

Deuteronomy 15:1-18 The Sabbath Year “The Year of Release”

Introduction: The word “sabbath” means “rest”. The sabbath day did not start with the Law of Moses. It started at the close of the six days of creative work recorded in Genesis chapter 1. God did His creative work in six days and “rested” on the seventh day. That is, He did no work on that day. Starting the next day, God set six days in which man was to work, but on the seventh he was to do no work. This pattern was to continue through the years. In the law God gives through Moses God has incorporated the Sabbath day into the Ten Commandments. Back in the Book of Leviticus God gave the law of the seventh year. In this year the children of Israel were not to plant or harvest crops. Debts were to be forgiven and slaves were to be set free. In our text Moses reviews the law of sabbath with the new generation which would enter Canaan’s land. In this text he says nothing about not planting or harvesting the fields, but he does review with them the law requiring the forgiving of debts and the release of slaves.

I. The release of debts V. 1-11

- A. Moses said that the seventh year was to be a year of release, but he does not at first say what kind of release, V. 1.
- B. In V. 2 he said that it was to be a release of debts. (That is, the debts of Israelite people were to be released – forgiven.)
- C. The Israelite people were not required to release the debts of foreigners, V. 3.
- D. One purpose of this law was to help the poor, V. 4.
 1. This statement was not intended to mean that there would be no poor in Israel. (See center references and also V. 11.)
 2. Yet it would give relief to the poor.
 3. The Lord would bless Israel and make them able to help the poor and would bless them for doing so.
- E. He warns the people of Israel not to neglect this command, V. 5.
- F. The Lord promised to enable Israel to lend to the Gentile nations and instructed them to do so, V.6.
- G. He warns the people who are able to lend to the poor not to neglect to do so, V. 7.
 1. One might be especially reluctant to lend to the poor even of Israel when the sabbath year was drawing near, because he would know that he may have to forgive a part of the debt, V. 8.
 2. But God warned against such selfishness, V. 9.
 3. He is to help the poor generously and not grudgingly, V. 10.
 4. There would always be poor people whom they could and should help, V. 11.

II. The release of slaves V. 12-18

- A. If a Hebrew man has sold himself or some member of his family into slavery to another Hebrew, the slave is to be released in the sabbath year, V. 12.
 1. A Hebrew could not capture another Hebrew and sell him into slavery.
 2. But a man was allowed to sell himself or a family member into slavery to pay off a debt.
 3. Since debts were to be forgiven in the seventh year, this would mean that the slave would be released.
- B. Yet he was not to be released without means of survival and so he was to be generously supplied when he was set free, V. 13-14.

- C. The Israelites were to remember that their forefathers had been held in bondage and that they had been released, V. 15.
 - 1. Their release had been a special act of redemption by the Lord.
 - 2. Likewise the release of their fellow Hebrew slaves was to be counted as their being redeemed or released by the Lord.
- D. A released slave could choose to remain in slavery to his master out of gratitude and love for his master, but if he chose to do so he must do so for life, V.16-18 (This is the kind of voluntary service that the Christian should render unto Christ, who has redeemed him from bondage to service.

III. Some of the symbolism involved in the sabbath year release

- A. First remember that the Sabbath day symbolized two things:
 - 1. It was a reminder that God is the Creator of all people and all things and that He has the right to rule over all.
 - 2. It was a picture of the “rest” that God would provide for redeemed man.
 - a. All mankind is sinful and does not deserve the peace and rest that God provides for mankind through Jesus.
 - b. But in His mercy God has provided a rest for those who trust His Son.
- B. The law of the sabbath day and also the law of the sabbath year pictures the rest that the redeemed of God will enjoy in the heaven ages to come.
- C. The law of the sabbath year pictures the guilty sinner being set free from his debt of sin.
- D. It also pictures the guilty being set free from his bondage to sin.
- E. It also pictures that even though he is set free from bondage, yet because of his gratitude and his love for the Lord he may voluntarily give his life in service to God.