

**THE LAW ON THE RELEASE OF DEBTS IN
DEUTERONOMY 15:1-11 POTENTIALY WIDENS THE
GAP BETWEEN THE RICH AND THE POOR**

A Samoan Ideological Reading

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by

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Abstract

Everyone has interests and ideas that shape and determine things we do. The ideas and interests of a certain society are reflected in their culture, values and traditions. Ideas and interests also embedded in their social, economic, religion and political settings. These interests and ideas motivate people to act, explain and define societies. The purpose of this paper is to determine and identify the interests that the law on Release of Debts in Deuteronomy 15:-11 served. This paper also investigates whether such law serves to relieve the economic hardships of the Debtors in the Ancient Israel society or represents specific interest of an elite group that caters for the interest of the wealthy and consequently widens the gap between the rich and the poor. I seek to analyse the text using interpretive analytic of ideological criticism by identifying the ideologies of the reader, ideologies in the context of the text and ideologies in the text. A Samoan ideological analysis is important to identify ideologies that preserve the interest of the elites in the expense of the powerless.

Declaration

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my parents Rev. Uele Lotu and Ane Uele

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

For his love endures forever” (Psalm 107:1)

May all glory and honour be unto you O God, for your love endures forever. Your grace, O God, was my source of strength, wisdom and patience, your guidance steered my path and your protection ensured my safety throughout this journey. AMEN

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis: “The remission of debts in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 widens the gap between the rich and the poor,” suggests my view of the sabbatical law. I see it as an ideology that preserves the privileges of the rich or the creditors rather than having the purpose of relieving the poor of their burdens. The instruction to cancel all the debts after seven years, and then immediately commence lending to the poor without reservation, reengages the poor for a loan, which naturally re-establishes the indebtedness of the poor in the next seven years. It is a cycle that continually benefits the money-lender, rather than easing the burdens of the poor.

My reading of the passage as an ideology stems from ideologies of the same nature I have witnessed and experienced in my Samoan context. There are many ideologies which aim at ensuring the privileged of their status and thus continually oppress the unfortunate in society. That is, they benefit the rich rather than the poor and thus result in widening the gap between these two groups. Such ideologies are apparent in the Samoan *matai* (chiefly) system. I view the *matai* system as a system that is preserved and maintained by numerous ideologies. The *matai* system has a comprehensive influence on the social, economic, political, cultural and daily lives of almost all Samoan villages and families. The *matai* govern the daily life of Samoa in every village and are the sole rulers of villages and families. They set policies, procedures, rules and regulations, as well as make decisions on the affairs of the whole village. In this case, they could be considered rich and privileged in Samoan society while those without *matai* titles are underprivileged and poor. This latter group are known as the *tautua* (server). Most of what the *matai* desire is simply a command for the *tautua* to carry out and fulfil to the best of their abilities. This response is

encouraged by a number of ideologies (laws, policies, protocols and propagandas), which in turn transposes burdens on the *tautua*,¹ thus increasing the economic gap between the two groups. Seeing the demise of the *tautua* from the ideologies of the *matai* leads me to perceive the sabbatical release of debts in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 as an ideology that could benefit the rich instead of the poor.

In contrast, the scholars who study Deuteronomy 15:1-11 see the cancelation of debts as a humanitarian measure to relieve the burden of the poor and eradicate poverty in society. Bradd A. Pruitt, who viewed the release of debts from a historical critic's perspective, saw the law, as a compassionate response to the dependent class of the community.² The change in the social economic conditions of Israel in this monarchical period increased financial trouble for the poor. It fostered the need to borrow money in order to cope with the economy. The law therefore aimed at relieving the poor of this burden. Gerhard Von Rad, another historical critic argued that the law regarding the release of debts came into current form when Israel's primitive society grew into a commercial economy, with demanding land developments and the burden of taxation under the monarchy. Thus, debt cancellation is an act of goodwill for rural peasantry who were unable to keep up with daily living.³ Also, from a historical critic's perspective Jeffrey H Tigay expanded on Pruitt and Von Rad's views, in saying that the sabbatical release of debts is not only a relief for a debtor, but also a mechanism that promotes a balance distribution of resources across the society.⁴

¹I will discuss this in Chapter 2 as part of the readers ideologies.

²Brad A. Pruitt, "The Sabbatical Year of Release: The Social Location and Practice of Shemittah in Deuteronomy 15:1-18," *Restoration Quarterly*: 83-84.

³Gerhard Von Rad, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 106. For a similar view see, Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary of the Old Testament (Michigan: William B. Erdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 236.

⁴Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna, The Jps Torah Commentary (Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 145. See also Eugene H. Merrill in *The New American*

According to these historical critics, the law on the release of debts balance rather than increased the gap between the rich and poor.

Another scholar Martin Oosthuizen, from a social-rhetorical perspective, pointed out that the rationale of the law is the eradication of poverty in the community. He argued that the blessing in Deuteronomy 15:4 suggests the self-interest of the people for an ideal society that lives free of poverty. They were also interested in creating a community with a self-sufficient economy where they could prosper as well as lend monies to foreign countries. The refutation in verse 7, that they should not be hard-hearted, refers to attitudes that must be prohibited in the community if poverty elimination is to succeed.⁵ Patrick D Miller on his literary studies of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 pointed out that the law recognises the reality in society. Miller analysed the use of body features in the passage such as hands, eyes, mind and heart as an indication that both attitude and action are important when dealing with the poor. Miller suggests that the law illustrates the reality of poverty and the ideal response of the creditor to the debtor in these particular times.⁶ Ryan P. O'Dowd from a structuralist's perspective, views the command as an ideal vision of social order (depicted in verse 4) and the portrayal of social reality (depicted in verse 11). The latter represents the social reality that there will always be poverty in a community. The former is motivation for Israel to give generously, so that God will bless them in the land in order to eliminate poverty.⁷

Commentary pg 242; Also A.D.H Mayes in New Century Bible commentary pg 247-248 which highlight the debtor as beneficiary of this law.

⁵Martin Oosthuizen, "Deuteronomy 15: 1-18 in Socio-Rhetorical Perspective," *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* 3(1997): 70-72.

⁶Miller Patrick D, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 136.

⁷Ryan P. O'Dowd, "The Work of Sabbath: Radicalization of Old Testament Law in Acts 1-4," *Southeastern Theological Review* STR 1/1, no. Winter 2010 (2010): 52.

Judging from the views of the scholars above, it is clear that there is a consensus that the law on the cancellation of debts in Deuteronomy 15:1-11, is for the sole purpose of relieving the poor of their burdens, thus balancing the gap between the rich and poor in Israelite society. Such views are contrary to my initial response to the chosen text, which I admit is influenced by my social location as a reader. This thesis therefore, intends to explain my path to such a response. This thesis is divided into five parts.

Chapter One, provides a discussion of Ideological Criticism. In the course of the chapter, I will provide a definition of the term ideology and then highlight how Ideological Criticism is being used in Biblical studies. Chapter Two discusses ideologies in my context as a Samoan reader. As indicated above, I will discuss the *matai* system and unravel its ideologies and impacts on the rich and poor in Samoan society. Chapter Three is an attempt to identify ideologies in the context from which the text was produced. The intention is to identify the producer of ideologies. This will be made possible by identifying the period in which the text was produced and exploring the social, economic and political practices of the Israelite society at the time. Chapter Four provides an analysis of the literary dimensions of the text. This literary analysis aims at revealing the ideologies embedded within the text. Finally, Chapter Five provide the conclusion to the study which is the comparison of the ideologies from the three previous analyses. If the ideologies from the three separate contexts align, then we can affirm that from a Samoan Ideological perspective, the law concerning the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11, preserves the status of the privileged, thus widening the gap between the rich and poor.

