

SESSION #35 (9 November 2010); Deut 15:1-6; Israel’s Distinctive Theocentric Faith in God’s Economic Order—Part 2

I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

1:1-5	Introduction to God’s spokesman, the 1 st Prophet Moses
1:6 - 4:40	1 st Exposition of the Torah = <u>motivation</u> to obey from (1) <u>past gracious actions</u> of Yahweh and (2) <u>sovereign destiny</u> of the nation (<u>future gracious actions</u> of Yahweh)
4:41-49	Editorial comment on context of 2 nd Exposition of the Torah
5:1 - 26:19	2 nd Exposition of the Torah = proper response to Yahweh in heart and soul
5:1-11:32	Loving Yahweh with <u>all the heart</u>
12:1 - 26:19	Loving Yahweh with <u>all the soul</u> (<i>nephesh</i> =life)
12:1-31	Theological unity of Israel’s tribes (1 st , 2 nd , 10 th commandments)
12:32 - 13:18	Enforcement of Theological Orthodoxy (1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 9 th , 10 th commandments)
14:1-21	Enforcement of Distinct Cultural Sustenance from Life to Death (all 10 commandments)
14:22-29	A Distinct Culture of Financial Faith-Rest (all 10 commandments with emphasis upon the 4 th and 8 th commandments)
15:1-18 A Distinct Culture of Economic Liberation (esp. 4th and 8th commandments)	

People Group	Status
Israelite (family unit)	Fully responsible for obedience to Yahweh’s law out of gratitude for His deliverance from Egypt; full inheritance title to tribal land; receiver of “contract” graces
Widow, orphan	Lacked inheritance title because of isolation from a family unit, but received some “contract” graces
<i>Ger</i> (“resident alien”)	Gentile who voluntarily chose to join Israel and submit to Yahweh’s rule; lacked inheritance title because not a descendant of the sons of Jacob, but received some “contract” graces
<i>Nokree</i> (“foreigner”)	Gentile who lived temporarily in Israel—probably due to business—and did not receive “contract” blessings

Distinctions not [economic] but [legal] based upon relation to Yahweh’s Word. Historical revelation of distinction between the Kingdom of God and the unsaved world: comes via [relationship] to God.

Some commentators analyze this section of Deuteronomy by relating different sub-sections to specific commands of the Ten.

- 12:1-31** 1st commandment – no cultural pluralism (religious polytheism)
- 12:32-13:18** 2nd commandment – no graven images (false claims of revelation)
- 14:1-21** 3rd commandment – maintaining the integrity of God’s name
(distinctive views of death and daily diet—unique culture associated with Yahweh)

14:22-16:17 4th commandment – Sabbath-keeping (expressing confidence in Yahweh’s finished work)

14:22-29 Tithing

Enforced a creature-hood [dependency] upon God’s provisions for financial part of life

- #1 for Levites’ inheritance.
- #2 for rural Israelites’ prosperity test to use “holy wastefulness” to stimulate faith-rest drill about future production planning by recognizing God’s logistical grace.
- #3 for sharing production from inherited land with those Yahweh-worshippers without inheritance.

The objective was *to create a culture that willingly witnessed to Yahweh and His work*; not a socialist counterfeit scheme using government coercion (instead of individual choice) to level economic inequalities (instead of practicing real godly justice).

II. OVERVIEW OF THE SABBATH PRINCIPLE OF THE 4th COMMANDMENT

A. Based upon God’s Creation Week (Ex 20:8-11) as the archetype of all labor

1. Labor is required to have a rest — work: goal::effort: result

Aristotle: “No one who leads the life of a worker can practice virtue.”

Seneca: “The common arts. . . are those practiced by manual laborers, who spend all their time earning their living. There is no beauty in such occupations, which bear little resemblance to the Good.”

Cicero: “Wage labor is sordid and unworthy of a freeman. . .craft labor is sordid as is the business of retailing.”

2. But labor has an end goal (purpose).

God’s rest remains (**Heb. 3:6-4:10**) for His work is finished.

3:7 Sabbath is picture of faith in God’s finished work that it “wins out” in the end

3:8-11 Failure of the 1st generation

3:14 confidence (faith)

4:3 finished from the foundation of the world

4:10 ceased from his works

PRINCIPLE: God’s creation week sets up the structure for all other labor—that it is to have an end, a goal, a purpose.

