

**Text:** Dt 15.1-23

**THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY<sup>1</sup>**

1. **Consider:** a review of God’s faithfulness (1.6–4.40)
2. **Covenant:** an exposition of the law (5–26)

5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
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3. **Commence:** preparations for renewing the covenant (27.1–28.68)
4. **Commit:** an exhortation to obedience (29.2–30.20)

As you can see, I’ve dispensed with the Parallels to the 10 Commandments chart – it was a nice idea, but it doesn’t seem to really reflect what is going on in the second message of Deuteronomy.

Let’s identify our paragraphs and their themes:

1. (1-6) The law of remission of debt
2. (7-11) The law of generosity to the poor
3. (12-17) The law of release from bondage
4. (18) Addendum to the law of release from bondage
5. (19-23) The law of the firstborn from the flock

Could you sum up the general theme of this chapter in one or two words?

**Social Justice**

On the law of remission of debt, some conservative commentators suggest that it was more a “suspension of debt” so that one would not be obliged to service his debt during the sabbatical year. Traditionally, commentators have taken it as the cancellation of debt, and that debts would be calculated to run their course by the sabbatical year (more or less). Constable favours the total cancellation view, as I do.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an outline in Lawrence O Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 117.

Moses gave the law of the sabbatical year in Ex 23.10-11 and in Lev 25.1-7, but only here did he mention the remission of debts.

“The law of cancellation is stated in Deuteronomy 15:1 and explained in verses 2–11.”<sup>2</sup> (Thus the law concerning generosity to the poor are connected to the law of remission of debt with verse 1 as a header.)

**What** was the purpose of the law of remission of debt? (4) **To eliminate poverty in Israel**

**What** would be the cause of general prosperity among the Israelites? (5-6) **Obedience to God’s laws**

**Why** did God demand generosity to poorer Israelites, especially as the year of remission of debts neared? (7-10) **Because God’s law should encourage generosity and open-heartedness**

**What** should we make, then, of the apparent contradiction between v. 4 and v. 11? **One verse expresses the objective of Israel’s economy, the other expresses the reality of the human condition.**

If Israel followed God’s system, they would prosper (5-6). **What** is one reason that there always would be poor among Israel? **Disobedience**

**What** other reasons could account for the presence of poor among them? **The failure of crops, the laziness of people (sin nature), the attacks of enemies, failure of health [or death] of a head of household with young children, etc.**

**What** might cause an Israelite to be sold into bondage? (12) **Poverty**

The “Year of Release” is also discussed in Ex 21.2.

Ex 21.2 “If you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment.”

Look again at vv. 12-14: **What** additional requirement was placed on Israel in these verses? **They were required to stake the man to a new start.**

<sup>2</sup> Jack S. Deere, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 290.

The principle would be something like “profit-sharing.” The value of the bonded Israelite could exceed the amount of indebtedness, and some of the profit should accrue to the credit of the one heading back out on his own.

**What** was one purpose of this law of generosity to those in bondage? (15) **To remind Israel of their bondage in Egypt**

**What** other option was available to the bonded Israelite? (16-17) **To become a permanent member of the household to which he was bonded, thinking it better for him to remain where he was**

Finally, **what** additional motivation did Moses give to the wealthy Israelite who was setting his brother free from his bondage? (18) **A reminder that a man serving for debt was much less expensive than employing a “hired man” — the bonded man served for subsistence, not for wages**

The next section seems an abrupt change of focus. However, “The law regarding firstborn animals may have occurred here in Moses’ sermon because, like the laws of canceling debts and releasing servants, it involved giving up one’s possessions.”<sup>3</sup>

A summary of the law of the firstborn:

- Ex 13.11-15: first mention, to teach succeeding generations about redemption (from Egypt)
- Ex 22.29-30: firstborn animals were to be given to the Lord on the eighth day
- Num 18.15-18: firstborn animals were part of the means by which Israel supported the priests

**What** details do we find added here? (19) **You are not to work the animal or profit from it**

**What** was to be done with the firstborn animals? (20) **They were to be part of a fellowship offering before the Lord “in the place which the Lord chooses” as a fellowship offering (presumably including priests and Levites in the celebrations)**

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<sup>3</sup> Deere, 291.

**What** about firstborn animals with a defect? (21-23) **They could be eaten at home, not as a sacrifice, but as a normal source of meat, being careful to not “eat the blood.”** These animals would also presumably be redeemed with another animal “without defect” to be part of the regular worship

“As Christians, we too should acknowledge God’s goodness if He increases our possessions. Our sacrifices need not be literal firstborn animals of our herds or flocks, but they might be: verbal thanksgiving (Heb. 13:15), and our labor, our money, indeed our very lives (Rom. 12:1–2). We too should give Him our best!”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 15.19.