

## TOWARD THE END OF SLAVERY: THE VISION OF LEVITICUS 25

Excerpts from Leviticus, volume III by Prof. Jacob Milgrom

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### INTRODUCTION

In his magnum opus, Leviticus, volumes I-III, Professor Milgrom shows how the material on slavery in chapter 25 of the book of Leviticus is distinctly different than laws about slavery in the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy. Specifically, Professor Milgrom shows how the priestly author(s) saw the enslavement of Israelites as a denial of the ideal of their being servants to God. The laws in Leviticus 25, basically make the enslavement of Israelites difficult if not impossible. Israelites who became slaves because of indebtedness became hired hands to their creditors not their slaves. The book of Leviticus draws a sharp distinction between Israelites and resident aliens when they become enslaved.

Below you will find two sections. The first section is Prof. Milgrom's translation of Leviticus 25:23-35. Following the translation, you will find verbatim excerpts of Prof. Milgrom's commentary on selected verses from this chapter. The commentary includes selections from his introduction to 25:23-55 as well as selections from his commentary on different verses from this section of the chapter. At the end of section, you will find the page numbers from where the commentary was taken.

### PART I THE TEXT: LEVITICUS 25:23-55

#### Redemption of Property: The Basic Principle

<sup>23</sup>Furthermore, the land must not be sold beyond reclaim, for the land is mine; you are but resident aliens under my authority. <sup>24</sup>Therefore, throughout the land you hold, you must provide redemption for the land.

#### The Three Stages of Destitution

##### *Stage One: Sold Land and Houses and Their Redemption*

<sup>25</sup>When your brother (Israelite) becomes impoverished and has to sell part of his holding, his closest redeemer shall come and redeem the sold property of his brother. <sup>26</sup>If a man has no redeemer but prospers and acquires enough for his redemption, <sup>27</sup>he shall compute the years since its sale, refund the difference to the man to whom he sold it, and return to his holding. <sup>28</sup>If he does not acquire sufficient means to recover it, his sold property shall remain with its buyer until the jubilee year; it shall be released in the jubilee, and he shall return to his holding.

<sup>29</sup>If a man sells a dwelling house (in) a walled city, it may be redeemed until the end of a year of its sale; its redemption period shall be a year. <sup>30</sup>If it is not redeemed before the completion of one full year, the house in the walled city shall belong to its purchaser beyond reclaim throughout the ages; it shall not be released in the jubilee. <sup>31</sup>However, houses in hamlets that have no encircling walls shall be classed as open country; they may be redeemed, and in the jubilee they shall be released. <sup>32</sup>As for the Levitic cities – the houses in the cities they hold – the Levites shall forever have the right of redemption. <sup>33</sup>Whoever of the Levites redeems (should know that) the house sold (in) the city of his possession shall be released in the jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites are their holding among the Israelites. <sup>34</sup>But the field of the livestock enclosures (about) their cities may not be sold, for that is their holding forever.

### *Stage Two: Lost Land*

<sup>35</sup>If your brother, being (further) impoverished, falls under your authority, and you (would) hold him (as though he were) a resident alien, let him subsist under your authority. <sup>36</sup>Do not exact from him advance or accrued interest. Fear your God, and let your brother subsist under your authority. <sup>37</sup>Do not lend him money at advance interest, or lend him food at accrued interest. <sup>38</sup>I, YHWH, am your God, who freed you from the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

### *Stage Three: "Slavery"*

<sup>39</sup>If your brother, being (further) impoverished, falls under your authority, is sold to you, do not make him work as a slave. <sup>40</sup>He shall remain under you as a resident hireling; he shall work under you until the jubilee year. <sup>41</sup>Then he and his children with him shall be released from your authority; he shall return to his kin group and return to his ancestral holding. – <sup>42</sup>For they are my slaves, whom I freed from the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves are sold. – <sup>43</sup>You shall not rule over him with harshness; you shall fear your God.

