

THE BELIEVER MUST NOT HOARD, BE HARD-HEARTED OR TIGHT-FISTED

DEUTERONOMY 15:01–06

Introduction

Poverty is a reality. Some people are poor, genuinely poor. As children, they never received the education or training that enabled them to earn a decent living. No one was around to encourage them to secure adequate education or job training skills. All kinds of things can cause poverty:

- lack of education
- health problems
- age
- accident
- loss of job
- some natural disaster
- economic recession or depression
- divorce or desertion

The causes of poverty are innumerable. As Scripture declares, “There will always be poor people” among you (Deut 15:11). What is to be our attitude toward the poor? Toward helping them? Toward meeting their needs: feeding, clothing, housing them? Are we going to be hard-hearted and tight-fisted? Or compassionate, generous, and giving? Poverty — the poor among us — was of great concern to God. For this reason, God led Moses to preach the message of this compassionate section of Scripture: *Laws that Demand Generosity and Giving: the Believer Must Not Hoard, Be Hard-hearted Or Tight-fisted*, Deuteronomy 15:1–23.

- I. The law of debt release: must not be hard-hearted nor tight-fisted against debtors (vv. 1-6).
- II. The law of generosity, of giving to the poor: must not be hard-hearted nor tight-fisted against the poor (vv. 7-11).
- III. The law of releasing slaves: must not be hard-hearted nor tight-fisted against workers (vv. 12-18).
- IV. The law of giving all first-born to the LORD: must not be hard-hearted nor tight-fisted against God (vv. 19-23).

Deuteronomy 15:01–06 The Law of Debt Release

There was the law of debt release. The believer must not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted against debtors. Remember, one of the very first institutions established by God was the Sabbath day, which stated that man was to rest and worship one day out of every seven. Sometime later, God established an additional Sabbath institution for His people, the Sabbath year or what is commonly known as the *Sabbatical year*. The law of debt release was to take place during the Sabbatical year. The purpose of the Sabbath year was fourfold:

- => to give the land a year of rest, one year out of every seven when the land was to lie fallow, untilled and undisturbed (see notes, Exo 23:10-19; Lev 25:2-7.)
 - => to show special compassion for the poor every seven years, special compassion by allowing them and the animals of the field to eat freely from whatever grew naturally
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=> to set aside one year out of every seven for special worship and study of God's Word (Deut 31:10-13)

=> to provide a year of debt release — one year out of every seven — one year of freedom from the pressure of all debt for all of God's people

This latter purpose, the release from all debt, is the concern of the present passage. Debt causes all kinds of pressure for people and can cause some of the most agonizing tension known to man. If a person does not have the money to pay his debts, he is often left destitute, unable to provide food and housing for himself and his family. The pressure of debt can cause all kinds of health problems such as ulcers, high blood pressure and strokes. Moreover, the pressure of debt and financial difficulties gnaw away at human relationships, consuming them. It can rip families and friendships apart. For this reason, release from the pressure of debt is a vital concern to God. Through His servant Moses, God attacks the problem head-on in this passage. Moses preaches to God's people: there is to be a law governing debt release during the Sabbatical year. You must not be hard-hearted nor tight-fisted against debtors.

1. The law was simply stated: all loans made to fellow Israelites or brothers were cancelled every seven years, that is, during the observance of the Sabbatical year. However, the Israelites could require payment of a foreigner. He only had to cancel any debt owed by an Israelite brother (v. 3). Now, does this mean that the debts were permanently, forever terminated? Or, does it mean that the debts were just suspended during the course of the seventh year and were to be repaid after that, during the following six years? This issue is debated among commentators; however, the latter alternative seems to be the intent of the law because of the Year of Jubilee. All debts were released during the Year of Jubilee (every 50th year. See notes, Lev 25:1-55.)
2. There was strong motivation for keeping the law of debt release (vv. 4-6). Poverty would be eliminated. There would be no poor among them. Every person would have enough to eat, enough clothing, housing and whatever else he needed. The land, the nation, and its people would be greatly blessed. Pressure caused by debt and financial difficulties would be erased. The strain, the tension that causes so many health problems and broken relationships would be greatly eased. This is the purpose for this law, and it is the motivation, the very reason the Israelites were to keep this law.

But note, Moses declared that this blessing is conditional: the people must obey the LORD in order to receive the blessing. They must obey all the commandments of God. If they will obey the law of debt release and all the other commandments of God, poverty will be eliminated from their land. There will be no poor among them.

Note also the promise of financial prosperity and freedom, both individually and nationally. If the Israelites obey, the LORD God will bless them just as He has promised. In fact, they will find themselves lending to many nations but having to borrow from none. And even more significant, they will rule many nations and be

ruled by none. They will be a great people and a great nation, all because they obey God. Imagine! A nation with no poverty, a people with no poor among them.

Thought 1. The law of debt release had one specific purpose: to eliminate poverty among the Israelites. There should be no poor among God's people. Every person must have at least the necessities of life, that is, food to eat, clothes to wear, and a roof over his head. God's Holy Word is clear: we are to take care of the poor, not take advantage of them. We are not to deliberately set low wages for the poor nor steal their wages. Neither are we to allow the execution of injustice against them just because they do not have the authority or money to defend themselves. The needs of the poor are to be met.

Mat 19:21 *Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."*

Gal 2:10 *All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.*

James 1:27 *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

Exo 23:11 *But during the seventh year let the land lie unploughed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what is left. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.*

Deut 15:7 *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother.*

Deut 24:17 *"Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge."*

Psa 82:3 *Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.*

Psa 41:1 *Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble.*

Prov 19:17 *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.*

Prov 21:13 *If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered.*

Prov 29:14 *If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will be established forever. ■*