

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 15

### *The Sabbatical Year*

**“At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. 2 And this is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release what he has lent to his neighbor. He shall not exact it of his neighbor, his brother, because the LORD’s release has been proclaimed. 3 Of a foreigner you may exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother your hand shall release. 4 But there will be no poor among you; for the LORD will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess— 5 if only you will strictly obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all this commandment that I command you today. 6 For the LORD your God will bless you, as he promised you, and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow, and you shall rule over many nations, but they shall not rule over you. 7 “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, 8 but you shall open your hand to him and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. 9 Take care lest there be an unworthy thought in your heart and you say, ‘The seventh year, the year of release is near,’ and your eye look grudgingly on your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the LORD against you, and you be guilty of sin. 10 You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him, because for this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’ 12 “If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. 13 And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. 14 You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. 16 But if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off with you, 17 then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever. And to your female slave[d] you shall do the same. 18 It shall not seem hard to you when you let him go free from you, for at half the cost of a hired worker he has served you six years. So the LORD your God will bless you in all that you do. 19 “All the firstborn males that are born of your herd and flock you shall dedicate to the LORD your God. You shall do no work with the firstborn of your herd, nor shear the firstborn of your flock. 20 You shall eat it, you and your household, before the LORD your God year by year at the place that the LORD will choose. 21 But if it has any blemish, if it is lame or blind or has any serious blemish whatever, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God. 22 You shall eat it within your towns. The unclean and the clean alike may eat it, as though it were a gazelle or a deer. 23 Only you shall not eat its blood; you shall pour it out on the ground like water.**

**15:1–2** Luther comments that such a charitable model of business would limit the amount of litigation and disputes in a nation, and that it would make creditors rightly more cautious in lending (AE 9:144). See note, v 6. This model does not likely apply to today’s economy since the law applied only to the “brothers” of Israel, who were connected by tribal kinship. Foreigners were not protected by this rule (v 3). (TLSB)

**15:1** *grant a release.* Not insist on repayment. (TLSB)

**15:3** *of a foreigner you may exact.* Since he was not subject to the command to allow his fields to lie fallow during the seventh year, a foreigner would probably be financially able to pay his debts if asked to do so. (CSB)

**15:4** *there will be no poor among you.* Because of the Lord's blessings (vv. 4–6), and because of the sabbath-year arrangement (vv. 7–11). This "year for canceling debts" (v. 9) gave Israelites who had experienced economic reverses a way to gain release from indebtedness and so, in a measure, a way to equalize wealth. Cf. the provisions of the Year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–38). (CSB)

In the land the Lord was giving His people, there would always be plenty for everyone—old and young, sick and healthy. It was God's will that His people would harvest and use the produce of the land in a charitable manner, and that the people's strict obedience to God's commands would alleviate poverty. (TLSB)

**15:6** *you shall lend.* If Israel failed to follow the Lord's commands, the reverse would be true (see 28:43–44). (CSB)

God was not absolutely opposed to credit-based business. (TLSB)

*you shall not borrow.* Such a rule would protect the Israelites from being dominated financially, which could open the way to cultural and religious domination by the idol-worshipping nations. (TLSB)

**15:7–11** It was sinful to ignore a brother in need. This teaching is taken up in the NT. (TLSB)

**15:7** *not harden your heart.* People were forbidden from willfully refusing to help the poor. (TLSB)

**15:10** God's people should not hoard wealth as a source of security. Instead, God called the wealthy to trust that He would always provide bountifully for them through their work and their business dealings; He called them to live out this trust in freely sharing with those in need. (TLSB)

**15:11** *There will always be poor people.* See also Jesus' statement in Mt 26:11. Even in the best of societies under the most enlightened laws, the uncertainties of life and the variations among citizens result in some people becoming poor. In such cases the Lord commands that generosity and kindness be extended to them. (CSB)

People, through no fault of their own, would be vulnerable to falling into poverty (e.g., the elderly, the sick, widows and orphans, and refugees). (TLSB)

**15:19** *firstborn males ...you shall dedicate.* Because the Lord saved his people from the plague of death on the firstborn in Egypt. (CSB)

The Israelites consecrated the firstborn male to God as a reminder that He provided all their livestock (12:6; Nu 18:17–19). (TLSB)

**15:21** *If it has any blemish ... you shall not sacrifice it.* Only the best was fit for sacrificing to God and for sharing in religious celebration. The people's sacrifices were not intended to be offerings made in order to placate God's wrath. Rather, God provided them with the best animals, which were used for making them clean from guilt and for feasts. (TLSB)

**Ch 15** Since the Lord would generously provide for His people, He commands them to be generous with one another. Today, the existence of poverty in the Christian community is a scandal, and the cry of those in need in any community goes up before the Lord. In the Church, you have brothers and sisters given to you by God. This means that you can always be confident God will provide for you when you are in need, and that you can help others knowing that God will give you more than enough to live life to the full. • Gracious Father, grant me wisdom in caring for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Since You have adopted me in Holy Baptism, help me give and receive in ways that honor You. Amen. (TLSB)