

Jeremiah 34:9

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother.

Analysis

That every man should let his manservant, and every man his maidservant, being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess, go free; that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother. This verse describes the covenant's specific terms: comprehensive emancipation of Hebrew servants. The phrase "every man... every man" emphasizes universal participation—no exceptions based on status or property value. The specification **being an Hebrew or an Hebrewess** (ivri ve'ivriah) distinguishes this from foreigners who could be permanent servants (Leviticus 25:44-46). This invokes Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12, which required releasing Hebrew servants in the seventh year.

The prohibition **that none should serve himself of them, to wit, of a Jew his brother** reveals the violation's gravity: enslaving fellow covenant members contradicted Israelite identity. The phrase "a Jew his brother" (Yehudi achihu) emphasizes covenant brotherhood—they were family, not merely ethnic group. Enslaving "brothers" violated the foundational Exodus narrative: God freed Israel from Egyptian slavery, so oppressing fellow Hebrews inverted redemption's meaning. The seventh-year release law symbolized God's redemptive pattern and anticipated the Jubilee's complete restoration.

Theologically, this teaches:

1. Covenant law protects the vulnerable from exploitation by the powerful
2. redemption creates obligations toward fellow-redeemed people
3. social justice isn't peripheral but central to covenant faithfulness
4. oppression of brothers/sisters in faith especially provokes divine anger.

Christ's redemption similarly creates brotherhood requiring mutual service (Galatians 6:10; 1 John 3:16-17).

Historical Context

The Sabbath year release (Deuteronomy 15:12-18) was systematically violated in pre-exilic Judah, creating permanent debt-slavery among Hebrews. The seventh-year and Jubilee laws were designed to prevent permanent underclass formation and maintain family land inheritance. Violation created economic injustice that prophets consistently condemned (Amos 2:6-7; 8:4-6; Micah 2:1-2). Zedekiah's decree attempted belated obedience during crisis, but verses 10-11 reveal it as pragmatic rather than genuine reformation. Historical context shows this violated law was among the specific reasons God cited for exile (Jeremiah 34:13-14)—social injustice, not merely idolatry, brought judgment. This challenges reductionist readings focusing only on "spiritual" sins while ignoring economic oppression.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the "Jew his brother" language challenge modern Christians to see economic justice toward fellow believers as covenant obligation, not optional charity?
2. What parallels exist between Judah's violation of servant release laws and contemporary economic systems that exploit the vulnerable?
3. How should Christ's redemption of us from slavery to sin shape our treatment of those economically or socially vulnerable?

Interlinear Text

לְ שֶׁלַח go H7971	אִישׁ: אֶת That every man H376	אֶת H853	עֶבֶד וְ should let his manservant H5650	אִישׁ: אֶת That every man H376	אֶת H853
שְׁפָחָת וְ his maidservant H8198	וְהֶעֱבְרִי הָ being an Hebrew H5680	וְהֶעֱבְרִי הָ being an Hebrew H5680	חֶפְזָם יִ free H2670	לְבִלְתָּ יִ H1115	
עֶבֶד that none should serve H5647	בְּ מ H0	בִּיהוּד יִ himself of them to wit of a Jew H3064	אָחֵי יֵהוּ his brother H251		
אִישׁ: That every man H376					