

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam

DOCUMENT 266

YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX

A Covenant Deep Dive into Deuteronomy 25:4 — *lo tachsom shor be-disho* (you shall not muzzle an ox in its threshing), לֹא-תַחְסֹם שׁוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹ

What Does the Law of the Unmuzzled Ox Command, Why Does It Stand Among Laws of Justice for People, and How Does It Bind the Covenant Believer Today? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✝ ISLAM
The rabbinic tradition counts <i>lo tachsom</i> (you shall not muzzle) among the 613 commandments (Maimonides, Negative Commandment 219; Sefer HaChinuch 596) and still rules on it today: any animal, at any work with produce, may eat while it works (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 338). The Mishnah gives the human field worker a parallel right to eat (Bava Metzia 7:2). The Tanakh speaks first: what the verse says, and why it stands where it stands.	Paul cites the verse twice to defend support for those who teach (1 Corinthians 9:9–10; 1 Timothy 5:18), asking “ <i>Is it for oxen that God is concerned?</i> ” Many pulpits therefore read Deuteronomy 25:4 as a text about ministers’ pay. Catholic teaching calls a just wage “ <i>the legitimate fruit of work</i> ” (Catechism 2434). The Tanakh asks first whether Yahweh cares for the ox.	The Qur’an calls the creatures of the earth “ <i>communities like you</i> ” (Q. 6:38). Hadith condemns a woman who starved a cat (Sahih al-Bukhari 3318), records a camel’s complaint that its owner starved and overworked it (Sunan Abi Dawud 2549), and commands, “ <i>Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries</i> ” (Sunan Ibn Majah 2443). The law of the ox is close kin to all three.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh's** own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh's** covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to five questions about one verse: what **Deuteronomy 25:4** commands and of whom, why it stands between the law of the lash and the law of the brother's widow, whether it concerns oxen or people, whether it requires congregations to pay those who teach them, and how it binds the covenant believer today. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books and personal names are given in English. Hebrew transliterations and their English meanings appear together in ***bold italic*** at every occurrence; anything in quotation marks is set in bold italic. Scripture references are bold. Verse numbers follow the English version; where the Hebrew numbering differs, it is given in brackets. Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Each finding is graded under the two-or-three-witness standard as **Corroborated** (two or more independent Tanakh witnesses), **Single witness**, or **Not in the text**. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, New Testament texts, and the Qur'an and hadith appear only in the opening table, the Comparative Texts table, and the Three-Religion Audit, as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The statute itself; its setting in Deuteronomy 24–25; the Sabbath rest of the ox; the Sabbath-year food of the beast; the wage laws; Egypt as the muzzled nation
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Judges, 2 Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Micah, Malachi	The threshing floor and sledge; the second use of the verb <i>chasam (to block)</i> ; the trained heifer; woe to the one who takes service for nothing; Yahweh's pity on the cattle of Nineveh
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Nehemiah	The one approved muzzle; the righteous man who knows the soul of his beast; eating the labor of one's hands; the land that cries out; faithful treasurers

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
New Testament	Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7; 13:15; 14:5; 1 Corinthians 9:7–14; 1 Timothy 5:17–18; James 5:4	Every New Testament use of the verse, and the wage and animal sayings beside it
Qur'an and hadith	Q. 6:38; 11:6; Sahih al-Bukhari 2227, 2363, 3318; Sunan Abi Dawud 2549; Sunan Ibn Majah 2443	Animals as communities; the starved cat; the overworked camel; the unpaid worker
Rabbinic literature	Mishnah Bava Metzia 7:2–5; Talmud Bava Metzia 32b, 87b, 89a–91a; Yevamot 4a; Makkot 23a; Berakhot 40a; Maimonides, Hilchot Sechirut 13; Sefer HaChinuch 596; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 338; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 186	How the commandment is counted, extended, and kept today; the juxtaposition readings

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Church teaching	Catechism of the Catholic Church 2418, 2434; Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa contra Gentiles</i> III.112	Animals and the just wage in Christian teaching
Historical sources	Laws of Hammurabi §§245–249, 268–271	The hired threshing ox in the ancient Near East
Modern scholarship and data	Keil and Delitzsch, <i>Commentary on the Old Testament</i> ; J. L. Verbruggen, <i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i> 49:4 (2006); Economic Policy Institute (Cooper and Kroeger, May 2017); Brooke (working-animal charity)	Scholarly readings of the verse; wage theft and working animals today
Miqdash Bethel Library	Witnesses to the Wound, Report No. 19, <i>The Nameless Oxen</i> (March 2026); <i>The 613 Laws of the Tanakh</i> (Nos. 185–187, 202); Doc 230; Doc 250	Earlier library uses of the verse, tested in Section X

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — ONE VERSE, FOUR HEBREW WORDS

I-A. The Questions as They Are Usually Asked

Deuteronomy 25:4 is one of the shortest commands in the Torah. In Hebrew it is four words. It is also one of the most quoted verses in the Torah and one of the least read in its own setting. The questions put to this Institution are these:

First: what does the verse actually command, and whom does it bind?