B. Is a deliberate choice to observe (Deut 5:12-15)

5:15 slave. . .brought you out. . .

PRINCIPLE: The realm of labor and economics is a part of God’s *general revelation* that helps us understand the gospel and plan of salvation. We’ll observe this at several points in this study. For a preview, remember that “imputation” is an economic term that Paul brought over into theology.

- “Redeem” is an economic word to procure a desired object that historically came over into theology to refer to God’s saving work in procuring our salvation analogous to someone buying the freedom of a slave.
- Slavery is a picture of endless labor without a personal purpose (for the laboring slave never got to own and thus be responsible for personal property); living at a

level of responsibility far below that of a creature made in God's image; an abnormal, truncated existence that is not fitting for a believer.

- **1 Cor 7:21-23** *“Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it, for he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men.”*
- C. The Sabbath principle, therefore, whether the weekly or yearly Sabbath, expresses the ultimate purpose of and finished nature of God's work using the general revelation of economic relations. Nowhere present in history before the Exodus.

III. THE SABBATH YEAR'S ECONOMICS AND ITS SPIRITUAL REVELATION (15:1-6)

A. The Socialist Debate:

A central passage of Christian Socialists:

“It is crucial to note that the Scripture prescribes justice rather than mere charity. The sabbatical release of debts was an institutionalized mechanism for preventing an ever-growing gap between rich and poor.”

Ronald Sider, Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger

Socialists like Sider, Campolo, and Wallis argue that it is a matter of “justice” so that necessarily it becomes a civil government duty to enforce by coercion rather than an individual choice of love of neighbor.

1. Biblical definition of justice: impartial application of God's standards (rooted in His Holy essence) such that each person receives his due.

Lev 19:15 *“You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”*

Deut 24:17 *“You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge.”*

Lev 19:35-36 *“You shall do not injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah [dry measure], and an honest hin [liquid measure].”*

Rom 13:7 *“Render to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to who customs, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor.”*

NOTE: Justice requires a standard that applies to all.

2. The Sabbath Year regulations were not applied impartially: **Deut 15:3** discriminates against the “*nokree*” or foreigner. Thus the Scripture does not prescribe these regulations as “justice.” They were part of the unique wisdom that was intended to establish a distinctive culture as a witness to Yahweh.
3. The Sabbath Year regulations do not appear to be enforced by a central civil government. They spelled out the 4th commandment so that the issue with every Israelite was whether they would obey the Lord or not.

B. The Release of Debts (15:1-3)

1. The importance of the Sabbath Year.

- The Sabbatical Year was so important to the Lord that He added one year to the nation's exile for each Sabbatical Year they missed:

Lev 26:33-35: *“I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies land; the land shall rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest—for the time it did not rest on your Sabbaths when you dwelt in it.”*

- This determined the duration of the exile—70 years (**Jer 25:9-12**) from which Daniel learned when to confess the nation's sin (**Dan 9**).
- Post-exilic Judaism became so serious about keeping it that Julius Caesar remitted Jewish taxes in the 7th year (Josephus *Antiquities*, XIV, 10, 6).
- At end of 7th year, a national convocation (including the *ger*) was to have a “refresher” reading of the law, presumably to prepare for the next 7 years (**Deut 31:10-14**).
- The loyalty of Yahweh to support the Sabbath Year was shown by His control over the soil, insects, and climate in the 6th year (**Lev 25:20-22**).

2. Release of 100% of principle or release of 7th year repayments?

Point is: if the land rested, there could be no profits generated, so debtors would become further in debt and possibly default.

3. The battle for economic liberation from economic servitude

- These were charitable loans, not business loans. Jesus distinguished between the two kinds of loans (**Luke 6:34-35** addresses charitable loans to poor, but the parable of the talents addresses legitimate business loans—**Matt 25:27**).
- Charitable loans in Israel were 0% interest loans; elsewhere in ANE loans had 20-50% interest; business loans also were limited by the collateral available before the 50th Year of Jubilee.
- Immediately after the exile, Nehemiah had a problem with the post-exilic community (**Neh. 5:1-8**).

