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Don't Muzzle the Ox

25: 4

Don't muzzle the ox DIG: What does "muzzle the ox" mean here? What is the rabbinic principle of "from lesser to greater," and how does it apply here? What does it mean for a rabbi of a Messianic congregation or the pastor of a church? But more importantly, what does it mean for you?

REFLECT: Giving to ADONAI's workers is giving to ADONAI. How are you doing in that regard? If you are doing great, praise God! If not so great, what needs to change so that you can honor those who feed you spiritually? Are you muzzling the Ox?

If men working for men should be paid for their labor, surely men working for God should be paid for theirs.

Deuteronomy 19:1 to 26:15 (to see link click [DI](#) - The Social and Family Mitzvot) deals with individual mitzvot, and to today's readers they might appear irrelevant at first, but the very principles behind these commandments were the ones that have brought dignity to mankind. We need to examine these mitzvot in depth to discover the spirit in which they were given, so that we can still live in obedience to **God's Word** today. For example, in **Numbers 18, the Israelites** were to bring **their tithes** to the Tabernacle because **the priests and Levites** had **no inheritance**. But today we have no Temple and no priesthood; however, we bring our tithes to our place of worship. That is the spirit of the mitzvah.

From **23:15 to 26:15, Moses** deals with **twenty** real life situations that the nation would need to function in a godly manner, and valuable lessons for us today as well: **number sixteen**.

In ancient times, after the grain was harvested from the field the workers would lay the grain stalks on a **threshing** floor of a rock or packed earth. Then they would have **oxen** walk over the grain stalks while pulling a wood sledge with sharp objects on its bottom. This action would chew up the grain stalks and release the grain from the stalk (thereby leaving

straw, chaff, and grain). The threshed material was then thrown up on broad flat forks into the air so that the wind would carry away the chaff and leave the grain. **Muzzling the ox** would prevent it from eating any of the grain. **Moshe** prohibited this practice. The wholeness of the covenant community extended even to its livestock.



The mitzvah **not to muzzle the ox while it is threshing (25:4)**, breaking up the grain stalks for winnowing, stressed kindness and fairness to the animals that helped a person obtain his daily bread. While the animal is working, do not deprive him of his food. Just as no man was permitted to deny the gleanings of his crop for the poor (see [Eq - Justice for the Poor](#)), no man was **to muzzle the ox while it was threshing**. Love and kindness were to be shown to all **God's** creatures (**Deuteronomy 22:6-7; Proverbs 12:10**).

Paul used this passage twice in the B'rit Chadashah to show that those who minister the Word of God to His people are also worthy of proper care. Paul does not allegorize or spiritualize this mitzvah. Just as **ADONAI** requires the fair treatment of a working animal, so do working human beings deserve fair consideration, including people who have given their lives to ministry. **Paul** uses a clear principle from this mitzvah in the time of **Moshe**. **In both cases below Paul used a well-known rabbinic interpretation. It was argued that if one agreed with a lesser mitzvah, then a principle of greater, more important issues would also be true. In other words, the greater could be deduced from the lesser.**

First: The principle of workers being paid for their work is merely according to **human judgment**. No, it is written in **the Torah of Moses**, **"You shall not muzzle an ox while it is threshing."** **Oxen** were allowed to eat as **they** worked. That was **their** payment. **Is it the oxen that concern God, or is He speaking entirely for our sake? Paul** was saying that **men** should earn **their** living from **their** labor. **Yes, it was written for our sake, because the one plowing ought to plow in hope and the one threshing in hope of a share in the crop. If men** working for **men** should be paid for **their** labor, surely **men** working for **God** should be paid for **theirs**. **This is the rabbinic principle from lesser to greater. Paul** had every right to apply the principle to **himself**. **If we sowed spiritual**

things into you, is it too much if we reap material things from you (First Corinthians 9:9-11)?

YHVH's servants deserve to be supported well. There should not be a double standard, applying to Messianic rabbis, pastors, and missionaries a wage that is considerably lower than that set for those laboring in the world. We should pay them as generously as possible and leave the stewardship of that money up to them, just as we expect the stewardship of our own money to be left up to us.⁵⁴⁷

Secondly: The elders who lead well are worthy of honor and honorarium - especially those who work hard in the Word and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing," and, "The worker is worthy of his wage" (First Timothy 5:17-18). The lesson is clear, Messianic rabbis and pastors of their flocks deserve to be paid generously. Our attitude toward animals will reflect our attitude toward mankind, and vice versa.⁵⁴⁸