Second: why does a law about an ox stand between a law on flogging and the law of a brother's widow?

Third: is the verse about oxen at all, or is the ox a picture of people?

Fourth: does the verse require congregations to pay those who teach them?

Fifth: how does the law bind the covenant believer today, when few believers thresh grain and fewer still own an ox?

This study builds on earlier work in the Library and does not repeat it. Witnesses to the Wound Report No. 19, *The Nameless Oxen* (March 2026), applied the verse to session musicians. *The 613 Laws of the*

Tanakh lists it among the duties owed to workers (No. 202). **Doc 250** (*Holy to Yahweh*) showed that the Levite's tithe was called his wages for real service. **Doc 230** (*Formed, Not Cloned*) described man's dominion over the creatures as a derived authority, not ownership without limit. The present document supplies the word study and the setting, sets the verse beside the Torah's other witnesses for the animal and the worker, marks what the verse does not say, and refines three points in the earlier material (Section X).

I-B. The Questions in the Tanakh's Own Terms

“You shall not muzzle an ox in its threshing.” (Deuteronomy 25:4)

The Hebrew is **לֹא־תַחֲסֹם שׁוֹר בְּדִישׁוֹ**, *lo tachsom shor be-disho* (*you shall not muzzle an ox in its threshing*): a negative, a verb, a noun, and a time.

The five questions therefore become:

1. What is a muzzle, and who puts it on?
2. Whose ox is meant?
3. When does the command apply?
4. What does the Torah say elsewhere about the one who works with food in front of him?
5. And what does the Torah say about people that it says here about an animal?

Every finding below is graded. A finding is **Corroborated** when two or more independent Tanakh witnesses carry it (**Deuteronomy 19:15**). It is **Single witness** when only one text carries it. It is **Not in the text** when it is taught but the Tanakh does not say it.

II. THE WORD STUDY — WHAT THE HEBREW SAYS

The vocabulary of the verse, and of the laws around it, is precise. The table sets out the terms this study relies on.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>chasam</i> (to muzzle / to block), חָסַם	H2629	To stop up a mouth or a way. Used only twice in the Tanakh	Deuteronomy 25:4; Ezekiel 39:11
<i>machsom</i> (muzzle), מַחְסוֹם	H4269	The muzzle itself. Used once — of a man guarding his own mouth	Psalms 39:1 [Hebrew 39:2]
<i>shor</i> (ox), שׁוֹר	H7794	A single head of cattle. In 25:4 it carries no possessive — not “ <i>your ox</i> ”	Deuteronomy 25:4; compare 5:14; 22:1

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>dush (to tread / to thresh),</i> דוּשׁ	H1758	To tread out grain; also used of crushing nations	Hosea 10:11; Isaiah 28:28; Amos 1:3; Micah 4:13
<i>dayish (threshing season),</i> דַּיִשׁ	H1786	The time of threshing. Used once	Leviticus 26:5
<i>goren (threshing floor),</i> גֶּרֶן	H1637	The hard open floor where grain was trodden and winnowed	Numbers 18:27; Deuteronomy 15:14; Ruth 3:2
<i>morag (threshing sledge),</i> מוֹרָג	H4173	A heavy board drawn over the grain by oxen	2 Samuel 24:22; Isaiah 41:15
<i>sakhir (hired worker),</i> שָׂכִיר	H7916	One who works for wages	Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14
<i>pe'ullah (wages / work done),</i> פְּעֻלָּה	H6468	The worker's earnings, named by the word for his work	Leviticus 19:13
<i>chinnam (for nothing / without pay),</i> חִנָּם	H2600	Without cost or reward; of labor taken without wages	Genesis 29:15; Jeremiah 22:13
<i>nefesh (soul / life / appetite),</i> נֶפֶשׁ	H5315	The living self, with its hunger. Used of the passer-by, the worker, and the beast	Deuteronomy 23:24; 24:15; Proverbs 12:10
<i>nikleh (be degraded / made light),</i> נִקְלָה	H7034	To be made contemptible; the limit on the lash	Deuteronomy 25:3
<i>befarekh (with rigor / harshly),</i> בִּפְרוֹךְ	H6531	Crushing, ruthless labor — the labor of Egypt	Exodus 1:13; Leviticus 25:43

Three lexical observations govern what follows.

First, the verb *chasam (to muzzle / to block)* appears only twice. In **Ezekiel 39:11** the valley of Gog's burial “*shall block those who pass through.*” The noun *machsom (muzzle)* appears once, and it is the one muzzle the Tanakh approves — the one a man puts on his own mouth: “*I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth while the wicked is before me*” (**Psalms 39:1** [Hebrew 39:2]). The covenant honors restraint a person chooses for himself. It forbids restraint laid on another's mouth while that other works the harvest.

Second, the ox in **Deuteronomy 25:4** has no owner named. Elsewhere the Torah writes *shorkha* (*your ox*), שׁוֹרְךָ (**Deuteronomy 5:14**), or *shor achikha* (*your brother's ox*), שׁוֹר אָחִיךָ (**Deuteronomy 22:1**). Here it writes only *shor* (*ox*). The command therefore binds whoever threshes with an ox — the owner, the man who hired the animal, and the man who borrowed it.