CHAPTER ONE

IDEOLOGICAL CRITICISM

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses Ideological Criticism and it is vital to understand the term “ideology” in order to gain insight of the components of Ideological Criticism. It is a pre-requisite to gain knowledge of Ideological Criticism since it dictates the path that this study will undertake. The intention here is to formulate and outline how I am going to apply Ideological Criticism to my interpretation of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 and prove my thesis statement that the release of debts only contribute to a widening of the gap between the rich and the poor, in Ancient Israel.

1.2 Definition of Ideology

The origin of the term “ideology” goes back to the time of the French Revolution in the 18th century. Its instigator was a French philosopher by the name of Antoine Destutt de Tracy. He proposed the term Ideology to signify the “science of ideas,” that studies the origin and birth of ideas. Here, de Tracy saw the importance of a scientific approach to the birth of ideas, in terms of everyday human needs and wants. Specifically new science would uncover and counter false ideas, which deceive people and hinder social and scientific progression.¹ In other words, the study of Ideology exposes abusive and exploitative ideas.

¹ Alan Geyer, *Ideology in America: Challenges to Faith* (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 12.

This idea was supported by Hans Barth, who saw the process warranted an ideal political and economic system. Ideologies in this sense are ideas that form the basis and a framework for the political, ethical, economic and educational sciences. In other words, knowledge of the birth and origin of ideas would wholly benefit societal developments especially when it raises the consciousness of the people on the ideas and interest imposed on their communities.²

However, this emerging science posed a threat to the political and economic establishments of the time. For example, in the beginning of the 19th century, Napoleon Bonaparte showed hostility to this new emerging science, for the objection countered his political endeavours. Thus, he opted for a religion based society and dispelled the Ideologues from France.³ His religiously based society was the opposite of that proposed by the Ideologues, who wanted a society based on the spirit of tolerance and thus viewed the church as an Ideology that threatens social stability and peace.⁴

This view on religion was also uncovered during the Marxian and the Engelian eras. Many saw the church as an ideology that manufactures “false consciousness.”⁵ Their perceptions redefined the term. It no longer represented the “science of ideas” but now represented anything that makes someone unconscious of reality. This distorting process is clearer in Gale Yee’s interpretation of the Marxist theory. She saw Marx as claiming ideology functioned as an explanation on “any unequal distribution of wealth, prestige and control over the means of production; land, natural resources, factories and

²Hans Barth, *Truth and Ideology*, trans. Frederic Lilge (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 3.

³Ideologue designates those engaged in the study of Ideology, active in public speaking.

⁴Barth, *Truth and Ideology*, 10.

⁵ R. J. Hinnells, ed. “Ideology,” *The Penguin Dictionary of Religions*, 2nd Edition (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 230-231.

so forth.”⁶ It is apparent in this case, that the Marxist theory highlighted the pejorative function of Ideology in society. It sees Ideology as a manipulative tool employed by the upper class to justify their status in society as normal, and therefore imposing a false realization upon the peasant population. This process silenced and suppressed the peasants from challenging their position. This was the way in which the privileged of society affirmed their interests.

Following the Marxian connotation of Ideology was Vladimir Lenin, except he acknowledges both the pejorative and the non-pejorative usage of ideologies. This was evident in his classification of ideologies into Bourgeois and Socialist ideologies.⁷ This classification added a new dimension to the understanding of ideology. In the sense that a Socialist Ideology will function against the Bourgeois or the upper class by breaking down and revealing what the upper class citizens were trying to impose on civilization.

This observation hinted at the existence of conflicting ideologies within a society. That is, between the ideology of the upper class and that of the peasantry. This observation also highlighted the dual nature of ideology. It can be both a positive and negative concept depending on its employers and their intentions. Kevin Vanhoozer supported this claim by suggesting that “[I]deology may therefore be used for good purposes as well as evil.”⁸ This examination also highlights the fact that ideology can be anything that produces “false consciousness”⁹ or distort the image of reality.

Yee saw ideology as, “...a complex system of values, ideas, pictures, images and perceptions, ideology motivates men and women to ‘see’ their place in the social order

⁶Gale A. Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," in *Judges and Methods: New Approaches in Biblical Studies*, ed. Gale A. Yee (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 148.

⁷Geyer, *Ideology in America: Challenges to Faith*, 13.

⁸Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 1998), 175.

as natural, inevitable and necessary.”¹⁰ Alan Geyer agreed with Yee’s definition suggesting Ideology to be “a set of beliefs and symbols that serve to interpret social reality and motivate political actions ... it is both inevitable and necessary in any society.”¹¹ Geyer’s definition attached the term to the political realm and saw the importance of Ideology in the operation of every society. Likewise, David Clines sees the location of ideologies in society to be in the cream of the crop, used by the elite to influence every faction of society.¹²

From these views, it is obvious that Ideology can either be physical (e.g., pictures, symbols, images, etc.) or metaphysical (e.g., beliefs, ideas, values, assumptions, etc). Physical Ideology can include statues, flags and salutes to name but a few while, Metaphysical Ideology includes beliefs in the supernatural, language and statements, ideas and so forth.

These examples are suggestive of the fact that ideologies therefore can be anything. Thus, echoing the words of Paul Ricoeur that “anything can become Ideology.”¹³

1.3 Ideological Criticism

The above analysis of the term ideology reveals how an interpreter employing Ideological Criticism should approach Biblical texts. Firstly, the text can be looked at as an ideology. This view extends from the supposition that anything can be an ideology. Secondly, the text is a production of an ideological context. This reflects the fact that

⁹David J.A Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 13.

¹⁰Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 148.

¹¹Geyer, *Ideology in America: Challenges to Faith*, 9.

¹²Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, 50.

¹³Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: University Press, 1981), 226.

there is always ideology anywhere anytime.¹⁴ This also means that behind every text there is a world full of ideologies.¹⁵ And thirdly, that Biblical criticism can be an ideological activity. This is understood if we see the Biblical interpreter living in an ideological world with ideologies of his or her own.

With these suppositions in hand the interpreter using Ideological Criticism to read texts therefore investigates three features of a text,

- Ideology(s) in the Reader Context
- Ideology(s) in the context of the text; and
- Ideology(s) within the text.¹⁶

The three tier investigation aims at unravelling the ideologies of a text. This aim is reflected in Richard N. Soulen and Soulen's definition of Ideological Criticism as an "approach to biblical interpretation that is centrally concerned with laying bare the ideological dimensions of a text and its history of interpretation."¹⁷ Clearly, it means that the purpose of Ideological Criticism was to uncover and unmask ideas and interests of various groups that relate to the biblical text.

Yee expanded this definition by stressing the point that the purpose of Ideological Criticism is to "enable the exegete to become conscious of blind spots and constraints and to produce a more ethically responsible reading."¹⁸ We can draw from the above that there are gaps in ideological texts, which could be hidden ideology. Thus, we need

¹⁴Arthur John Wulf, "Come Let Us Go Down and Disband the Solomonic Monarchy: The Function of the Tower of Babel Narrative from an Ideological Critic's Perspective" (Thesis on Master of Theology, Pacific Theological College, 2004), 43.

¹⁵Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 141.

¹⁶Richard N.Soulen and R.Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 84-85. Here the authors explored in details the three layers of Ideological Criticism.

¹⁷Ibid., 84.

¹⁸Ibid.

to reconstruct the text and identify issues in the period of production, to allow us to see all sides of the story and further emphasises the importance of an ethical reading.

Clines also emphasised a threefold task of Ideological Criticism stating that ideological criticism is inclusive.¹⁹ By looking and assessing the interest of all parties, not just the Ideology of the text or the writers, but the Ideology of a reader as well.²⁰ Meaningful critique of the text is only possible, when the reader understands the ideologies of his or her context, and assesses the text according to his own practical standards. It means that we should evaluate the text in terms of culture and values of our prevailing societies. This will enable us to learn new lessons, gain new experience, and improve understanding of our standards as well.