<sup>44</sup>Male and female slaves as you may have – (it is) from the nations around about you, from them that you may buy male and female slaves. <sup>45</sup>Also from among the children of residents (aliens) who live under your sway, whom they begot in your land. These shall become your property; <sup>46</sup>you may keep them as a possession for your children after you, for them to inherit as property for all time. These you may treat as slaves, but as for your Israelite brothers, no one shall rule over the other with harshness.

<sup>47</sup>If a resident alien under you has prospered, and your brother, being (further) impoverished, comes under his authority and is sold to the resident alien under you, or to a branch of the alien's kin group, <sup>48</sup>after he is sold he shall have the right of redemption. One of his brothers shall redeem him, <sup>49</sup>or his uncle or his uncle's son shall redeem him, or anyone of his kin group who is of his own flesh shall redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself. <sup>50</sup>He shall compute with his buyer the total from the year he was sold to him until the jubilee year: the price of his sale shall be applied to the number of years, as the term of a hired laborer he shall be under the other's authority. <sup>51</sup>If many years remain, he shall pay back (for) his redemption in proportion to his purchase price; <sup>52</sup>And if few years remain until the jubilee year, he shall so compute; according to the years involved, he shall pay back (for) his redemption. <sup>53</sup>As a worker hired by the year shall be under his (the alien's) authority, who (however) shall not rule over him with harshness in your sight. <sup>54</sup>If he has not been redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children with him shall go free in the jubilee year. <sup>55</sup>For it is to me the Israelites are slaves. They are my slaves whom I freed from the land of Egypt. I am YHWH your God.). (*Leviticus, vol III, pp. 2147-2148*)

## **PART II: THE COMMENTARY**

### *v. 25-55 The Three Stages of Destitution*

A likely scenario can be reconstructed:

1. An Israelite farmer is forced to sell part of his land to cover his debt. If he cannot redeem the land, his redeemer does, and the latter retains it until the jubilee (vv. 25-28).
2. In the event of crop failure on his reduced land, the farmer takes out a loan to purchase seed for the next year's crop. It is estimated that the present-day peasant of Iraq breaks even if no more than every fourth harvest fails. If crop failures occur more frequently, the peasant has to make use of credit (Wirth 1962: 20-21). The probability is higher in areas such as Israel, which experiences lower rainfall and less irrigation. thus the farmer may default and lose his land (but not the title) to his creditor. If he still owes on his loan, he works his land as a tenant farmer. Although he has lost the land, its usufruct is still his. It amortizes the loan (on which he pays no interest), or the land reverts to him at the jubilee (vv. 35-38).
3. If the farmer still cannot pay off his loan, he forfeits not only his land but also its usufruct. He and his

family enter the household of the creditor (vv. 41a, 54b): "The rich rule the poor, and the borrower is a slave to the lender" (Prov 22:7). That indebtedness could end in enslavement, see 2 Kgs 4:1; Amos 2:6; Neh 5:5. However, in Lev 25, the debtor's status is that of a resident hireling, not a debt-slave. He receives wages that amortize his debt (vv. 39-43). In stages 2 and 3, the redeemer does not intervene (see Introduction to vv. 39-55). But if the farmer sells himself to a non-Israelite, he must be redeemed, and until the jubilee he works for his redeemer (vv. 47-55).

*(Leviticus, Volume III, p. 2191)*

The worsening stages of indebtedness may be compared with a similar account told in the Joseph story (Gen 47:13-26). The Egyptians sold all they owned to Pharaoh in order to buy food: first their mobile possessions, then their land, and finally their persons; and thus they were reduced to serfdom. Who was the author of this policy---Joseph. And who became its main victims---Joseph's descendants (a subtle critique of "Joseph the Wise; Joseph the Provider"). Our text's message is loud and clear: in Israel this must not happen!