Third, *be-disho* (*in its threshing*) sets the time and names the worker. The command applies while the animal works, and the Hebrew makes the ox the one who threshes: it is its threshing. The Torah speaks of the animal as a laborer with a share in the work, not as a tool.

III. THE THRESHING FLOOR — WHAT THE VERSE PICTURES

III-A. The Floor and Its Work

After the harvest, the cut stalks were carried to the *goren* (*threshing floor*), a hard, open, often raised place where the wind could reach. Boaz winnowed barley there at night (**Ruth 3:2**). Gideon, afraid of Midian, beat out his wheat in a winepress instead, where no one would see the grain (**Judges 6:11**). Araunah offered David his floor, his oxen, and “*the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for wood*” (**2 Samuel 24:22**).

The prophet records that the methods varied with the crop, and that the farmer learned them from his **Elohim**: “*His Elohim instructs him rightly and teaches him*” (**Isaiah 28:26**). Small seeds were beaten with a stick; grain was trodden by animals or crushed by a sledge or cart wheel; and the work had a limit: “*Bread grain is crushed, but one does not go on threshing it forever*” (**Isaiah 28:28**).

III-B. The Animal at the Floor

The ox walked in circles over the spread stalks for hours, often in the heat of the dry season, with the grain at the level of its mouth. A muzzle lets the owner keep every kernel. The Torah forbids it. The prophet assumes the result: threshing was the work an animal liked.

“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; but I passed over upon her fair neck; I will make Ephraim to be driven; Judah shall plow” (**Hosea 10:11**).

The heifer that loved the floor is set against the heifer driven under the yoke to plow. That the pleasure of threshing was the freedom to eat is the reading of most commentators; the verse itself does not say why she loved it, so the point is offered as a strong inference, not a separate witness.

III-C. The World Around Israel

As historical background only: the Laws of Hammurabi (eighteenth century BCE) set the hire of a threshing ox at twenty measures of grain (§268), of a donkey at ten (§269), and fixed what a hirer owed the owner if he injured the animal (§§245–249). In that code the ox appears as property to be priced and compensated. The Torah, given to a nation that knew such contracts, turns instead to the animal's own mouth.

Finding — what the verse pictures: the command addresses a real and common practice — an animal working for hours over food it can reach — and forbids keeping that food from it while it works. **Corroborated (Deuteronomy 25:4; Isaiah 28:27–28; Hosea 10:11).**

IV. THE LAW IN ITS SETTING — WHY AN OX BETWEEN THE LASH AND THE WIDOW

IV-A. The Run of Laws Before the Ox

Deuteronomy 25:4 is often called out of place. It is not. It closes a run of laws, beginning in chapter 24, that set limits on what the strong may do to those who cannot defend themselves.

TEXT	LAW	WHO IS PROTECTED
Deuteronomy 24:6	The millstone may not be taken in pledge	The debtor's daily bread
24:7	Death for kidnapping and selling a brother	The free person
24:10–13	Do not enter his house for the pledge; return his cloak by sunset	The poor debtor
24:14–15	Pay the hired worker before the sun sets	The poor worker, brother or sojourner
24:16	Each dies for his own sin	The children of the guilty
24:17–18	Do not pervert justice; do not take a widow's garment	The sojourner, the fatherless, the widow
24:19–22	Leave the forgotten sheaf, the olives, the grapes	The sojourner, the fatherless, the widow
25:1–3	No more than forty lashes	The guilty man — <i>“your brother”</i>

TEXT	LAW	WHO IS PROTECTED
25:4	Do not muzzle the ox in its threshing	The working animal

Twice in this run the Torah gives its reason: *“You shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 24:18, 22). And the last three laws follow the harvest itself. The forgotten sheaf is left in the field (24:19); the olive branches are not beaten a second time (24:20); the vineyard is not gleaned (24:21); and at the threshing floor the ox eats (25:4). At every stage from field to floor, someone besides the owner eats.

IV-B. The Lash Before the Ox

“Forty lashes he may give him, not more; lest, if he should go on to strike him more than these with many stripes, your brother will be degraded in your eyes.” (Deuteronomy 25:3)

The word is *nikleh* (*be degraded / made light*), וְנִקְלָה אָחִיךָ לְעֵינֶיךָ. Even a man the court has found guilty keeps a dignity the court may not exceed. The verse that follows turns from the man lying under the rod (25:2) to the animal under the yoke. Both are bodies under another’s power, and both laws set a limit on that power.

IV-C. The Widow After the Ox

The next law, the levirate (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), concerns a brother who refuses *“to build up his brother’s house”* (25:9) — who will not let his labor bear fruit for the dead man’s name. Some readers see a link with the ox: in both, someone’s labor must not be cut off from its rightful fruit. Others see no link at all. Three readings of the verse have long stood side by side, and this study presents all three.

