

Jeremiah 34:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear.

Analysis

At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew—this cites the sabbatical release law from Deuteronomy 15:12. The seventh year (שָׁבֻעַ, shavu'a) pattern echoes creation's sabbath rest, embedding social justice in worship rhythm. Hebrew slaves must serve only six years, then go chofshi ("free")—the same word used for the Exodus liberation itself (Exodus 21:2). Economic relationships must mirror God's redemptive character, not the oppression they themselves escaped.

But your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear (וְלֹא הִשְׁמָעוּ אֶת־אָזְנָם, lo shame'u... velo hitu et-oznam). The double negative emphasizes willful deafness—they didn't accidentally miss God's command, they deliberately refused to listen. "Incline the ear" suggests active effort; its negation implies they actively resisted. This generational pattern of disobedience ("your fathers") indicts not just individuals but systemic covenant violation across centuries.

The tragedy: Israel treated fellow Hebrews worse than God's law even allowed treating foreign slaves. Leviticus 25:39-43 explicitly forbids harsh rule over Israelite servants, commanding: "thou shalt not rule over him with rigour." By

ignoring sabbatical release, they reduced covenant brothers to chattel slavery, fundamentally denying the Exodus itself. This prefigures Jesus's parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:23-35)—failure to extend received mercy proves one never truly received it.

Historical Context

Archaeological evidence from ancient Israel reveals economic stratification intensifying during the divided monarchy period. The eighth-century prophets (Amos, Isaiah, Micah) condemned wealthy landowners exploiting the poor. By Jeremiah's time, debt slavery was endemic—poor Judeans sold themselves or children to wealthy compatriots during agricultural failures or wartime disruption. The sabbatical release law, designed to prevent permanent underclass formation, was ignored for profit.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What modern 'sabbath' principles of rest, release, and restoration does contemporary culture systematically ignore?
2. How does treating covenant family members (fellow believers) worse than outsiders contradict the gospel?
3. In what ways might deliberate spiritual deafness be disguised as simple ignorance in your own life?

Interlinear Text

מֶקֶץ	שֶׁבַע	שָׁנִים	וְשִׁלַּחְתָּ	אִישׁ	אֶת	אָחִיו
At the end	of seven	years	let ye go	every man	H853	his brother
H7093	H7651	H8141	H7971	H376		H251
הָעֵבֶרִי	אֲשֶׁר	יָמָּכָה	לָךְ	וְעָבָדְךָ		
an Hebrew	H834	which hath been sold	H0	unto thee and when he hath served		
H5680		H4376		H5647		
שֵׁשׁ	שָׁנִים	וְשִׁלַּחְתָּ	חֶפְזָךְ	מֵעִמָּךְ	וְלֹא	שָׁמַעַתָּ
thee six	years	let ye go	free	H5973	H3808	hearkened
H8337	H8141	H7971	H2670			H8085
אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	אֶל	וְלֹא	הֵטָה	אֶת		
from thee but your fathers	H413	H3808	not unto me neither inclined	H853		
H1			H5186			
אָזְנָם:						
their ear						
H241						

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 15:12 (Parallel theme): And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.

1 Kings 9:22 (Parallel theme): But of the children of Israel did Solomon make no bondmen: but they were men of war, and his servants, and his princes, and his captains, and rulers of his chariots, and his horsemen.