

Deuteronomy 25:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.

Analysis

Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn—the Hebrew loc-tachsom (לֹכַח־תַּחַסּוּ, do not muzzle) protects the working animal's right to eat from its labor. Threshing (dush, שְׁחִינָה) involved oxen treading grain to separate kernels from chaff—arduous work deserving immediate reward.

Paul applies this principle twice to gospel ministry (1 Corinthians 9:9-10, 1 Timothy 5:18), arguing a fortiori that if God cares for oxen, how much more for those laboring in spiritual harvest. The principle extends beyond oxen to all workers: those who labor deserve provision from their work. This seemingly minor law reveals God's comprehensive concern for justice extending even to animals (Proverbs 12:10).

Historical Context

Ancient threshing floors were communal spaces where oxen walked in circles over harvested grain. Muzzling prevented animals from eating, maximizing owner profit at the animal's expense. This law revealed Israel's distinct ethic: covenant people must reflect God's justice even in treatment of beasts, since all creation belongs to Him (Psalm 50:10-11).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does Paul's application of this law to gospel workers challenge your view of supporting those in Christian ministry?
2. If God commands justice toward animals, what does this imply about treatment of human workers in employment relationships?

Interlinear Text

לֹא תַמְלִיכֵנִי שׂוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹן

H3808

Thou shalt not muzzle

H2629

שׂוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹן

the ox

H7794

H1758

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 12:10 (Parallel theme): A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast: but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

Hosea 10:11 (Parallel theme): And Ephraim is as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn; but I passed over upon her fair neck: I will make Ephraim to ride; Judah shall plow, and Jacob shall break his clods.

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