READING	WHAT IT HOLDS	TEXTUAL BASIS	GRADE
1. Literal and humane	The verse protects the animal itself	Five witnesses that Yahweh cares for the working animal (Section V)	Corroborated
2. Economic — the hired ox	The law concerns a man threshing with another man’s ox, who might muzzle it to save grain (Verbruggen, 2006)	The ox is unpossessive, so the hirer is bound. But the text names no owner, so it does not limit the law to the hirer	Corroborated that the hirer is bound; Not in the text that only he is
3. Proverbial — the ox as any worker	The ox stands for every laborer; Keil and Delitzsch	The Tanakh never re-applies 25:4 to people; the worker’s	Not in the text as the verse’s

READING	WHAT IT HOLDS	TEXTUAL BASIS	GRADE
	call the command <i>“proverbial in its nature”</i>	right stands on its own witnesses (Section VI)	meaning; Corroborated as a principle from other texts

Finding — the setting: the ox closes a run of laws that limit power over the poor, the guilty, and the defenseless, and that share the harvest with those who work or lack it, under the repeated memory of Egypt. **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 24:6–25:4; 24:18, 22). The verse is in its right place.

V. IS IT ABOUT OXEN? — FIVE WITNESSES THAT YAHWEH CARES FOR THE WORKING ANIMAL

The question has been asked since antiquity, and Section IX shows how each tradition has answered it. The Tanakh answers it first, and it answers yes.

Witness One — the Sabbath rest of the ox. *“Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your maidservant and the sojourner may be refreshed”* (Exodus 23:12).

The reason given is the animal's own rest: *lema'an yanuach (that it may rest)*. The Ten Words repeat it: *“nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your livestock”* (Deuteronomy 5:14).

Witness Two — the Sabbath year feeds the beast. *“And the sabbath of the land shall be food for you: for you, for your servant, for your maidservant, for your hired worker, and for your sojourner who dwells with you; and for your livestock and for the beast that is in your land shall all its increase be for food”* (Leviticus 25:6–7; compare Exodus 23:11).

In the seventh year the land's produce is shared by statute with the worker and the animal alike. Deuteronomy 25:4 does at the floor every year what Leviticus 25 does in the field every seventh year.

Witness Three — the righteous man knows the soul of his beast. *“A righteous man knows the soul of his beast, but the mercies of the wicked are cruel”* (Proverbs 12:10).

The Hebrew is יֹדֵעַ צַדִּיק נֶפֶשׁ בְּהֵמָתוֹ, *yodea tzaddik nefesh behemto (a righteous man knows the soul of his beast)*. The animal has a *nefesh (soul / life / appetite)* — a hunger the righteous man notices.

Witness Four — the messenger of Yahweh takes the donkey's side. When Balaam beat his donkey three times, the messenger of **Yahweh** rebuked him:

“Why have you struck your donkey these three times?” (Numbers 22:32).

The donkey had turned aside to save Balaam's life (22:33). Heaven defended the animal against the prophet.

Witness Five — Yahweh's own pity reaches the cattle. The book of Jonah ends with a question: *“And should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than one hundred twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?”* (Jonah 4:11).

The psalmist says the same: *“Man and beast You save, O Yahweh”* (Psalms 36:6 [Hebrew 36:7]); *“Yahweh is good to all, and His compassions are over all His works”* (Psalms 145:9).

Behind these five stand more.

1. The fallen ox or donkey must be lifted (**Deuteronomy 22:4**), even an enemy's (**Exodus 23:5**).
2. The mother bird is sent away (**Deuteronomy 22:6–7**).
3. An ox and a donkey may not be yoked together, unequal in strength (**22:10**).
4. **Yahweh's** covenant after the flood was made *“with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth”* (Genesis 9:9–10).
5. And when **Yahweh** promised rain, He named the cattle's food before the people's: *“And I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you shall eat and be satisfied”* (**Deuteronomy 11:15**).

Finding — is it about oxen? Yes. The literal ox is the first subject of the command, and **Yahweh's** care for the working animal for its own sake is **Corroborated** by five independent witnesses across the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. **Any reading that says Yahweh is not concerned for oxen contradicts the text.**

VI. IS IT ONLY ABOUT OXEN? — THE WORKER WHO EATS FROM HIS LABOR

The Torah never quotes **Deuteronomy 25:4** again, and it never applies the verse to people. It does not need to. It says the same thing about people in its own words, many times, and the reasoning from the lesser to the greater runs through the chapter itself: the verse before the ox protects *“your brother”*

from degradation (25:3). If the ox may not be cut off from the grain under its feet, how much more the man?

VI-A. The One Who Stands in the Field

“When you come into your neighbor’s vineyard, you may eat grapes as your soul desires, your fill; but you shall not put any in your vessel. When you come into your neighbor’s standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand; but you shall not wave a sickle over your neighbor’s standing grain.” (Deuteronomy 23:24–25 [Hebrew 23:25–26])

The phrase is *ke-nafshekha* (*as your soul desires*), כְּנַפְשְׁךָ. The law has the same shape as the law of the ox. The one standing in the harvest may eat there, to his fill. He may not carry it away in a vessel, and he may not take the harvest with a sickle. The text gives this right to anyone who “comes into” the neighbor’s field — it does not limit it to a hired hand.