(a) Ideological Context of the Reader

Reader's Ideology in its simplicity, refers to the reader's ideas and interests in his environment which influence the reading of the text. The environment and circumstances of the reader influences his/her response, interpretation and conclusion. For example, George Achiele et al., explained that others read the bible from a Liberated or a Feminist hermeneutics, which clarify and trace their perspective to the text.²¹ Clines has made an important point that to "read the Bible to our own best values, we have to read it as the people we are".²² In other words, we need to consider the Bible not as a historical book but as a modern one and analyse it in the context of ideologies that surround us. In this regard, we have to analyze the reader's ideas and interests and bring these in the analysis of the text.

¹⁹This is also depicted in third element of Soulen and Soulen approach of Ideological Criticism.

²⁰Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, 17.

²¹George Achiele et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (London: Yale University Press, 1995), 280.

²² Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, 20.

(b) Ideological context of the text

This investigation according to Yee is an external investigation that combines the social sciences and historical criticisms in order to gain knowledge of specific social classes, their social structure, and their relations to other sects in society, and their modes of production.²³ Similarly, Soulen and Soulen also considered this socio-historical examination as the reconstruction of the social, economic and political environments of the Biblical period.²⁴ The aim of all these examinations is to sketch the ideological world behind the production and composition of the text.

In this regard, I will analyse the social and historical background of the text and place the text at a particular period. To fulfil this task I will enquire on the issue of authorship and the date of composition. This follows the analysis of the social, political, economic and religious background of the period so we can identify dominant ideologies in the context of the text.

(c) Ideological content of the Text

This analysis aims at identifying the ideologies within the text. According to Yee, the text symbolises its ideological context.²⁵ The underlying assumption here is that, texts are both the “representation and reproduction of Ideology.”²⁶ This means that the literary elements of a text carry ideologies dominant in its background. In light of this fact, this study will analyse different literary elements of Deuteronomy 15:1-11 to uncover the ideologies within the text. This includes an investigation of the text’s structures and key Hebrew terms. These methods of interpretation will be integrated to unravel the ideologies embedded within the text.

²³Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 151.

²⁴N.Soulen and Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, 84.

²⁵Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 142.

1.4 Employing Ideological Criticism to Interpret Biblical Texts

To understand the application of Ideological Criticism, I would like to turn the discussion on how some Biblical scholars employ Ideological Criticism in their study of Biblical texts. There are a number of studies that employed Ideological Criticism to interpret texts, but only a few are chosen here to illustrate the application of Ideological Criticism to biblical texts.²⁷

First we consider Clines, who use Ideological Criticism in his reading of the Ten Commandment in Exodus 20:1-17.²⁸ He aimed at unravelling the interests (ideologies) served by the Ten Commandments. In using Ideological Criticism, he revealed that the Ten Commandment in Exodus 20:1-17 promoted a certain group's interest. The elites desire to sustain their own interest and secure the agreement or consent of others not of their class, to ensure their social stability and preservation of their power.²⁹

Clines employed Ideological Criticism to examine the general interest of different social groups, and genders in the text against the interests of the law. He found out that the poor, children, slaves and foreigners had no power or say in the Ten Commandment although they may benefited from it. Prohibiting murder for example, naturally benefited both the wealthy and the powerless. This did not mean that the powerless pushed the law to its current form, for the protection of the wealthy carried more weight for the law establishment than the powerless. Clines also pointed out that the Sabbath law did not cater to the desires of those who could not afford to lose an income of one day of work. Instead it best served the interests of those who could afford to live with

²⁶ Aichele et al, *Post Modern Bible*, 275.

²⁷ For more examples see D. Jobling and T. Pippin (eds), *Ideological Criticism of Biblical Texts*, Semeia, 59. This volume is devoted to the application of Ideological Criticism to selected texts by biblical scholars.

²⁸ See Clines, *Interested Parties* that demonstrates his work on Ideological Criticism.

²⁹ Clines, *Interested Parties: The Ideology of Writers and Readers of the Hebrew Bible*, 38.

six working days of income but sufficient for seven days. Certainly, it was not the interests of the Priests, as they will definitely work on Sundays. Merchants and Traders would be disadvantaged if trading ceases on the Sabbath. Farmers had to milk the cows and feed the animals daily. In fact, the only people whose interests were not against the law were the urban elites, the officials and wealthiest of traders as prohibiting work on the Sabbath will not affect them at all. Similarly, the social commandments in Exodus 20:13-17 illustrated the protection of the wealthy person's interest.

This analysis of the fifth commandment best highlighted the type of person whose interest embedded in the Ten Commandments. It indicated that the group of people that were best served in the Ten Commandments were married men who became fathers; who are concerned with their wealth, their assets, his wife, their religions and who demanded the respect of their children. This group did not accept opposition from any group as it would threaten their status. Rather they promoted and encouraged all to obey the commandment. In other words, the Ten Commandment is an Ideology that preserved the status of the wealthy men in society.

Gale Yee's application of Ideological Criticism is twofold. First, is an intrinsic analysis where she examined the encoded rhetoric in the text to unravel the ideologies within the text. It means that the reader has to determine the power struggles, and the dilemmas the text ideologies tried to resolve. This approach is mindful of the "absences" or things that are left out from the text. She believed that to tell the truth, we should not say things that contradict that truth.³⁰ The second aspect is what she referred to as an extrinsic analysis. This focused on Ideology in the context of the text or the environment of the production. This is the window to view the society and

³⁰Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 143.

various groups exist in circumstances under which the text was produced; their social relationships, their economic and political issues and dominant groups and their ideas.

Yee has several works on Ideological Criticism, but I will focus on her Ideological Criticism in 1995 study of the book of Judges 17-21. Here, Yee deployed historical criticism to view the situation and social interaction in the period of Judges 17-21. Yee's interpretation was that Judges 17-21 was an ideological production of the Deuteronomist in the period of King Josiah. This was an effort of the Deuteronomist to support King Josiah's so called religious reforms in particular the elimination of popular local cult centres for the centralisation of worship in Jerusalem. It propagated the Deuteronomist war against the country Levites who rejected centralised worship reforms.

The Deuteronomist portrayed the corrupt household of Micah from hillside of Ephraim, who built his own personal shrine and hired the freelance Levites as his personal priest in Judges 17 and 18, to show dishonesty and fraudulent actions of the clergy in their local shrines. The dismembered body of the Levite concubine in chapter 19 and the war between the tribes as a result, was a depiction of the disintegration of the tribal body in Israel. However hidden in the text was the realisation and justification of the services to Josiah's reforms. Such reforms were driven by ambitions to channel all revenues collected by the Levites into Jerusalem the official location of the Monarchy. The Deuteronomist used repetition as in Judges 21:25, "In those days there was no king in Israel" with the implication "every man did what was right in his own eyes," to explain the lawlessness and disorderly practices during the tribal time and justify King Josiah's reforms. Yee noted, that as the "Levite naturally mutilates the body of his

wife, the Deuteronomist narratively dis-members the body of the tribes.”³¹ Thus, Yee concluded that the Judges 17-21 is an Ideology that preserves the Josiah worship centralisation programme, and sustains its political power over Judah and the Northern Kingdom.

Similarly Arthur Wulf used the same approach to contextualise the narrative on the Tower of Babel in the historical period of Solomonic kingship.³² The analysis of the text revealed the disbursement of the Babel workers is the Ideology of the Deuteronomist to de-centralise Solomonic power. Solomon treated Jerusalem through the building of the temple as the centre of religious and his monarchy. The tower of Babel was a counter Ideology to reverse centralisation program and promote disbursement. This also means a disbursement of power and economic benefits.

My usage of Ideological Criticism differs from the above scholars since I will employ the three investigation identified in the definition above. In this regard I will not only investigate the predominant ideologies in my social location as a reader, but will also attempt to unravel the ideologies in the world of the text, and those engraved within the text itself. The aim is to draw contrasts and comparisons between my ideological context and that of the text. Such a process will allow for a better understanding of the text and its impacts on society. In light of this study, it will lead to an understanding of the impact of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 on the gap between the rich and poor.