The preventive force is the institution of redemption: "The centre of gravity passes from him (the original owner) to a relative; he loses in importance what the relative gains, but the family, as a family, loses nothing. The property is not left to chance, but remains in the kindred with which it is familiar" (Pedersen 1926: 1.84). This simultaneously answers the question: If, according to H, the property reverts to its owner only at the jubilee whether or not it is redeemed, what, indeed, is the purpose of redemption? The fundamental principle (with Pedersen 1926: 1.81-85) is that ancestral lands should never be alienated from the (kin) family. At the moment the land is sold, the obligation falls on the redeemer to reclaim it. Ostensibly, this is supported by the assumption throughout the hexateuchal sources that the kind group, not the individual, was the unit for land allotment (cf. Num 26:1-56; 33:54; Josh 13-17). But contrary to general practice, as attested by Jer 32 (see below, and contra Pedersen), H ordains that the property does not even belong to the redeemer. He retains it only so its usufruct will repay him his redemption costs---technically, until the jubilee---when it must revert to the owner (i.e. *bet 'ab* the father's house'). This, then is the innovation of Lev 25: the redeemer does not keep the property forever. He must return it to the original owner, at the latest, at the jubilee (Lowenstamm 1958a: 578-82; see below). Thus Lev 25 breaks the age-old, time-honored institution of clan ownership of property (contra Tigay 1966: 467). henceforth, the concern of the law is to preserve the property rights of the individual.

Wright (1992: 3.1027) has caught the precise significance of the jubilee:

The main aim of redemption was the preservation of the land and persons of the clan, whereas the main beneficiary of the jubilee was the extended family, or "father's house." The jubilee therefore functioned as a necessary override to the practice of redemption. The regular operation of redemption over a period could result in the whole territory of a clan coming into the hands of a few wealthier families, with the rest of the families in the clan in a kind of debt servitude, living as dependent tenants of the wealthy....The jubilee was thus a mechanism to prevent this. *(Leviticus, Volume III, p.2192-93)*.

### *Vv. 39-55. Stage Three: "Slavery"*

If, as a tenant (vv 35-38), the debtor still cannot repay his loan and otherwise cannot support himself and his family, they enter the household of the creditor (vv. 41a, 54b). He no longer enjoys the usufruct of his forfeited land. Nonetheless, his status is not that of a slave, but of a resident hireling; he receives wages, all of which pay off his debt. However, non-Israelites may become bona fide slaves.

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According to Chirichigno (1993:145-46)

*In the ancient Near East debt-slaves were not identified with chattel-slaves. For example, according to LH (=CH) §117 if a loan was foreclosed and dependents were sold or surrendered to a creditor---as debt-slaves, they were released after three years' service. These laws demonstrate that citizens who became debt-slaves were not to be regarded as the property of their creditors---viz., the creditor has only purchased the service or capacity for work (Arbeitskraft) of his debt-slaves. While certain rights pertaining to debt-slaves were also extended to chattel-slaves (e.g., LH [=CH] §1190, the latter were always the property of their owners. This attitude is also reflected in the mēšarum acts, which proclaimed the release of debt-slaves and their estranged property but not the release of chattel-slaves...it is likely that the compilers of LH (=CH) and MAL did not employ the term wardum "slave" of debt-slaves in order to make it clear that a debt-slave was not to be identified with or treated like a chattel-slave.*

The pentateuchal slave-laws, in contrast, do not distinguish between the debt-slave and the chattel-slave: both are called *ʿebed*. Chirichigno ((1993:182-185) presents a strong case for regarding the adjective *ibrî* in Exodus and Deuteronomy (e.g., Exod 21:2 [contrast vv. 20, 26, 27]; Deut 15:12 [contrast v.15] as designating a debt-slave (over against the foreign chattel-slave). It must be admitted, however, that in Lev 25 there is no such terminological distinction, though ostensibly both kinds of slavery are mentioned (contrast vv.39, 42b with vv. 42a, 44, 46, 55). The reason, as will be demonstrated, is of utmost significance. For Israelites, both kinds of slavery, chattel, and debt, are prohibited: chattel-slavery is abolished, and debt-slavery is transformed into work for hire. The two terms, therefore, coalesce...