VI-B. The Wages of the Hired Worker

“You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him; the wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until morning.” (Leviticus 19:13)

“You shall not oppress a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether of your brothers or of your sojourners who are in your land within your gates. In his day you shall give him his wages, and the sun shall not go down on it, for he is poor and sets his soul on it, lest he cry against you to Yahweh, and it be sin in you.” (Deuteronomy 24:14–15)

The Hebrew of Leviticus 19:13 is לֹא־תִלִּין פְּעֻלַּת שָׂכִיר, *lo talin pe'ullat sakhir* (*the wages of a hired worker shall not lodge overnight*). Deuteronomy 24:15 gives the reason: וְאֵלֹיו הוּא נָשָׂא אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ, *ve-elav hu nose et nafsho* (*and to it he lifts his soul*).

The same word runs through all three laws. The passer-by may eat *ke-nafshekha* (*as your soul desires*) (Deuteronomy 23:24); the worker lifts his *nefesh* (*soul / life / appetite*) to his wages (24:15); the righteous man knows the *nefesh* (*soul / life / appetite*) of his beast (Proverbs 12:10). The Torah sees the hunger of the one who works, man or animal, and will not let it be ignored.

VI-C. Serving for Nothing

The word *chinnam* (*for nothing / without pay*) opens and closes the Tanakh’s record of stolen labor.

Laban said to Jacob, *“Because you are my brother, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?”* (Genesis 29:15).

Then he *“changed my wages ten times”* (Genesis 31:7, 41), and Jacob's testimony was that Elohim saw it: *“Elohim has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands”* (Genesis 31:42).

“Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness and his upper rooms without justice, who makes his neighbor serve for nothing and does not give him his wages.” (Jeremiah 22:13)

The Hebrew is **בְּרֵעְהוּ יַעֲבֹד חִנָּם**, *be-re'ehu ya'avod chinnam* (he makes his neighbor serve for nothing). The prophet sets this king against his father Josiah, who *“judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this to know Me? says Yahweh”* (Jeremiah 22:16). To pay the worker is part of knowing Yahweh.

VI-D. The Land That Cries Out

Job, defending his life, lists the sins that would deserve a curse on his fields:

“If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together; if I have eaten its strength without silver, or caused its owners to breathe out their life; let thorns come up instead of wheat, and stinking weeds instead of barley” (Job 31:38–40).

And Malachi names Yahweh's witness *“against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless”* (Malachi 3:5).

VI-E. Egypt, the Muzzled Nation

Israel learned this law from the other side. In Egypt they were made to serve *befarekh* (with rigor / harshly), **בְּפָרָךְ** (Exodus 1:13). When Moses asked for their release, Pharaoh did not lower the work; he took away what the work required:

“You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the quota of bricks which they made before, you shall lay on them; you shall not reduce any of it.” (Exodus 5:7–8; compare 5:18)

That is the muzzle in its purest form: take the full labor, and cut off what the labor needs. The Torah forbids Israel to rule a brother the way Egypt ruled them:

“You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your Elohim” (Leviticus 25:43)

— the same word, *befarekh* (with rigor / harshly). This is why the laws before the ox close with *“remember that you were a slave in Egypt”* (Deuteronomy 24:18, 22).

VI-F. From Your Threshing Floor

“And when you send him away free from you, you shall not send him away empty. You shall surely furnish him from your flock, and from your threshing floor, and from your winepress; as Yahweh your Elohim has blessed you, you shall give to him.” (Deuteronomy 15:13–14)

The phrase is **וּמִגֶּרְנֶךָ**, *u-migornekha* (*and from your threshing floor*). The servant who worked the floor for six years leaves with a share of it. The ox eats from the floor while it works; the released servant carries from the floor when his work is done.

VI-G. The Promise and the Curse

The covenant's blessing is to eat what one has labored for:

“When you eat the labor of your hands, you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you” (Psalms 128:2);

“Whoever tends the fig tree shall eat its fruit” (Proverbs 27:18);

and in the age to come, *“They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat” (Isaiah 65:22).*

Its curse is the reverse — a muzzled people: *“The fruit of your ground and all your labor a nation which you have not known shall eat” (Deuteronomy 28:33).*

Finding — is it only about oxen? The principle that one who labors in the harvest must not be cut off from it, and that his wages are owed in full and on time, is **Corroborated** by more than ten witnesses across all three divisions of the Tanakh. That **Deuteronomy 25:4** itself was written about people is **Not in the text**: the ox is an ox, and the worker has laws of his own. Reasoning from the ox to the man is sound, because the chapter itself moves from “*your brother*” to the ox and back again.

VII. THE LIMITS OF THE LAW — WHAT DEUTERONOMY 25:4 DOES NOT SAY

A short verse attracts long claims. The table tests six of them.