1.5 Summary

This chapter outlined the meaning of Ideology and the dimensions of Ideological Criticism. The definitions will now allow me to analyse and employ it for the purposes

³¹Ibid., 157.

³²Wulf, "Come Let Us Go Down and Disband the Solomonic Monarchy: The Function of the Tower of Babel Narrative from an Ideological Critic's Perspective," 137-40.

of this study. My proposed application involves a three-fold investigation. This three-fold approach focuses on my ideologies as a reader, the ideologies of the writers and the ideologies within the text. The ultimate aim is to identify which group in society is best served by the chosen text and its ideology(s) and if the cancelation of debts widens the gap between the rich and poor in society.

CHAPTER TWO

IDEOLOGIES IN MY SAMOAN CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses ideologies in my Samoan context. The purpose is to illustrate that I am approaching the text with ideologically conditioned eyes. That is, the ideologies of my social location influence my reading of biblical texts. Firstly, I will discuss the *matai* (chiefly) system in Samoa to identify why and how it can be seen as an ideology. Secondly I will be looking at ideologies that preserve the status quo of the *matai* system in Samoan. Thirdly, I will discuss how the ideologies of the *matai* system widen the gap between the rich and poor in Samoan society.

I was born and raised in Samoa, worked and raised a family; as part of *tautua* (serving group) for the *matai*, experiencing and observing how the *matai* system operates in Samoa and I heard the views of many about *matai* system. I decided to discuss the *matai* system because it explains the life of a Samoan who has been raised in the culture and the values of Samoan society.

2.2 The Matai System and Its Ideology(s)

The *matai* system is a profound and unique aspect of the Samoan community. The *matai* are leaders of extended families and are responsible for good governance in the families and the villages. Dr.Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa¹ commented that the *matai*

¹AionoFanaafi Le Tagaloa, a Samoan chief, scholar, historian and holds a PHD in education philosophy and applied linguistics.

system reflects, “the insistence of the culture on unity or holistic view of life.”² Aiono meant that the *matai* are strictly based in a system that reflects Samoan values, traditions, culture and knowledge.

Matai form the powerful village council. The *matai* maintain the unity of its people in a traditional Samoan way and governs all the village affairs; social, economic, political and religious matters. The village council is an umbrella of authority above the family level and presides over all village lands and legitimizes the conferral of *matai* titles on village members.³ Further, the *matai* system serves as the core of the Samoan culture. Its practices are still strong and resilient in Samoan society today. It has been the system under which Samoa’s traditional communities have been governed for years and possibly centuries.

The *matai* is possibly an ideology itself embraces by many other local ideologies. The *matai* system defines the villages as a stratified society. This comprises of a hierarchal structure visible in the division of the village into four main branches: the *matai*, *aumaga* (untitled men), *sa’oao and tama’ita’i* (daughter of the chiefs) and *faletua ma tausua* (wives of the chiefs and untitled men), with the *matai* on the top of the hierarchy.

The proverb “*O Samoa ua uma ona tofofi*” literally means each individual knows his/her place or position within society. This sanctions the hierarchal structure in the villages in the sense that each person knows their position and their responsibilities within the villages’ stratified structure. It serves as an affirmation that social

²Aiono Fanaafi Le Tagaloa, "The Samoan Culture and Government," *Culture and Democracy in the South Pacific* (1992): 117. See also Frank Smith, "The Joannine Jesus from the Samoan Perspective: Toward an Interculture Reading of the Fourth Gospel" (Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, Auckland University, 2009), 56.

³Asofou Soo, *Democracy and Customs in Samoa: An Uneasy Alliance* (Suva: USP ISP Publications, 2008), 19.

classification of classes under the *matai* system is naturally recognized and accepted. From an ideological perspective, the social classification under the *matai* system can be looked at as an ideology that preserves the status of the *matai* at the apex of the hierarchical structure. This ideology is enhanced by the belief that this social stratification is divinely given.

This is reflected in the Samoan saying that “*Na tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia pulea e matai*”⁴ meaning God destined and chose Samoa to be lead and governed under the authority of the chiefs. This highlight the notion of divine appointment of *matai*. This accords the system a more respectful and dignified status as Samoans who with strong Christian beliefs would never challenge divine appointments. It highlights the sacredness and high position of the *matai* system with the understanding that this system is holy and untouchable. Emma Kruse Vaai agreed that these proverbs support the existing social structure. She noted that under this understanding the *matai* system was appointed by God.⁵ In this sense, the position of the *matai* in Samoan society is therefore unchallenged.

The “*fono a matai*” or village council comprises of *matai* only. The saying “*e sa ona soli le fono a matai*” means that no one is allowed to come near the place of *matai* council. It is a curse for anyone to intrude in the council without consent. This not only provides protection for the secrecy of matters discussed, but it also reaffirms the standing of the council in the village.⁶ It reaffirms their centralised control and at the

⁴ Emma Kruse Vaai, *Producing the Text of Culture: The Appropriation of English in Contemporary Samoan* (Le Papaigalagala: National University of Samoa, 2011). The author discussed this proverb in detail

⁵Ibid., 25.

⁶Fapuleai Seuao Taeao Salua, *O Le Tafafa O Au Measina Samoa* (Apia: National University of Samoa, 2007), 14.

same time establishing its own privileges. This sets the *matai* apart and thus preserving their position in Samoan society.

In the village, one of the functions of the council of *matai* is to set up laws and regulations, procedures and policies of the village. The council also holds the power to fine, banish or forgive those who breach village laws. Council members can sanction anyone who goes against the council's decision at any time. The rules and regulations, fines and penalties are made in the best interests of the whole village.⁷ They are meant to protect and provide security at the same time boost the welfare of the whole village.

However, the practice of penalties and fines leans more towards the materialistic side and sometimes these are mainly influenced by the desire for economic gains. Most, if not all, the punishments are in the form of goods or money. For example, if one is caught stealing taro from another family's plantation, they will be fined and asked to provide boxes of tinned fish before the council. The fines issued will depend on the severity of the offence. Cartons of tinned fish or the like obtained from fines are usually distributed amongst the council members. The high chief usually receives more compared to the young and/or new *matai*. Monetary fines are also distributed in a similar way.

In this situation, rules and fines seem to serve dual interests. On one hand, the protection of the villages social and economic welfare and on the other hand an approach to satisfy the economic need on the expense of others. Hence, an ideology that maintains justice and at the same time, it satisfies the physical needs of those in power. Socially and economically, this can drain village resources and wealth, especially the *aumaga* are mostly unemployed men and dependent mostly on subsistent farming for a

⁷Lauofo Meti, *Samoa: Le Fauga O Le Faavae* (Le Papaigalagala: Le Univesite Aoao o Samoa, 2003), 4. The author explained in detail the authority of the village council.

living. This weakens the weak and empowers those in power as the offender(s) will have to find money to pay their fines, while the *matai* benefit from it financially.

