oppressed worker's cry reveal about His character and priorities, and how should this shape our engagement with economic justice issues?

Interlinear Text

בְּיוֹמוֹ	תִּתֶּנָּה	שְׂכָרֵוֹ	וְלֹא	תָבֹא	עַל יוֹ
At his day	thou shalt give	him his hire	H3808	go down	H5921
H3117	H5414	H7939		H935	
הַשֶּׁשֶׁשׁ	כִּי	עָנִי	הוּא	וְאֵלַי	הוּא
neither shall the sun	H3588	upon it for he is poor	H1931	H5921	H1931
H8121		H6041			
וְנָשָׂא	אֶת	בְּפֶשֶׁתֹו	וְלֹא	יִקְרָא	עַל יָדָהּ
and setteth	H853	his heart	H3808	upon it lest he cry	H5921
H5375		H5315		H7121	H413
יְהוָה	יְהוָה	בְּךָ	חֲטָא:		
against thee unto the LORD	H1961	H0	and it be sin		
H3068			H2399		

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 19:13 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

James 5:4 (References Lord): Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

Jeremiah 22:13 (Parallel theme): Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work;

Deuteronomy 15:9 (Sin): 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.

Job 35:9 (Parallel theme): By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty.

Job 34:28 (Parallel theme): So that they cause the cry of the poor to come unto him, and he heareth the cry of the afflicted.

Isaiah 5:7 (References Lord): For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant: and he looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry.

Psalms 86:4 (References Lord): Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.

Psalms 25:1 (References Lord): Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul.

Psalms 24:4 (Parallel theme): He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.