In Israel, slaves were supplied by war captives (Num 31:7-12; Deut 21:10-14; 2 Chr 28:8) and by native population: by sale of minors (2 Kgs 4:1; Neh 5:5), by self-sale due to hunger or debt (Exod 21:5-6; Lev 25:39-43; Deut 15:16-17), or by enslavement of defaulting debtors, including the thief who could not pay his fines (Exod 21:37-22:3), the widow who could not pay her late husband's debts (2 Kgs 4:1), and, in general, impoverished Israelites who were unable to repay their loans (Neh 5:1-13; cf. 1 Sam 22:2; Isaiah 50:1; Amos 2:6; 8:6). That Israel knew from past (and exilic?) experience the meaning of slavery is attested by the terminology employed by Second Isaiah (Baltzer 1987). "A borrower is a slave of the man who lends" (Prov 22:7) was, most often the bitter reality (cf. Lang 1983: 114-27). However, if the historical references (or lack of them) are reliable, there seem to have been certain self-imposed limits on the extent of slave practice. No captive during Israel's internecine wars was ever forced into slavery; the one ostensible exception, North Israel's treatment of Judean prisoners, was terminated by the prophet Obed (2 Chr 28:7-15). And Jeremiah, who relies on the debt-slave law of Deut 15:2 nonetheless, adds that "no one should keep his fellow Judean enslaved" (Jer 34:9b), a clause probably based on Lev 25:40 (see its NOTE).

As demonstrated in NOTE on "tattoos," 19:28, indirect evidence that H abolishes the slavery of Israelites can be derived from the prohibition against tattooing. The other pentateuchal law codes, which accede to the institution of slavery, allow a permanent slave to be marked (i.e. tattooed; Exod 21:6 [JE]; Deut 15:17 [D]), a practice attested in Babylonia (CH §§ 226-27) and in Elephantine (Cowley 28). That is, if H had accepted the slavery of Israelites, it would have allowed the indentured servant to remain in servitude beyond the jubilee. Perhaps just as Mesopotamian land and slave contracts could stipulate that the king's *mīšarum* would have no effect in the sale, so Israelite contracts might have stipulated that the slave willingly waived his jubilee rights if his debt had not been repaid. In any event, rather than searching (in vain) for a funerary practice, as in the adjoining prohibition against laceration (19:28aß), tattooing may be a discrete prohibition aimed at preventing the enslavement of Israelites.

Prophetic remonstrances and Israelite law against the excesses of slavery and, especially, our pericope (vv. 39-43), which virtually abolishes the institution of slavery, may, however, never have been put into

practice. Exod 21, followed by Deut 15, demands the release of Israelite slaves after six years of service. However, Jer 34 testifies that his law was not observed. In Mesopotamia, CH § 117 by limiting release from debt-slavery to the first year of the king's reign and special occasions (Hallo 1995). The same, of course, holds true for Israel. The jubilee laws remain utopian; at least there is no hard evidence that they were every enacted (for a more sanguine view, see COMMENT F). In either case, the theoretical principles that undergird them are radically different. For example, as mentioned above, Israel alone does not distinguish between chattel-slaves and debt-slaves. Moreover, both kinds of slavery are abolished by H... (*Leviticus*, vol III, pp. 2212-2214)