2.3 Ideologies that Support the Matai System

The group referred to as the *aumaga* (untitled men) is defined by Le Tagaloa as “*o le malosi o le nuu*” meaning the “*aumaga*” are the physical strength of the village.⁸ This saying has a dual meaning. It recognises their physical power and also their traditional roles and responsibilities in the village. Such responsibilities include physical hard work as planters, fishermen, ship and house builders, making weapons and tools, preparing of food, cooking and serving food and drinks, implementers, entertainers, sportsmen and fighters in times of wars.⁹

There is a saying “*o le ala i le pule o le tautua*” meaning the way to power and success is through service. This is the basis of the relationship between the *matai* and his *aiga* (family). It warrants respect, obedience and service to the *matai* at any cost. It is recognised as a traditional practice for untitled men as the pathway to becoming good leaders in the future.¹⁰ The concept of *tautua* demands nothing but the best for the chief. The *tautua* serves the chief with honesty and loyalty. However, such practice demands full commitment of time and resources. The *aumaga* goes out fishing, hunting and farming to serve the chief. He builds houses and provides security for his chief.¹¹ The *tautua* provides the chief with the best dish. The *aumaga* eat only when the chief finishes eating. Any leftover food is for them and the rest of the family. The *tautua* will

⁸Le Tagaloa, "The Samoan Culture and Government," 118.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Smith, "The Joannine Jesus from the Samoan Perspective: Toward an Interculture Reading of the Fourth Gospel," 76. See also Vaitusi Nofoaiga intensive discussion about “*tautua*”. Vaitusi Lealaiauloto Nofoaiga, "Towards a Samoan Postcolonial Reading of Discipleship in Matthean Gospel" (Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, Auckland University, 2014), 45-50.

¹¹Le Tagaloa, "The Samoan Culture and Government," 118.

distribute the remaining food for his sisters, brothers and their children first and he would be last to eat.¹² This is the fundamental basis of the relationship between the untitled men and their chiefs. Thus the saying, “*o le ala i le pule o le tautua.*”

However, this can be seen as an ideology. It preserves the privileges of the chiefs and demands services from the *tautua*. The *tautua* has to find income through farming, fishing and hunting for his services to the *matai*. It could be seen as a training ground for untitled men and women to become chiefs but whether he will be appointed as a *matai* is not guaranteed. Clearly, the institution of the *tautua* is an ideology in the sense that it veils the hardships of providing service to the *matai* and assures the *matai* of a support network that helps uphold their status.

There is also an unwritten rule that as soon as a young boy stops attending formal school and becomes unemployed, he automatically joins the *aumaga* group. This is good practice in promoting village development and initiate young men into modes of employment by engaging in village and family responsibilities.¹³ On the other hand, it is also a measure that maintains servitude for the chiefs. This ensures the pool of *aumaga* is never short of its strength to maintain services and retains the status and power of those higher up in the hierarchy.

Part of the *tautua* is satisfying the requirements for family *faalavelave*. A family *faalavelave* is defined by Tupua Tamasese Efi as “an event out of the ordinary of the normal daily activities.”¹⁴ *Faalavelave* refers to weddings, funerals or any event not considered a normal daily activity of a family. Many of the Samoan *faalavelave* require contribution from members of the extended family, under the administration of the

¹²Nofoaiga, "Towards a Samoan Postcolonial Reading of Discipleship in Matthean Gospel," 44.

¹³Le Tagaloa, "The Samoan Culture and Government," 119.

¹⁴Tuiatua Tupua Tamasese Efi, "He Who Rallies in My Hour of Need Is My Kin," in *New Zealand Families Commission Pasifika Families' Fono* (Auckland2009), 5.

matai. Each family has to contribute what the *matai* has set for contributions, which includes monetary and other forms of donations.¹⁵ The redistribution of money and food from the *faalavelave* is also done under the *matai*'s authority. The priority in family *faalavelave* is always the *matai*, and they get more compared to the rest of the family.

These traditional *faalavelave* are based on the notion of honor, respect and reciprocated love. They symbolizes unity as the whole family come together to share contribute and work together to achieve a certain goal. However, a common saying I have often heard people say is that “*o faalavelave o le teugatupe*” meaning *faalavelave* is similar to a bank deposit. It is where you invest today by contributing for your family and the same love will be reciprocated when the “*faalavelave*” occurs to you and your children. This saying implies that the intention of doing something good for your extended family is not out love but rather in anticipation of what you will receive in return.

Similarly, the *Samoan* proverb “*A e iloa au i Togamau, ou te iloa foi oe i Siulepa*” literally mean if you do me a good deed in “*Togamau*” I will reciprocate it in “*Siulepa*.” It highlights the reciprocal performance of the customs or duty implicit in the cultural imperative of *faalavelave* is not to be motivated only by what one can receive in return. Rather it should be motivated by the knowledge that if performed with the best possible motives then it will be reciprocated in kindness.¹⁶ These very concepts of *faalavelave* impose ideological thinking that drives one to contribute and give more in anticipating that the reciprocated love from others will be greater. However, in reality the return of one's kindness and love depends on the faithfulness

¹⁵ Fofu.I.F.Sunia, *Lupe O Le Foaga* (American Samoa: Department of Education, 2002), 93-98. Here Sunia explain in detail preparation of traditional weddings and funerals

and the love of the *matai* who is head of the family and the response of the extended family.

The promulgation of *faalavelave* is clearly an ideology that disregards the social and economic situation of family members as such understanding forces others to contribute and donate more beyond their financial capacity. As a result, this leads many to loan in order to meet the demands of a *faalavelave*. I have been in the same situation here in Samoa where I have had on many occasions loaned money from National Provident Fund¹⁷ whenever we have had a family *faalavelave* due to not having enough income to contribute to family *faalavelave*. This leads to financial burden on the *tautua*.

Equally, the saying “*E tupu mea ave*” literally means that what you have donated and contributed for others, will come back to you in manifold. This understanding encourages people to give more. But underlying this is the desire to do more for pride and for others to gain more in return. Many people in the villages, despite the hardships they face, still struggle to contribute more due to beliefs. Lalomilo Kamu wrote that:

There are instances in which people are more concerned with their own personal agendas than the betterment of the family and have gained authority in the *FaaSamoa*/ the Samoan Way only to manipulate the system for personal advancement.¹⁸

Following is a recent letter from the Samoan Observer, which explains the same understanding elaborated by Kamu.

Many people are struggling; people are trying to make ends.
Our own culture is bleeding us dry with things like funerals.

¹⁶Mata'afa Keni Lesa, "The Question of Culture," *Samoa Observer*, 12 August 2016.

¹⁷National Provident Fund is Samoa's government superannuation fund established in 1972, a compulsory saving scheme of the working population. All employees are required to deduct statutory contribution of 7% from their basic salary every year with another 7% from employer. Members of the fund are allowed to loan 40% of their contribution for personal use without security.

¹⁸Lalomilo Kamu, *The Samoan Culture and the Christian Gospel* (Apia: Methodist Printing Press, 1996), 179.

Many people go to funerals nowadays with the mindset of profiting or getting something out of it knowing that the hosts have too much pride to reject.¹⁹

In the end, those who gain more from *faalavelave* will be the *matai* while families financially struggle. In other words, the institution of Samoan *faalavelave* increases the wealth of the *matai* while diminishing that of the *tautua*.

In addition, a *matai* is traditionally recognized as the custodian of all family assets including land and titles.²⁰ They administer the distribution of the family land. The *matai* leads the discussion and makes the final decision regarding the allocation of family land. Land therefore retains wealth for Samoans families. Samoa is still an agriculturally based economy but there is also a gradual increase in the number of businesses that require land. Holding such authority on the land places the *matai* in an even more powerful position. For customary land allocation, there is an understanding that the *matai* will take priority and receive the best land from his/her family.²¹ Receiving the best land equates to an increase in wealth while those with substandard land parcels receive less from working their land. The norm of giving the *matai* sole authority of family land can also be perceived as an ideology. It preserves the position and interests of the *matai* and avoids objections from the members of the family.

2.4 Samoan Images

Other local ideologies carry through symbols and icons of Samoan customs. One is the *tulagafale* or “placement of a family house in a village”. The layout of Samoan village houses bear great significance in the same sense. The *matai*’s *fale* (house of the

¹⁹Lesā, "The Question of Culture."

