

Deuteronomy 15:7-11

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Moses urged the Israelite creditors not to be reluctant to lend money to their needy brothers when the year of remission is near, because the Suzerain (Ruler) God will greatly bless those who give freely and generously.

Having stated the law concerning the remission of debts in vv. 1 – 6, Moses then appealed to the hearts of his fellow Israelites in vv. 7 – 11. Here, he dealt with the everyday reality regarding *if there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the LORD your God is giving you*. The scenario involved an Israelite who was poor and was a resident in the Promised Land. This implies that non-Israelites were not in view here.

The acknowledgement of the poor in this verse and in v. 11 dealt with reality. There were poor, but there was not to be a class of people who remained poor. There was to be a path out of poverty. The sabbath year where debts were extinguished was to be one element to that path. But Moses recognizes that this provides an incentive to not lend to those in need when the sabbath year is near.

In light of this, Moses exhorts the people to *not harden your heart nor close your hand from your poor brother*, even if the year of remission is near. To *harden* one's *heart* means to show no pity or compassion for a needy brother. To *close* the *hand* from someone is to be unwilling to share or give to him. Creditors were commanded not to act that way with a poor fellow Israelite. The demand the Suzerain (Ruler) has of His vassals (subjects) is for them to treat one another as they want to be treated. Creditors were not to be reluctant to lend money to their needy brothers when the year of remission was near.

Moses made it clear to the Israelites that they were *brothers*, all having the same Father, the *LORD* their *God* (Deuteronomy 14:1). Because of such an attachment, Moses warned the creditors against hardening their hearts against Israelites who lived *in any of their towns in the land of Canaan which the LORD their God was giving them*. The LORD had given them a great gift—the Promised Land. The people were supposed to reflect the LORD's gracious act to their covenant brethren by lending (giving) in order to help lift the poor out of poverty. Lending near the year of remission would be

tantamount to giving. But God desired that, for them to give without any expectation of being paid back.

It is worth noting that there was to be no permanent poor class in Israel. These provisions are intended to allow a path out of poverty. The goal of any good system aimed at the needy is to provide them a path out.

Lenders were commanded to *freely open your hand* to an Israelite in need of a loan, *and generously lend him sufficient for his need in whatever he lacks*, even if the year of remission is near. The phrase *freely open* is emphatic in the Hebrew text. Literally, it can be translated “You shall certainly open your hand.” Likewise, the phrase *generously lend* has the same construct and can be translated “You shall certainly lend him.” All Israelites were to be gracious to their neighbors by being generous in their lending so as to meet the needs of their poor brethren.

The command to generously lend to the poor would remain unchanged even if the poor asked for help at the last hour. Moses told the people to *beware that there is no base thought in your heart* as the year of remission drew near. The word *base* (Heb. “beliya’al”) can mean “wicked” or “worthless.” The term has appeared in [Deuteronomy 13](#), where it is used for men with no reputation who may have gone out from among the Israelite community to seduce the inhabitants of their city, saying, “Let us go and serve other gods” ([Deuteronomy 13:13](#)). Here, it is used for a creditor who may have worthless or wicked thoughts in his heart, saying *the seventh year, the year of remission, is near*. The idea here was that if the seventh year was near, there would be little or no time for the borrower to pay back the loan and the lender would in effect lose the money he was owed. Thus, the lender might be tempted to refrain from lending, because it would turn into a gift. So be it. Then give, Moses commands.

The goal here is not to create a class of parasites. The goal is to help people in need find a path out of poverty.

The closer the year for the cancellation of all debts was, the less the debtor would have to pay back the amount he owed. The fact of the matter is that a loan given at the last minute (when the *year of remission is near*) is basically a gift. For this reason, a creditor might think he would not be able to get his money back. Thinking “I will wait and loan later” is a wicked thought that Moses describes as being *hostile toward his poor brother*. To *give him nothing* is an act of hostility. Moses told the Israelite creditors that such an attitude toward the needy is ungodly. Again, this emphasizes God’s design for

Israel to be self-governing, and loving and caring for their neighbors. God desired Israel to show the surrounding nations that this was a better way to live than the pagan ways of exploitation.

The Israelite who was denied help had the right to *cry to the LORD against the creditor, and it would be a sin in him*. This selfishness would be treated as a sin by the Suzerain LORD and would condemn the lender for such a wicked act.

Moses emphasized this principle once again by telling them that they were to *generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him* (v. 10). Creditors were urged to give generously and unselfishly to the needy man because he was part of the covenant community. The creditors were not to be *grieved* whether the *year of remission* was near or not. Moses is acknowledging here that a loan given shortly prior to the year of remission would turn into a gift. But if there is genuine need, people should be generous.

Two verses in Proverbs seem to be related to this principle of giving. First, [Proverbs 19:17](#) states that “one who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.” This implies that the LORD will reward and pay back the one who lends (“is gracious to”) a poor person. Second, [Proverbs 11:24](#) says “there is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want.” This proverb contrasts the one who “scatters” (meaning one who gives generously) with a person who “withholds what is justly due” (based on [Deuteronomy 15:10](#)). The generous man prospers all the more while the one who *withholds* suffers want (i.e., poverty). This could be partly because the one with a generous spirit will cultivate goodwill and likely have more opportunities to trade and prosper.

This concept of giving generously is also found in the New Testament. Verse 10 could be the basis of what Paul told the Corinthian believers that “God loves a cheerful giver” ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#)).

There is a reward for giving generously. Moses stated that *because for this thing* (that is, being generous in giving/lending to the poor) *the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings*. The phrase *in all your undertakings* here is literally translated as “in every outstretching of one’s hand.” It refers to the fruits of man’s labor ([Deuteronomy 12:7](#); [26:11](#)). This statement is emphatic because the phrase *in all your work* is synonymous with the phrase *in all your undertakings*. This emphatic statement served to teach the Israelite creditors about the necessity of giving

freely to their poor countrymen, because they would certainly receive blessings from their Suzerain LORD.

Moses ended this discussion about giving by emphasizing the fact that *the poor will never cease to be in the land* (v. 11). The reality is that there would always be some Israelites in need, but there was to be a pathway out of poverty. This debt redemption statute, together with other statutes, prevented the creation of a class of enslaved or impoverished Israelites.

Moses commanded the creditors that they should *freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land*. There was to be no limit to giving or lending graciously among the Israelites because their LORD gave them so much—freedom from slavery in Egypt, provision and protection during their journey to the Promised Land, and finally the gift of the Land itself and the promise of victory over their enemies. The people were freed from slavery in Egypt by the hand of God. Now they were to avoid becoming economic slaves through this Sabbath year of redemption and generosity toward the poor.

It is unfortunate that for many years Israel ignored the Sabbath year. When God exiled Judah to Babylon, He set the time of the exile at 70 years, in order to take back the Sabbath years the land did not enjoy, which meant the Sabbath law was not honored for 490 years ([2 Chron 36:20-21](#)).

Biblical Text:

⁷ If there is a poor man with you, one of your brothers, in any of your towns in your land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart, nor close your hand from your poor brother; ⁸ but you shall freely open your hand to him, and shall generously lend him sufficient for his need *in whatever he lacks*. ⁹ Beware that there is no base thought in your heart, saying, ‘The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,’ and your eye is hostile toward your poor brother, and you give him nothing; then he may cry to the Lord against you, and it will be a sin in you. ¹⁰ You shall generously give to him, and your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all your undertakings. ¹¹ For the poor will never cease *to be in the land*; therefore I command you, saying, ‘You shall freely open your hand to your brother, to your needy and poor in your land.