Stage 3 is startlingly conspicuous by the absence of the provision for redemption, which the rabbis confirm when they declare that relatives are under no obligation to redeem their indentured kinsperson (*b. Qidd.* 15b). Yet redemption of debt-slaves was obtained in Mesopotamia. In Sippar, during the reign of Rim-Sin, a female slave regained her freedom by paying 10 shekels to her owner. As for redemption by a relative: "17 shekels of silver for the redemption of Hagaliaga, his father, Zagagan has received (as a loan). (But) he had no silver (so) he sold himself to the *enum* priest" (Khafajah 88, cited in Leggett 1974:63-83). Here the son borrows money to redeem his father, but being unable to repay the loan, he sells himself into bondage. In CH § 117, we find the clause "has sold his wife, his son or his daughter, or gives them into servitude." Its two verbs translate, respectively, *ana kaspim nadanu* and *ana kiššātim nadānu*, where the latter implies the power of redemption (Driver and Miles 1952: 212-14). The edict of Ammisaduqa confirms CH § 117 and adds the further option *ana manzazānim ezēbu* 'to leave as a pledge', by which the creditor has no power of alienation (cf. Yaron 1959:158-59). Thus redemption of debt-slaves prevails in Mesopotamia. Why, then, is it missing in Israel? Similarly, there is surprisingly no allowance for self-redemption (contrast vv. 26, 48-49).

The answer is that the Israelite slave is not a slave (pace Weinfeld 1990a); he is *šākîr*, a "hireling" (see NOTE on "as a resident hireling," v. 40), whose work amortizes the principal---a status to which redemption does not apply. The wages he earns may even provide him a surplus with which to free himself of his debt and status (see NOTE on "or if he prospers," v. 49). Thus it is preposterous to deduce categorically from the absence of a redemption provision that "the one who sold himself into debt bondage remains in service until the jubilee" (Fager 1993: 102, following Horst 1961: 219). To be sure, his family has no obligation to redeem him. Only if neither he nor his family can supply the means for his redemption, as we shall see, will the jubilee free him, cancel his debt, and give him back his land. Thus he (or his inheritor) will be able to start out afresh as a debt-free landowner who will be independent of his family.

The redemption and self-redemption clauses are also missing in the second stage (vv. 35-38), again for the same reason: the term "redemption" does not apply. Redemption is applicable to only sold land and sol Israelites (to a non-Israelite owner, vv. 47-52), but not to a loan. Perhaps because his loan is interest-free, his labor (as a tenant farmer) can repay the loan. Perhaps because his loan is interest-free, his labor (as a tenant farmer) can repay the loan. Also, the *gō'ēl* (or anyone else) may lend him money to pay off his debt. But that person does not as a consequence, come into possession of the land or the enslaved kinsperson; his act does not constitute redemption. Similarly, the term "self-redemption" also does not apply; the debtor's income as a tenant farmer may produce a surplus (in non-famine years) that can fully amortize the loan...

Japhet (1996:43) has noted that the slave law is the mirror image of the land law. As only the usufruct of the land, but not the land itself, may be sold, so only the labor of the Israelite, but the Israelite himself, may be sold. Although, technically, the creditor has bought the land of the person, he cannot own either of them. Hence, in effect, he leases the land or the person until the jubilee. The Israelite can, therefore, never become a slave; if he is reduced to indebtedness, his status is that of a *šākîr*, a wage earning day laborer. (*Leviticus*, vol III, pp. 2216-17)

39. *do not make him work as a slave. Lo-ta`abod bo `abodat `abed*, literally “do not enslave him with the enslavement of a slave.” The threefold use of the root `bd indicates the revulsion at the institution of slavery in the mind of the writer. The *Qal* of `bd, having the transitive meaning “make/put to work,” requires the *beth* of means (e.g., v. 46; Exod 1:14, Deut 15:19). If, however, the *Hip`il* is used (Exod 1:13), the *beth* is unnecessary (cf. McConville 1984:95). The rationale for this prohibition is given at the end of this periscope: the Israelite cannot be the slave of any person because he is God’s slave (v. 42; cf. v.55).