²⁰Smith, "The Joannine Jesus from the Samoan Perspective: Toward an Interculture Reading of the Fourth Gospel," 55. See also Ama'amalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga-the Household of Life: A Perspective from the Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlangener Verl, 2000), 10-17.

chief) is always placed in the front yard near the main road with the whole family behind this main house.²² Their houses are also the best and the biggest houses in the village. A state of the art of the house, its architectural and structural design is of great importance, as most chiefs and families likewise see it as an important icon in upholding family pride. Such a reality represents wealth and power within the family. However, building and maintaining of such icons can be very costly and leave family members again in financial turmoil.

Funerals of high chiefs are the most respected events in the villages. Everyone is expected to pay respect and honour the death of his/her chief in one way or another. The *aumaga* carries his/her coffin and conducts curfews to ensure everything remains calm, respected and honoured. Food is provided every day for the guests, relatives and the villages who have come to pay their respects. The traditional *fa'aaloalo* (respect) in terms of goods and money involves tremendous financial commitments, which again fall on the shoulders of the family and the *tautua*.²³

These images and symbols carry the ideologies of the *matai* systems and preserve its status and privileges in the Samoan *aiga* and village. Upholding these practices requires physical help and support and incurs financial commitment as well. These ideas and interests further add to the ever increasing gap between the poor and the rich.

2.5 Summary

As Samoans, we embrace our culture and traditions with great pride. However, practices of the *matai* system discussed here has identified some profound ideologies

²¹Meti, *Samoa: Le Fauga O Le Faavae*, 121.

²²Salua, *O Le Tafafa O Au Measina Samoa*, 18-19. Here, the author discussed the setting of a Samoan village.

²³Fofu.I.F.Sunia, *Lupe O Le Foaga*, 123.

behind it. Which indicates practices developed not only for the improvement of the society but also conveys ideas and interests to maintain and preserve the status quo. The surrounding environment of the *matai* system also holds ideologies that support its existence. Highlighted in this chapter, has been the power and authority vested in the *matai*, and how these are being preserved and promoted within the *matai* system structure, including the practices in villages and within the *aiga*. They promote and sustain the interests of this group at the expense of the villages and the *aiga potopoto*. The above context identifies some common ground, whereby in using this method, I chose to draw a parallel of the use of the Samoan context to that of the Biblical text. This setting has influenced my reading of the law of remission in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 as an ideological text. In short, it serves to give power and wealth to the rich (creditors) instead of helping out the poor. This is similar in my context in the way the *matai* system gives more power to the *matai* and in serving the *matai* system interests.

CHAPTER THREE

IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF THE TEXT

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to identify ideologies of the world behind the text's production. This is the second analysis of ideological criticism highlighted in Chapter two. Firstly, I will discuss the authorship and period from which the text was produced. The intention is to identify the ideologies of the author(s) and those predominant in the time of the text's composition. Secondly, I will analyse social and economic aspects of this period to clarify ideologies of the period. Knowledge of the ideologies in the context of the text and those etched into the text allows us to determine the impact of the law on the release of debts on the gap between the rich and poor.

3.2 Authorship and Date of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

Deuteronomy 15:1-11 is part of a wider section of the Book of Deuteronomy known as the Deuteronomistic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26). According to John Van Seters this is the oldest section of the Book of Deuteronomy from which the rest of the book developed and it is very difficult to date and identify its author(s).¹ Therefore, in discussing the date and authorship of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 this project will discuss the authorship and date of the Book of Deuteronomy as a whole. First, I will discuss the authorship of the book in the attempt to identify the ideologies of the authors'. Second,

¹ John Van Seters, "The Pentateuch" in Steven L. McKenzie; Matt Patrick Graham, *The Hebrew Bible today: an introduction to critical issues* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1998), 15-17.

I will attempt to identify the proposed date(s) of the book to identify the ideologies in existence in the time of composition.

3.2.1 Authorship of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

There is no consensus among critical scholars² regarding the authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy. However, a number of proposals have been put forward.

(a) *Levitical Priests*

The first proposal is Gerhard von Rad's. He proposed that Judean Levitical priests were the composer of Deuteronomy.³ For Von Rad, Deuteronomy is a religious manuscript and a document filled with images of holy war as in Deuteronomy 20. These two elements suggest Levitical authorship since the priests were responsible for cultic ceremonies and obsessed with holy war.⁴ Von Rad saw the Levitical priests as the "preachers of the holy war."⁵ Furthermore, he also pointed to hortatory nature of the Book of Deuteronomy as further evidence to support Levitical priestly authorship.⁶ According to Von Rad the laws in the book were interpreted laws meant to be preached to an audience as illustrated in Nehemiah 8: 7-7 and 2 Chronicles 19: 8-11. In these passages, the priests read the law to the people and instructed them according to their interpretation of the law.⁷ In other words, the Levitical priests who had access to the law interpreted them and delivered them to the people.⁸ This not only hints that the

²Critical scholars refer to biblical scholars who reject the Mosaic authorship of Deuteronomy.

³ Gerhard Von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 66-67.

⁴Ibid., 67.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 15.

⁷Ibid., 14.

⁸Also see, John. W. Miller, *The Origin of the Bible: Rethinking Canon History* (New York: Paulist, 1994), 58-66; Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Summit Books, 1987), 120; Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 178-79 These scholars are in support of Von Rad's proposal.

Levitical priests were the authors of Deuteronomy but also suggests the composition process of the Book of Deuteronomy. That is, it came into existence as interpretations and editions of older Israelite laws.

However, there is also opposition to Von Rad's view. The central problem for these scholars is the call for centralisation evident in the Book of Deuteronomy. The move to centralisation would not serve the interests of the Levitical priests serving in sanctuaries in the rural areas. Abolishing rural sanctuaries means they would lose power and economic privileges since they depended on the rural communities for their livelihoods. So why would the priests write something that put their existence in jeopardy?⁹

(b) Northern Prophets

The second proposal for authorship of Deuteronomy was proposed by Ernest W. Nicholson. He suggested that the Book of Deuteronomy was the work of the Northern prophetic circle. In other words, the Prophets of the north compile Deuteronomy in the time of Manasseh and hid it at the Jerusalem temple.¹⁰ This was done with the expectation that it would initiate reforms in the future when found. In support of his view Nicholson claimed, that the 8th century B. C. E. prophets were linked to cultic ceremonies. In addition, he also suggested that Moses was presented in Deuteronomy as a prophetic archetype. According to Nicholson, this is depicted in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, where Yahweh promises to raise a prophet like Moses to proclaim the law in the future. For Nicholson, this hints at the prophetic authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy.¹¹

⁹See, Ernest W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 85-86.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 77 & 106.

Similarly, Nicholson's proposal faces the similar problem as Von Rad's suggestion. It does not fully account for the issue of centralisation. Why would the Northern prophetic circle uphold Jerusalem as the sole place of worship? Like the Levites, such a move will endanger their power and livelihoods. For they too depended upon the multiple shrines and sanctuaries in the north for their source of living.

(c) Scribes

Another proposal points to the Scribes as the authors of the Book of Deuteronomy. The proponent of this view was Moshe Weinfeld.¹² He attributed the Book of Deuteronomy to the Scribal circles who began composing Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah and continued on during the exile. Weinfeld's argument is based on correspondents between Deuteronomy and Ancient Near Eastern treaty documents. He assumed that the Scribes who were responsible for Deuteronomy must have been exposed and accessed Assyrian and Hittite political treaties.¹³ To support his view Weinfeld identified elements of wisdom evident in the Book of Deuteronomy. This included the Theology of Retribution, the Father and Son discourses, various prohibitions and so forth.¹⁴ Weinfeld's view found favour among the scholars who also identified wisdom influence on the Book of Deuteronomy.¹⁵ However, Weinfeld's proposal does not really address the issue of centralisation. He did not identify the

¹²Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*(Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 9.

¹³Ibid., 59-69. See also, Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. The Anchor Bible 5, (NewHaven: Yale University Press, 2006), 62-65.

