



Deuteronomy & The Beauty of Obedience

## Free Indeed

Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you. That is why I give you this command today. (Deut. 15:15)

### Freedom and Bondage

The crucifixion of Jesus canceled the debt we owed to God for our sins, and the resurrection of Jesus set us free from the bondage of death. God has set us free indeed! But freedom is a difficult gift, because we often fail to manage it well. Many see freedom as a license to live by our feelings and desires—which is actually a form of bondage. God’s freedom releases us from our sinful ways so we can live Christlike lives. Central to Christlike living is showing others the same grace God has shown you. When you hold grudges, practice unforgiveness, remain angry, gossip, harbor resentment, and the like, \_\_\_\_\_?

### Debt-cancelation, Emancipation, and Firstborn (Deut. 15:1-23)

- **Deut. 15:1-6. Cancel debts:** Every seven years, Israelites were to cancel all debts of other Israelites. This guaranteed that everyone regularly got a fresh start. **Foreigner.** The statute did not apply to foreigners, because they had not sworn allegiance to God and the whole Torah and therefore could not be expected to manage such a system. **No poor among you.** A very important verse: God’s intent with Israel was to establish an ideal state where obedience to Him produced a \_\_\_\_\_ under His rule. Because of disobedience, this ideal was never reached. Jesus renews the call into such a kingdom—the Kingdom of God—which will achieve paradise at His return.
- **15:7-11. Openhanded:** When canceling debts or whenever dealing with the poor, God’s people are to be generous. Stinginess towards those in need is a sin against God.
- **15:12-15. Let them go free.** Anyone who had sold themselves in order to pay off debts must be set free in the seventh year. And they are to be supplied with ample provisions to start their

#### Understanding *Wardship* Cultures

*Wardship* is a social institution in which a person or group practices deference and support for another in exchange for care and protection. Americans enjoy an abundant world largely shaped by Christian values, so we can afford *soft* forms of wardship, with great amounts of individual autonomy. But OT cultures of scarcity and danger required more hierarchy—and were built on *strong* forms of wardship. Citizens were wards of the king; clans were the wards of chiefs; females were the wards of males; tenant farmers were the wards of land owners; families were wards of the father, etc. Though not ideal, this system offered everyone protection from constant danger. Most ancient peoples appreciated this system and the security it offered. It is a form of cultural arrogance to assert that strong wardship systems are inherently wrong.



An empty 1st century tomb in Jerusalem. The resurrection of God’s firstborn has set us free; now we can set others free, too (dmy)

lives over. **Remember.** We were all once in bondage; compassion compels us to be generous to others who are now in bondage. You receive \_\_\_\_\_ . (Matt. 6:14-15)

- **15:16-18. Earlobe.** In clan-based cultures, slaves commonly became family members, and many didn’t want to be set free. Piercing the ear was a tender sign of adoption for such people.
- **15:19-23. Every firstborn male.** God wants us to give Him our first and our best. Keeping God at the center of our lives will rightly order everything else. **You are to eat it.** We get to enjoy the bounties of our sacrifices to God. It is more blessed to give than to receive. (Acts 20:35)

## There Should be no Poor

If every Israelite had obeyed the Word of God, Israel would have enjoyed a sort of paradise where nobody lived in debt and nobody served as a slave. But Israel failed. Now it's our turn to set others free and to cancel their debts. God has redeemed you, will you set others free?

- Recognize the signs of bondage: anger, fear, unforgiveness, gossip, resentment, bitterness, discouragement, distrust, and the like.
- Choose the right emotion. A \_\_\_\_\_ is something that happens to you. An \_\_\_\_\_ is a strategy you choose in response to your feelings. You can't always choose your feelings, but you can choose your emotions. Choose grace-filled, healthy emotions.
- Realize that those who are indebted to you are themselves victims of life. This does not excuse them, but it helps you feel empathy for them. Everybody you meet is \_\_\_\_\_.
- Remember how much God has forgiven you. You may share no blame, but you also have many sins. Remember that we receive just as much grace as we give.
- Trust in the justice of God. Let God execute justice, while you choose mercy.
- Use your pain as an access to \_\_\_\_\_. The very ones who have hurt us may be the ones we save.
- Understand this truth: as long as you are holding someone else in bondage, you, too, are living in bondage. Choose freedom!

### Does the Bible Condone Slavery?

- NO! Not as Americans use the term. Trading in slaves was punishable by death in the Bible. (Exod. 21:16; 1 Tim. 1:10) The kind of slavery practiced by many peoples over the years, including European and American enslavement of blacks, is evil to the core.
- Yes, when the term is understood in its OT context. The kind of slavery permitted in the OT was very different from America's race-based experience. In the OT, slavery typically referred to one of three things:
  - (1) Contractual workers (bond servants)—people who signed themselves over to others to attain economic security or to pay off debts—similar to tenant farming in America.
  - (2) POWs—those captured in war, where having internment camps was simply too expensive.
  - (3) Convicted criminals—where maintaining prison systems was also too expensive.
- The OT regulates these forms of slavery in order to guarantee the rights of everyone. And the emancipation of slaves in America was done *because* people accepted what the Bible says about human dignity!

*"So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)*

*Answers: who is really in bondage, paradise, grace you give, feeling, emotion, engaged in a great battle, disciplinemaking*