Philo (*Laws* 2.83) expounds: “Do not harness him like an unreasoning animal, nor oppress him with weights too heavy and too numerous for his capacity, nor heap insults upon him, nor drag him down by threats and nuances into cruel despondency.” The rabbis prefer to specify: “He should not have to carry his (the master’s) things before him when going to the bath house, nor support him by his hips when ascending steps, nor wash his feet, nor tie his shoes, nor carry him in a litter, chair or sedan chair as slaves do (*Mekh. Mishpatim, Nezikin 1; Sipra Behar 7:2*).

Nonetheless, this prohibition, as well as those prohibiting the creditor from confiscating the defaulting debtor’s clothing (Exod 22:25; Deut 24:12-13), taking his tools of food production (Deut 24:6), and even entering his house in order to seize his property (Deut 24:10-11), indicate, only too starkly, that this is precisely what was done: the indentured Israelite would end as a slave with his property lost. (*Leviticus, vol III, pp. 2220-2221*)

40. *He shall remain under you as a resident hireling; he shall work under you until the jubilee year.*

The major difference between the bonded laborer (i.e., the laborer who pays off his debts) in Mesopotamia and Israel is that the former (*d/tid/tennu*) works off only the interest of his loan (personal antichresis), whereas the latter, having no interest to pay (vv.36-37), works off the principal; that is, he can apply all his wages to amortize his debt: “The institution of personal *tidennutu* represents not only an antichretic security transaction but also a type of indentured servitude. As long as the debt remains unpaid, the *tidennu* loses his freedom of movement. He and his children are bound to the creditor by an obligation of service.” (Eichler 1973: 45). Considering the high rates of interest that prevailed in Mesopotamia, as noted above, it must be rare for a *tidennu* to redeem himself. The Israelite *`ebed-sakir*, on the contrary, unburdened by any interest whatsoever, frequently could meet this goal. If not, the safety net of the jubilee would rescue him.

In this respect, Lev 25 (H) provides a clear advance over the slave laws of Exod 21 (JE) and Deut 15 (D). Both JE and D stipulate six years of servitude, with no indication that this term can be reduced by early redemption, whereas H implies that the maximum period is the jubilee, which can be curtailed through redemption by self or others (Levi 1981: 180). If so, why then is the possibility of redemption omitted in the text both here, vv.39-43, and in vv. 35-38 (stages 2 and 3)? The answer is that redemption applies to only property (vv. 25-33) and true slavery (47-55). Land, house, and slaves are owned by the purchaser. The hireling, however, is a free person. He is a *sakir*, not an *`ebed*. Of course, he could be redeemed by a relative. The right of redemption existed in the ancient Near East (e.g., CH § 119; MAL A § 48), even for a female slave (Schorr 1913: 52-53, no. 28). It surely, then existed in Israel (Levi 1981: 190, n. 11). However, it is omitted from the slave law of Lev 25 because it is an option, not an obligation (see INTRODUCTION to vv. 39-55). Furthermore, it would not be true redemption. As noted above, the relative would only be lending the hireling the required money. The terms for repayment would be worked out by the two parties. Alternatively, the relative might give him a free loan, an act of charity. The relative could not hold him until the jubilee, which he could do were it a case of redemption.

The superior status of the hireling over the slave is manifest not only in his economic advantages, but also in his working conditions. This is implied by the repeated admonition *lo-tirdeh bo beparek`do not treat him harshly* (vv. 43, 46b) in contrast with the non-Israelite slave, concerning whom the text states *bahem tabodu`These you may treat as slaves* (v.46ay). After all, the terms of the hireling’s labor are stipulated

in advance; the slave, in contrast, is subject to the demands and whims of his master. This difference is subtly acknowledged by D in its admission that the slave works twice as hard as the hireling (Deut 15:18; for *mišneh* 'double', see no. 3 above). Considering that the hireling is a free person, it may very well be that if he finds the creditor's conditions too harsh or the wages too low, he can seek another employer. (*Leviticus*, vol III, p. 2223)