4. Who are the “poor”? [Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty*]

- Modern definitions use relative levels compared to total national wealth—i.e., a “poverty-level” statistic that is “blind” to the individuals so classified → enormous dimension → argument for civil government to step in
- Traditional definitions that are absolute: “an insufficiency of the material necessities of life; having little or no means to support oneself” → smaller more manageable dimension → voluntary charity

- NT Greek words for the poor:
plusios = one who has sufficient wealth to sustain himself, businessman
penes = someone who cannot sustain himself from his own property and so has to work with his hands, a laborer; has no superfluous (**2 Cor 9:6-11**)
ptochos = has nothing; relies on begging (**Rom 15:26**)
- Church protocol of helping the poor (utilized by rescue missions in the inner cities in the 19th century) **2 Thess 3:10-12**

C. Divine Economic Empowerment (15:4-6)

15:4 except when . . . no poor. . .

15:5 only if. . . [inf abs]

15:6 lend. . .reign. . .

International dominance potential for Kingdom of God in Israel (North’s commentary)

Net exporter of goods and services possible by

(1) saving profits to accumulate more capital

(2) higher efficiency in producing goods and services and in selling them than other nations involved in the trade

Equation: Goods + Services exported (\$) = Goods + Services imported (\$) + accumulated savings (\$)

Interest Rate Component	Domestic (Israel)	Foreign (pagan nations)
risk of default	lower due to personal integrity (Ps 37:21)	higher due to lack of integrity
forfeiture of present use of money	optimistic about the future (God’s linear progress)	pessimistic about the future (pagan cyclic view of history)
inflation premium	inflation forbidden by 8 th and 9 th commandments (Lev 19:35-36; Isa 1:22)	inflation ubiquitous in ancient pagan world (coin clipping, mixing base metals with silver and gold)

Israel (future-oriented)	Pagan nation (present-oriented)
Capital loaned at high interest rate	Borrowed to gain goods/services now
Sold goods & services at a profit	Bought goods & services with loan

Result fulfills Abrahamic Covenant “bless all nations” by

- (1) attracting international attention to their superior economic efficiency
- (2) exposure of their “secret” (relationship to the creator-redeemer who reveals Himself in their cultural design –**Deut 4:5-8**)
- (3) this is “cultural conquest”

IV. CONCLUSION

Prov 22:7 “The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.”

People Group	Status
Israelite (family unit)	Fully responsible for obedience to Yahweh's law out of gratitude for His deliverance from Egypt; full inheritance title to tribal land; receiver of "contract" graces
Widow, orphan	Lacked inheritance title because of isolation from a family unit, but received some "contract" graces
Ger ("resident alien")	Gentile who voluntarily chose to join Israel and submit to Yahweh's rule; lacked inheritance title because not a descendent of the sons of Jacob, but received some "contract" graces
Nokree ("foreigner")	Gentile who lived temporarily in Israel—probably due to business—and did not receive "contract" blessings

The 10 Commandments spreading throughout the culture

12:1-31 1st commandment – no cultural pluralism (religious polytheism)
 12:32-13:18 2nd commandment – no graven images (false claims of revelation)
 14:1-21 3rd commandment – maintaining the integrity of God's name (distinctive views of death and daily diet—unique culture associated with Yahweh)
 14:22-16:17 4th commandment – Sabbath-keeping (expressing confidence in Yahweh's finished work)

Balance of Trade Equation

Goods + Services exported (\$) =
 Goods + Services imported (\$) + accumulated savings (\$)

Interest Rate Component	Domestic (Israel)	Foreign (pagan nations)
risk of default	lower due to personal integrity	higher due to lack of integrity
forfeiture of present use of money	optimistic about the future (God's linear progress)	pessimistic about the future (pagan cyclic view of history)
Inflation premium	Inflation forbidden by 8 th and 9 th commandments (Lev 19:35-36; Isa 1:22)	Inflation ubiquitous in ancient pagan world (coin clipping, mixing base metals with silver and gold)

Israel (future oriented)	Pagan nation (present oriented)
Capital loaned at high interest rate	Borrowed to gain goods/services now
Sold goods & services at a profit	Bought goods & services with loan