¹⁴In support of Weinfeld other scholars identify wisdom influence in the Book of Deuteronomy. For example see, Levinson, "Is the Covenant Code an Exilic Composition? A Response to John Van Seters," in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (JSOTSup 406; ed. JohnDay; London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 295-96; William Morrow, "'To Set the Name' in the Deuteronomistic CentralizationFormula: A Case of Cultural Hybridity," *JSS* 55 [2010], 377-78; Jack R. Lundbom, "Wisdom Influence in the Book of Deuteronomy," in *Raising up a Faithful Exegete: Essays in Honor of Richard D. Nelson*, ed. K. L. Noll and Brooks Schramm(Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 193-209.

¹⁵Ibid.

Scribes to have any direct involvement in the movement. Does this mean that the Scribes are only involved with the wisdom elements in the Book of Deuteronomy? Or are there other author(s) of the book?

(d) Elders

Another view on the authorship of Deuteronomy points to the Elders. The instigator of this view is Leslie J. Hoppe.¹⁶ For Hoppe, the Elders preserved legal tradition in Ancient Israel and they must have composed Deuteronomy because the book has legal contents.¹⁷ In his words “Deuteronomy presents the elders with clearly defined legal responsibilities that flow from their association with Moses.” He even suggested that the Elders were prominent in legal proceedings in their respective communities.¹⁸ However, some scholars question Hoppe’s view. For them, the role of the Elders as guardians of the law in Ancient Israel is disputable. For example, Timothy M. Willis argued, that the elders in Deuteronomy were restricted only to their local cities, and they were not the sole authority on legal proceedings.¹⁹

(e) Reformers

Another proposal concerning the authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy points to a group of Reformers as the composers of the book. Leading proponents of this view includes Ronald Clements²⁰ and Rainer Albertz.²¹ The former claimed that

¹⁶Leslie J. Hoppe, “Elders and Deuteronomy: A Proposal,” *EgT* 14 (1983): 260

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 270-271.

¹⁹ Timothy M. Willis, *The Elders of the City: A Study of the Elders-Laws in Deuteronomy* (SBLMS 55; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 5. See also, Jacob Milgrom, “The Ideological and Historical Importance of the Office of Judge in Deuteronomy,” in Isac Leo Seeligmann Volume: Essays on the Bible and the Ancient World, ed. Alexander Rofé and Yair Zakovitch (Jerusalem: E. Rubinstein’s Publishing House, 1983):130-33.

²⁰ Ronald E. Clements, “The Book of Deuteronomy: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *New Interpretation Bible*, vol II (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 281.

Deuteronomy had multiple authors from not just one particular party but from among members of the leading party in Ancient Israel, with the intention of imposing legislation and constitutional reforms.²² In support, Albertz suggested that the priest, the scribes and the prophets all worked together to instigate reforms on a national scale. Thus, he claimed that the book of Deuteronomy was the product of a coalition among leading citizens from the three major groups.²³ This view is convincing for me given the nature of the content of Deuteronomy. As indicated in the four proposals above, the book contains elements that reflect the participation of Priests, Prophets, Scribes and Elders in its composition.

(f) Authorship of Deuteronomy from an Ideological Perspective

The analysis of the authorship of the Book of Deuteronomy places Deuteronomy in the vicinity of the Elite or the Ruling class in Israelite society. It is a production of the Priests, Prophets, Scribes and the Elders, all which are prominent groups in society. From an ideological perspective, this suggests that the Book of Deuteronomy presents the interests and the ideologies of the privileged and the rich, since its authors were members of professional groups who were at the apex of society. In other words, Deuteronomy (including the chosen passage Deuteronomy 15: 1-11) therefore leans toward serving the agendas and preserving the political and economic interests of the Ruling class. However, the content of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 needs to be analysed to confirm such a claim. Meanwhile, the date of Deuteronomy and the social condition of such period needs to be looked at, for further clarification of the ideological context of the book.

²¹Reiner Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, vol. 1; OTL; trans. John Bowden,(London: SCM Press, 1994), 201-203.

²²Clements, "The Book of Deuteronomy," 281.

3.2.2 Dating Deuteronomy 15:1-11

In determining the date of Deuteronomy 15:1-11, I will take a similar approach as I did above in the attempt to establish the authorship of the passage. That is, I will discuss it in light of the whole book in general. Similar to the authorship question, the issue of date of composition for the Book of Deuteronomy is also the subject of scholarly debate. There are also a few proposals put forward by critical scholars.

(a) *Josiah's Reign*

The most popular view concerning the date of composition for the Book of Deuteronomy is during the reign of King Josiah. The proposal put forward by W.M.L de Wette placed the book in the time of Josiah's reforms. De Wette argued that the law of Deuteronomy 12-26 explain King Josiah's law reformation such as cultic centralisation and purification. Thus, it must have been written before Josiah's reform sometime in 621 B.C.E.²⁴ This in particular is based on the laws in Deuteronomy 12:1-18:8 which forms a legal corpus relevant to Josiah's reforms, as it embodies an ideology of cultic centralisation.

This view receives support among Biblical scholars. As Gordon Wenham observed, most scholars in their works take as fact and without question the seventh century B.C.E date for Deuteronomy.²⁵ For example, one advocate of this view is Norman K. Gottwald. He also believed that Deuteronomy chapter 12-29 is characteristic of the platform of King Josiah's reformation.²⁶ He agreed that the text is a

²³Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion*, 202.

²⁴Bernard M Levinson, "McConville's" Law and Theology in Deuteronomy," *JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW* 80, no. 3-4 (1990): 396.

²⁵Gordon Wenham, "The Date of Deuteronomy: Linch-pin of Old Testament Criticism," *Themelios* 10.3 (April 1985): 15-20.

²⁶Norman K. Gottwald, "The Hebrew Bible: A Social-Literary Introduction," (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 387.

preface to the Deuteronomistic history and mentioned religious laws effective during the Josiah's reign. In addition, he pointed out that Deuteronomy 12:1-26:15 are recital laws that reflected organic growth of its "traditions and recitation of the covenant renewal ceremonies,"²⁷ produced prior to the re-establishment of Josiah's program.²⁸ Gottwald also agreed that Josiah's reforms, such as celebration of Passover in the temple rather than homes, prohibition of country altars, sacred poles and high places, are all legislated in Deuteronomy.²⁹

(b) Hezekiah's Reign

This view is an addition to the Josianic dating of the Book of Deuteronomy. Weinfeld proposed that the date for the composition of Deuteronomy could be extended to include the time of King Hezekiah (722-686 B.C.E.) where the destruction of altars and the demand of centralised worship were also evident.³⁰ Before Hezekiah's reign, country altars and the worship in high places were tolerated and considered legitimate in the religious life of Israel.³¹ The first time these altars and high places were abolished is in the time of Hezekiah.³² This suggests that the developments in the time of Hezekiah also correspond to the issue of an exclusive centre of worship prominent in the Book of Deuteronomy.³³ However, the reforms of Hezekiah were not as radical and aggressive as those implemented during the reign of Josiah. This therefore questions the validity of

²⁷Ibid., 389.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Moshe Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 3 (1967): 249-50.

³¹2 Kings 14 -16

³²Weinfeld, "Deuteronomy: The Present State of Inquiry," 249.

³³Ibid., 250.

attributing the Book of Deuteronomy and its ideology of centralisation to the time of Hezekiah.

