

Exodus 21:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

Analysis

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.

God's first civil law addresses slavery—revealing His priority to protect the vulnerable. 'Hebrew servant' (עבד עברי, eved ivri) refers to debt-servitude (not chattel slavery)—Israelites who sold themselves to pay debts. The six-year limit prevents permanent poverty-bondage. 'In the seventh go out free' (בשְׁבֻעָת יְצֵא, bashevi'it yetze lachofshi) parallels Sabbath principle—rest after labor, release after bondage. 'For nothing' (חִנָּם, chinnam) means without payment—freedom is gift, not purchase. This revolutionizes ancient economy where debt-slavery was perpetual. God champions the oppressed; His laws limit exploitation.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern slavery was usually permanent. Israel's six-year limit was radically humane. Debt-servitude allowed poor Israelites to work off obligations while maintaining dignity and receiving eventual freedom.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the seven-year release reflect Sabbath principles of rest and renewal?
2. What does God prioritizing slavery laws first teach about His heart for the oppressed?

Interlinear Text

וְאֵת שְׁבֻעָת	שְׁתִים	שָׁשׁ	עָבֵר	בַּד	תְּקִנָה	כִּי	יְשִׁיבָה	דְּבָר
H3588	If thou buy	servant	an Hebrew	six	years	he shall serve		
H7069		H5650	H5680	H8337	H8141		H5647	
וְבַיּוֹם שְׁבֻעָת	לְחַפֵשׁ	אֵצֶן	וְיָצַא	לְחַפֵשׁ	חַנְצָה	לְחַפֵשׁ	לְחַפֵשׁ	לְחַפֵשׁ
and in the seventh	he shall go out		free		for nothing			
H7637		H3318	H2670		H2600			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 12:44 (Parallel theme): But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat thereof.

Deuteronomy 15:18 (Parallel theme): It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.

Nehemiah 5:8 (Parallel theme): And I said unto them, We after our ability have redeemed our brethren the Jews, which were sold unto the heathen; and will ye even sell your brethren? or shall they be sold unto us? Then held they their peace, and found nothing to answer.

Exodus 22:3 (Parallel theme): If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft.

Deuteronomy 15:1 (Parallel theme): At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release.

Deuteronomy 31:10 (Parallel theme): And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org