43. *whom I freed from the land of Egypt. `ašer-hōsētî `ōtām mē`eres misrayim.* The precise nuance of *hōsētî* is deferred to the NOTE on v. 55. Contrast this motive with that given in Deut 15:15. Both cite the exodus from Egypt, but each with a different emphasis. Deuteronomy sanctions the enslavement of Israelites; it only wishes to ameliorate their conditions on humanitarian grounds: all Israelites were slaves in Egypt. Leviticus, to the contrary unconditionally prohibits the enslavement of Israelites since all are the slaves of their God. The alien, however, was not redeemed by God; he is not God's slave, and thus he can be charged interest and enslaved by others.

*They shall not be sold as slaves are sold. Lō' yimmākērū mimkeret `abed;* "according to the laws of slaves" (TN). In this apodictic prohibition, the negative particle *lō'* implies permanence (Bright 1973). Slavery of Israelites is out! The rabbis interpret this prohibition in terms of the slave markets of their time: "They should not make them stand in the marketplace upon the slave block" (*Sipra Behar*, par. 6:1).

43. *You shall not rule over him with harshness. Lō'-tirdeh bō bēpārek.* According to this follow-up apodictic prohibition, not only may you not enslave an Israelite (but have to treat him as a resident hireling, v. 40), but you may not treat him harshly. "An Israelite could sell only his capacity for work, but not his body" (Noordzji 1982). Not by accident, as noted by Greenstein (1984a:97), this word is purposefully chosen because of its occurrence in Exod 1:13, 14. That is, you shall not follow the practice of the Egyptians, who imposed hard labor "with harshness" on the Israelites. The prohibition includes not only hard work, but exploitation (Kochman). The rabbis prefer specificity: "Do not tell him to heat your cup when you don't want it (or) hoe under grape vine until I arrive" (*Sipra Behar*, par. 6:2)—that is, just to keep him busy.

*rule over him. tirdeh bō.* Limiting ourselves to priestly texts, the verb *rādâ Qal* is found in the following passages: 25:43, 46, 53; 26:17; Gen 1:26, 28—al with an object governed by the preposition *be*, with the exception of 25:53, which takes an accusative. It uniformly denotes absolute control: over the animal kingdom (Gen 1:26, 28), a neutral meaning, but over persons, a pejorative connotation. In other biblical books, however, the connotation frequently becomes neutral (e.g., the rule of the Davidic dynasty, I Kgs 5:4, 30; Isa 14:2; Pss 72:8; 110:2). Concerning the complication of a purported second root *rdh* and confusion caused by the closely related *rd*, see Zobel (1990).

*With harshness bēpārek, bēqašyô,* "ruthlessly" (Tgs.). This verb has Semitic cognates that are closely related in meaning: Aramaic *pērak*, 'rub, pulverize'; Arabic: *paraka* 'rub, press, hate strongly'; Akkadian *parāku* 'block, hinder, oppress'. The Akkadian *ina parikti* 'with force' corresponds precisely with biblical *bēpārek* (cf. AHW 828-29). Ezek 34:4b both borrows and interprets v.43a: *ûbēhozqâ rēdîtem `ōtām ûbēpārek*; the text explains *bēpārek* but the adverb *bēhozqâ* 'with force.' Leviticus uses this phrase three times in this chapter (vv. 43, 46, 53), probably as a reminder of the Egyptian bondage, when the travail of the enslaved Israelites is described by the same phrase (Exod 1:13-14 [P]). The message is clear: do not treat your Israelite "slaves" as the Egyptians treated you. If behind the stages of destitution (vv. 25-28, 35-55) lies a condemnation of Joseph's manipulation of the years of famine to enslave the Egyptians (see INTRODUCTION to vv. 25-55), this text commands the opposite behavior: what Joseph did to the Egyptians do not do to your fellow Israelites.