CLAIM OFTEN MADE	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	GRADE
The ox, or the worker, is owed a share of the harvest's later sale or profit	The ox eats at the floor while it works. The passer-by eats in the field but may put nothing in	Not in the text

CLAIM OFTEN MADE	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	GRADE
	his vessel (Deuteronomy 23:24). Neither law speaks of proceeds	
The worker may take what he needs from the harvest	He may eat; he may not carry away, and he may not put a sickle to the grain (Deuteronomy 23:24–25)	Not in the text
The verse commands congregations to pay their ministers	The verse names an ox. Support for those who teach stands on other witnesses (Deuteronomy 12:19; 14:27; Numbers 18:31); the ministerial reading is a New Testament application (Section IX)	Not in the text as the verse's meaning
Working an animal is itself wrong	The Torah assumes plowing and threshing (Deuteronomy 22:10; 25:4); <i>“much increase comes by the strength of the ox”</i> (Proverbs 14:4)	Not in the text
The law covers only oxen and only grain	The statute names an ox at threshing. The care it expresses covers every working animal (Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 5:14; Proverbs 12:10)	Principle Corroborated ; the statute's extension to every animal and every food is later rabbinic law (Section IX)
The law lapsed with the Temple	The verse sets no condition of place, priesthood, or Land, unlike the tithe (Doc 250 , Section VIII-A)	Corroborated that it still stands (Deuteronomy 25:4; Exodus 23:12)

VII-A. Not a Share of the Proceeds

“Where there are no oxen the trough is clean, but much increase comes by the strength of the ox” (**Proverbs 14:4**). The ox earns the increase, and the law makes sure it eats while it does. It does not give the ox title to the harvest. **The same is true of the man in the neighbor's field: he eats there, and leaves with nothing in his vessel.**

Wages are another matter, governed by their own laws (**Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15**): they must be agreed, paid in full, and paid on time — and Laban shows what happens when the agreement is changed by the stronger party (**Genesis 31:7**).

VII-B. Not a Collection Plate

The Tanakh supports those who serve in teaching the covenant:

“Take heed that you do not forsake the Levite as long as you live on your land”
(Deuteronomy 12:19),

and the Levite's tithe was *“your wages in return for your service”* (Numbers 18:31).

Doc 250 showed that no teacher today stands in the Levite's place, and that support for teachers is right when it is freely given and faithfully accounted for. A teacher who uses the law of the ox to demand a salary turns a limit on the power of the strong into a lever of power over the people. The verse was written to protect the one under the yoke, not the one holding it.

VIII. HOW DOES THE LAW BIND TODAY?

VIII-A. A Law That Needs No Temple

Unlike the tithe, which assumed a sanctuary, a Levite, a storehouse, and the Land, the law of the ox assumes only an animal, a task, and food within reach. It can be kept as written by anyone who works an animal, anywhere, today. Its principle reaches everyone who employs another person's labor.

VIII-B. Five Standing Applications

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS NOW	WITNESSES
1. Feed the animal that feeds you	Working animals are fed, watered, and rested; they are not worked over food they may not touch	Deuteronomy 25:4; Exodus 23:12; Proverbs 12:10
2. Pay the worker fully and promptly	No unpaid hours, no withheld overtime, no wages held back as leverage	Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Jeremiah 22:13
3. Let the hand that holds the food eat	Those who grow, cook, pack, or sell food should not go hungry beside it	Deuteronomy 23:24–25; Psalms 128:2; Proverbs 27:18
4. Do not take the labor and cut off what it needs	The quota is not raised while the means are taken away	Exodus 5:7–18; Leviticus 25:43

PRINCIPLE	WHAT IT MEANS NOW	WITNESSES
5. Keep the dignity of the one under your power	Discipline has a limit; no one is to be degraded	Deuteronomy 25:3; 24:10–11

VIII-C. The Muzzle in the Modern World

The ox and the threshing floor have not disappeared. The working-animal charity Brooke estimates that more than 100 million working horses, donkeys, and mules support the livelihoods of about 600 million people, mostly in the poorest regions of the world, and that many of these animals suffer from exhaustion, lack of proper food, and disease. These are Brooke's own estimates, and they are reported here as such. For those households, **Deuteronomy 25:4** and **Exodus 23:12** are not metaphors.

The muzzle on the human worker has changed shape. In 2017 the Economic Policy Institute (Cooper and Kroeger) estimated from government survey data that 2.4 million workers in the ten most populous American states lost about \$8 billion a year to minimum-wage violations alone — an average of about \$3,300 a year for a year-round worker — and that the national figure likely exceeds \$15 billion. That is one study's estimate, extrapolated from ten states; it does not count unpaid overtime, off-the-clock work, or withheld final paychecks.

The Torah names all of these in one line: *“the wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until morning”* (Leviticus 19:13).

