

Deuteronomy 24:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

Analysis

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again—the Hebrew *lo tefa'er acharekha* (לא תפאֵר אַחֲרֶיךָ) means 'you shall not search/go through after yourself.' After the initial harvest by beating the branches with poles, remnant olives were to remain. **It shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow**—the three classes most economically vulnerable in ancient society, lacking land inheritance or male providers.

This continues the gleaning laws (also Leviticus 19:9-10, 23:22) that institutionalized compassion into Israel's agricultural economy. Unlike charity depending on goodwill, these laws created legal rights for the poor to harvest leftovers. The practice allowed dignified provision through labor rather than begging, preserving both sustenance and self-respect. Ruth and Naomi survived by this system (Ruth 2).

Historical Context

Given circa 1406 BC before Israel possessed the Promised Land's olive groves and vineyards. Olive oil was essential for food, lighting, anointing, and religious rituals—a staple of Mediterranean economy. The law presupposed private land ownership (impossible in Egypt, where Pharaoh owned everything), preparing Israel for an agrarian society structured on covenant justice rather than exploitation.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does God's design allow provision for the poor while preserving their dignity through work?
2. What modern economic structures either help or hinder the poor's ability to provide for themselves?
3. How can Christians create 'gleaning rights'—systemic opportunities rather than mere charity handouts?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תִּחְבֹּט	זֵיתֶךָ	לֹא	תִפָּאֵר	
H3588	When thou beatest	thine olive tree	H3808	thou shalt not go over the boughs	
	H2251	H2132		H6286	
אֲחֵרֶיךָ	לִגְרִי	לִיתֹם	וְלֹאֲלִמָּנָה	יְהוָה:	
again	it shall be for the stranger	for the fatherless	and for the widow	H1961	
H310	H1616	H3490	H490		

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 19:10 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

