

Judgment—Not Oppression

Key Verse: “*Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.*”
—Deuteronomy
24:18

Selected Scripture:
Deuteronomy
24:10-22

IN OUR PREVIOUS LESSON

we considered the judicial system to be established for Israel when they would enter the land of promise. We noted that while there were no specific qualifications for those selected as judges, they were to follow righteous principles given by Jehovah, which were made known and agreed to by the people. Today’s Selected Scripture passage gives a few examples of cases in which these principles were to be applied.

The first example relates to taking collateral for a loan. The people of Israel had little in the way of individual property. Therefore, if a person could only pledge a cloak for a loan the creditor was to return it before nightfall. “Return the cloak to its owner by sunset so he can stay warm through the night and bless you, and the Lord your God will count you as righteous.” (Deut. 24:10-13, *New Living Translation*) Another part of this requirement stated that, when making the loan, the creditor was to remain outside while the borrower retrieved his pledge. This was beneficial to both parties as it prevented the borrower’s reproach and the creditor’s potential greediness if he were to see something better

than what had been agreed to as the pledge.

Another law mentioned in our lesson commanded that hired laborers should be paid their wages at the end of day, as was customary at that time. (Deut. 24:14,15) Leviticus 19:13 indicates that withholding pay, even if only overnight, was the equivalent of robbery. The Apostle James says of those who oppress the poor through this practice: “The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.”—James 5:4, *New International Version*

Deuteronomy 24:16 says, “Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.” (NIV) This law was to be enforced among all Israelites, establishing the equitable principle that none should be responsible for the crimes of others. The Prophet Ezekiel adds that every parent and every child belongs to Jehovah, and “the one who sins is the one who will die.”—Ezek. 18:4, *NIV*

Another law set forth in our lesson is with respect to landowners showing generosity to the poor and landless. Once a harvest had been completed the landowner was to leave any overlooked sheaves of grain where they lie. Likewise, once olives and grapes were harvested the owner should not go back and gather any missed fruit. Anything remaining was to be left for the “foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.” These requirements were to remind the people that Jehovah gave to them liberally when they were in need. “Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.”—Deut. 24:19-22, *NIV*

Similarly, we are also reminded of our bondage in sin. “The proof of God’s amazing love is this: that it was while we were sinners that Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8, *J. B. Phillips New Testament*) Therefore, let us heed the counsel of Paul: “Be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:2 ■