VIII-D. A Covenant Expression Today

SITUATION	A COVENANT EXPRESSION TODAY	TEXT
Owner of a working animal or livestock	Feed and water before the work ends and before your own meal; give the seventh day's rest	Deuteronomy 11:15; Exodus 23:12
Employer	Pay on the agreed day, in full; never change the terms by force or hold wages as leverage	Deuteronomy 24:15; Genesis 31:7
Household that hires help	Pay the babysitter, the yard worker, the day laborer the same day where possible	Leviticus 19:13
Business that handles food	Let workers eat; share what would otherwise be thrown away	Deuteronomy 23:24; 24:19

SITUATION	A COVENANT EXPRESSION TODAY	TEXT
Congregation	Support those who teach freely, and account for it openly; never by pressure	Deuteronomy 12:19; Nehemiah 13:13
The worker himself	Eat what is allowed; carry away nothing that is not yours; give honest work	Deuteronomy 23:24–25

VIII-E. A Warning That Still Stands

The threshing floor can be turned against people. **Yahweh** judged Damascus *“because they threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron”* (Amos 1:3). Micah condemned rulers *“who eat the flesh of my people”* (Micah 3:3). Threshing nations belong to **Yahweh** alone (Micah 4:13); no ruler, employer, or institution may tread men as grain.

Finding — how the law binds today: the statute can be kept as written by anyone who works an animal, and its principle — that the one who labors must eat and must be paid — binds every employer. **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 25:4; Exodus 23:12; Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15).

IX. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION READS THE UNMUZZLED OX

The table sets the three traditions against the Tanakh’s own findings. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	✠ JUDAISM	✝ CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Practice today	Counted as a commandment (Maimonides, Negative 219; Sefer HaChinuch 596). The Talmud extends it to every animal and every work with produce (Bava Metzia 89a–91a); the Shulchan Aruch codifies it (Choshen Mishpat 338), and later codes forbid even <i>“muzzling by voice”</i> — shouting an animal away from its food (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 186). Field workers may eat from what they harvest (Mishnah	Paul cites the verse for the support of those who teach: <i>“Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?”</i> (1 Corinthians 9:9–10), and pairs it with <i>“The laborer deserves his wages”</i> (1 Timothy 5:18; Luke 10:7). Most pulpits use it for pastoral salaries. Catholic teaching forbids causing animals to suffer needlessly (Catechism 2418) and calls a just wage <i>“the</i>	The Qur’an calls creatures <i>“communities like you”</i> (Q. 6:38) and says every creature’s provision is from Allah (Q. 11:6). Hadith: a woman punished for a cat she <i>“neither fed nor set free to eat”</i> (Bukhari 3318); a man forgiven for watering a thirsty dog (Bukhari 2363); a camel that complained its owner starved and wore it out (Abi Dawud 2549); Allah’s enmity toward one who takes a worker’s full

ELEMENT	✧ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
	Bava Metzia 7:2–5). The Talmud also teaches that one feeds his animal before he eats, from Deuteronomy 11:15 (Berakhot 40a).	<i>legitimate fruit of work</i> ” (2434).	labor and does not pay him (Bukhari 2227); <i>“Give the worker his wages before his sweat dries”</i> (Ibn Majah 2443).
Covenant strength	Keeps the literal ox first, as Section V requires. The codes permit muzzling only when the food would harm the animal, <i>“for the Torah is concerned with the benefit of the animal”</i> (Kitzur 186) — the reason of Exodus 23:12 . Concern for animal suffering (Bava Metzia 32b) and the worker’s right to eat are both upheld.	Paul’s argument runs from lesser to greater, which keeps the principle of the verse. James repeats Deuteronomy 24:15 and Malachi 3:5 almost word for word: <i>“the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out”</i> (James 5:4). Jesus appeals to the common practice of watering the ox and lifting it from a pit on the Sabbath (Luke 13:15; 14:5).	The camel hadith names exactly the two wrongs that Deuteronomy 25:4 and Exodus 23:12 forbid — hunger and overwork. Bukhari 2227 treats unpaid wages as an offense against Allah Himself, as Deuteronomy 24:15 does: <i>“lest he cry against you to Yahweh.”</i>
Covenant departure	The text of Deuteronomy 23:24–25 gives the right to eat to anyone who enters the neighbor’s field; rabbinic law narrows it to the hired worker at work (Bava Metzia 87b). The codes also exempt one who muzzles a human worker (Maimonides, Sechirut 13:2). The readings from adjacency — the lash strap cut from calf hide (Makkot 23a); a widow not compelled to marry a brother-in-law with boils (Yevamot 4a) — draw more from placement than the text states.	Read as <i>“God is not concerned for oxen,”</i> the saying contradicts Jonah 4:11 , Psalms 36:6 , and Proverbs 12:10 . Thomas Aquinas taught that the Torah’s kindness-to-animals laws were given chiefly to keep men from cruelty to men (Summa contra Gentiles III.112); the Torah itself gives the animal’s own rest as the reason (Exodus 23:12). Using the verse to require salaries or tithes adds to it (Deuteronomy 4:2 ; see Doc 250).	No departure from the Tanakh’s principle was found on this point. One evidentiary caution: the chain of Ibn Majah 2443 is weak in itself, and hadith critics (al-Albani) graded it authentic only through supporting routes. Leviticus 19:13 and Deuteronomy 24:15 carry the same command on the earlier and certain witness.
Covenant witness	Rabbinic practice has kept the oldest reading — the ox is an ox — for two thousand years, and has kept the worker’s right beside it.	Read from the Tanakh outward, 1 Corinthians 9 does not abolish the ox; it argues that if Yahweh cares for the ox, He cares more for the man.	The cat hadith describes a muzzle in all but name: an animal kept from the food within its reach until it died.

X. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

The Library's rule is that its own earlier work is tested by the same standard as everyone else's. Three points need refinement.

Correction 1 — the royalty claim in Report No. 19. Witnesses to the Wound Report No. 19, *The Nameless Oxen*, applied **Deuteronomy 25:4** to session musicians and wrote: *“Flat fees are not the grain. Session rates are not the grain. The grain is the royalty stream that flows from the music indefinitely.”* The verse secures the ox's right to eat while it works, from the grain at hand; it does not set a share in later proceeds, and the parallel law forbids carrying anything away in a vessel (**Deuteronomy 23:24**; Section VII-A). The claim that **Deuteronomy 25:4** requires royalties is **Not in the text**. The report's central concern still stands on other witnesses: wages that were agreed must be paid in full (**Leviticus 19:13**; **Deuteronomy 24:14–15**; **Jeremiah 22:13**); royalties owed under an agreement and withheld, as in the Liberty DeVitto case, are wages withheld (**Genesis 31:7**); and the report's charge of false weights in credit (**Leviticus 19:35–36**) is unaffected. Suggested wording: *“The ox that treads the grain must eat while it works; the musician whose agreed pay or royalties are withheld has been robbed of his wages.”*

Correction 2 — the Levitical model in Report No. 19. The same report made **Numbers 18:21** the Torah's standard for paying session musicians. The tithe was the Levites' wages for sanctuary service, given to a tribe that had no land (**Numbers 18:20–24, 31**; Doc 250, Section IV-B). Applying it to commercial recording work is an analogy, not a statute, and should be marked as such: **Not in the text** as a standard for wages outside the sanctuary.

Correction 3 — the 613 Laws listing, Nos. 185–187. *The 613 Laws of the Tanakh* cites “**Deut. 23:25–26**” for the hired laborer's right to eat. Those are the Hebrew verse numbers; in English Bibles the verses are **Deuteronomy 23:24–25**. The listing also limits the right to *“the hired laborer.”* The text gives it to anyone who comes into the neighbor's vineyard or grain; the limit to hired workers is the later rabbinic reading (Section IX). Suggested wording for No. 185: *“That one who comes into a neighbor's vineyard or standing grain may eat there, but take nothing away (Deut. 23:24–25 [Hebrew 23:25–26]).”*

XI. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE UNMUZZLED OX

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	The ox that treads the grain may not be muzzled, and the command binds whoever works the animal — owner, hirer, or borrower.	Deuteronomy 25:4; 5:14; 22:1
II	Yahweh cares for the working animal for its own sake: its rest, its food, and its life.	Exodus 23:12; Leviticus 25:7; Proverbs 12:10; Jonah 4:11
III	The law stands in a run of limits on power over those who cannot defend themselves, sealed by the memory of Egypt.	Deuteronomy 24:6–25:4; 24:18, 22; Exodus 5:7–8
IV	The one who labors in the harvest may eat from it while he labors, but may not carry it away or take it by force.	Deuteronomy 23:24–25; 25:4; Proverbs 27:18
V	The worker's wages are owed in full and on time; to take a neighbor's service for nothing is woe.	Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14–15; Genesis 29:15; Jeremiah 22:13; Malachi 3:5
VI	The verse does not command salaries, tithes, or royalties; support of those who teach stands on its own witnesses and is freely given.	Deuteronomy 12:19; 14:27; Numbers 18:31; Deuteronomy 4:2
VII	The law needs no Temple and no Land; every household that works an animal or employs a hand can keep it today.	Deuteronomy 25:4; Exodus 23:12; Deuteronomy 24:15

XII. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO THE ONE WHO ASKS

Behind the question about the ox there is usually a question about people: the worker who was not paid, the employer who wants to do right, the animal owner who never thought about it, the believer who has been told the verse is about the pastor's salary. Tanakh's answer is fivefold.

First: feed the ox. The verse means what it says. An animal working over food may eat it, and **Yahweh**, whose compassion is over all His works, wrote that law for the animal's sake (**Deuteronomy 25:4; Psalms 145:9**).

Second: pay the worker before the sun goes down. He has lifted his soul to that wage, and if he cries to **Yahweh**, it is sin in you (**Deuteronomy 24:15**).

Third: let the hand that holds the food eat. In the field, at the floor, in the kitchen, and at the counter, no one who works the harvest should go hungry beside it (**Deuteronomy 23:24–25**).

Fourth: do not turn the verse into a collection plate. Support those who teach freely and openly; the law of the ox protects the one under the yoke, not the one who holds it (**Deuteronomy 12:19; 4:2**).

Fifth: remember Egypt. Pharaoh took the full labor and withheld the straw. Every muzzle, on an animal or a man, is a small Egypt (**Exodus 5:7–8; Deuteronomy 24:18, 22**).

The ox knows its owner (**Isaiah 1:3**). The question this law asks is whether the owner knows the ox (**Proverbs 12:10**).

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“A righteous man knows the soul of his beast, but the mercies of the wicked are cruel.”

Proverbs 12:10 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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