(c) An Earlier Date

There are also proposals for an earlier date of composition for the Book of Deuteronomy. The first example is J.G. McConville. He argued against a seventh century dating for the Book of Deuteronomy. He claimed that Deuteronomy had a different vision that did not fit the period of Josiah's reforms. Deuteronomy reflected a political and religious understanding of the Israel pre-monarchical period. It presents as a challenge to Israel given its political, social and economic influences, its Near Eastern cultic and ideologies, that deter its belief and faith of Yahweh. Therefore, the purpose was to maintain Yahweh's direct covenant relation with its people. He argued that the centralisation demanded in Deuteronomy 12:5 was only to give priority to certain altars but does not restrict Jerusalem as the only site for worship.³⁴ A second example of this is Wenham argued for an earlier date for the composition of Deuteronomy. For him the law codes in Deuteronomy reflected early Assyrian and Hittite treaty and law documents, rather than those of Middle Assyrian or neo-Babylonian that aligned with the time of Josiah.³⁵

However, the periods proposed by these two scholars are fairly broad. In this light, I have decided to take into account the popular view that places the law of remission of debts in specifically in the time of Josiah's reforms.³⁶ This suggests that the law on the release of debts is one of the reforms of Josiah's time. So why is there a need for such reform? Are there poor people with financial burdens? Who benefits

³⁴Levinson, "Mcconville's" Law and Theology in Deuteronomy," 399.

³⁵Wenham, "The Date of Deuteronomy." 17-20.

³⁶Gottwald, "The Hebrew Bible: A Social-Literary Introduction," 367.

from such law reforms? Is it the Elite and rich of Josiah's time who revised the law or the poor who are in debt? To answer these questions, an investigation of the socio-economic situation of Josiah's time will be conducted. Knowledge of the socio-economic situation from which the text was produced, aids the interpreter in formulating the ideological world of the text.

3.3 Ideologies in Josiah's Reign: Social-Economic Analysis

The time of King Josiah is marked by a few developments on the social and economic front. A discussion of these spheres will give us an idea of the ideologies floating around in the context from which the Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 was produced.

Israel in becoming centralised created social stratification in its society. Power was always monopolised by the King and a few elites in the King's court. Gottwald pointed out that the Monarch's biased policies transferred wealth from a large productive people not only to government officials, but also to various layers of merchants who the government would gain affluence and respect.³⁷ This meant that there was favouritism and preferential treatment for the government officials and the rich. No doubt, these corrupt practices had social ramifications.

Vogt in his social analysis of the Josianic period explained Judah's social problems. To him, the Israelites did not show compassion and care for each other. The wealthy opportunists' behaved aggressively in pursuing their interests while ignoring the needy. This is evidence of a stratified society where the failure to care for one another created disparity between the rich and poor. According to Vogt, the poor in this

³⁷Ibid., 324.

situation, were the vulnerable property owners, whose situation deteriorated due to government taxation, and the greedy investment of the rich.³⁸

In terms of land tenure, the ownership of the land was mainly sustained in the family and tribal society. This meant that family members were not allowed to sell the land. However, this did not stand as entrepreneurs with increased wealth; through tax, plunder and trade, aggressively sought investment opportunities. As such, the wealthy of the society satisfied their hunger business, by purchasing land and offering more lending with interest within the local cities and outside of Israel. Not only that, the business people took advantage of the struggling poor community but taking over by force defaulted lending.

Vogt claimed that the poor landowners were those who struggled to meet financial obligations due to “failed crops,” “increased taxation” or “simple mismanagement.” These situations inevitably forced the struggling landowners to borrow, in order to avoid the loss of their homes and land, even selling themselves as slaves for repayment of their debts.³⁹ This was an ideal situation for the moneylenders, as they were able to offer loans with interest to the needy Israelites who mortgaged their properties in order to survive. The acquisition of land from the poor landowners no doubt left them in some very unfortunate conditions. These situations caused poverty and social chaos in these societies. Socially, the unity of Judah seemed to be in jeopardy as the rich look after their own interests at the expense of the vulnerable land owners while economically, the gap between rich and poor widened.

³⁸Peter T. Vogt, "Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy," *JETS* 51, no. 1 March 2008 (2008): 39.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 38. Also see, Paula M. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society of Ancient Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 160-162; Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 145. Here, Yee explained the lending system in this time allowed for the option of land collateral. This left many to become landless. The creditors offered high interest

Furthermore, the Josianic reforms could have led also to further social problems. Yee noted that the changes in the centralised system insisted by Josiah imposed a collapse on Israel's tribal structure.⁴⁰ The King has destroyed the tribal solidarity in ensuring the success of his reforms.⁴¹ This threatened the social fabric of Israelite society, as the collapse of the rural areas meant deterioration in support for Jerusalem capital.

The work programs of the Kings also created social and economic problems in society. Any program on war and vassalage had negative economic and social impacts on the people. The monarchy depended on increasing taxes so they could afford payment of tribute to the Assyria. The maintenance of a large army was also costly. The failure of the monarchy to provide protection for its citizens, affected daily living, trading, and livelihoods.

Being a colony of Assyria meant that Judah had to live with Assyria's exerted pressure to extract wealth. This required the transfer of gold, silver, precious stones, wine, oil, textiles, grain, flour, sheep and most of the land's wealth to Assyria. Even horses, which had high prices because of their usefulness in military operations were transferred and taken by the Assyrians, worsening the military capability of Judah to defend themselves.⁴² Overall, being a vassal to Assyria indicated a depletion of national wealth to the colonial power. This diminished their ability to trade and gain prosperity. Such a situation increased the economic problems in the nation. This put pressure on the

rates with cash crops and farms were taken as guarantees for loans. This lending system was taken as mechanism by the wealthy to take over failed farmers' properties and accumulate more wealth.

⁴⁰Yee, "Ideological Criticism: Judges 17-21 and the Dismembered Body," 145.

⁴¹Ibid. Also see, J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (2d ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 434 & 451-53. Here, Miller and Hayes explain the difficulty of living under Assyrian rule during the time of King Josiah.

⁴²Richard.H.Lowery, *The Reforming Kings Cult and Society in First Temple Judah*, ed. David Clines and Philip R.Davis, *Journal for Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 133.

rich, and their business endeavours, which led to further exploitation of the poor and thus increasing the gap between the rich and the poor.

Viewing this socio-economic analysis from an ideological perspective suggests that the predominant ideologies floating around in the time of King Josiah are those of the Elite or the rich. They are the ones aggressive in their attempts to maintain their wealth and status at the expense of the vulnerable and poor. Therefore, from an ideological perspective, Josiah's reforms could be seen as an ideology invented to preserve and maintain the economic stability of the upper class and Elite in society. Evidently, such ideology of the rich leads to the demise of the poor, and thus widening the gap between the haves and have-nots in society.

3.4 Conclusion

The historical analysis conducted here illuminates the ideological context of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11. The study of the authorship of Deuteronomy reveals the book to be a composition of leading citizens in Israelite society. Therefore, from an ideological perspective they are the ones whose ideology is preserved in the Book of Deuteronomy. The analysis of the date of Deuteronomy placed Deuteronomy 15:1-11 in the period of the Josianic reforms. The socio-economic analysis reveals that such reforms favoured the rich, whose dealings with the poor upheld their wealth, thus driving the poor to economic hardship. Apparently, the predominant ideologies of the Josianic period, are those of the Elite and rich. Their ideologies exploited the poor, widening the gap between the two groups. So, are the rich and Elite class ideology etched into Deuteronomy 15:1-11? Or is Deuteronomy 15:1-11 trying to solve the problem between the rich and poor? These questions can be answered through the intrinsic (literary analysis) in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

IDEOLOGICAL CONTENT OF THE TEXT.

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a literary analysis of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11. This is the third analysis of Ideological Criticism and it aims at unravelling the ideologies etched in the chosen text. The ideologies formulated here will be matched to the ones identified in the previous chapter. Such a process will determine if Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 is an ideology of the rich to preserve their interests thus widening the gap between them and the poor. In the course of this chapter, I will first discuss the structure of the text in terms of surface structure and deep structures. Secondly, I will conduct a grammatical analysis which will focus on the meaning of the phrases and words in the text.

4.2 Translation: Deuteronomy 15:1-11

1. At the end of seven years, you make a release.
2. And this is the command of the release. All creditors shall release a claim on hand against his fellow citizen and no exacting it from his brother because the release is a proclamation of the Lord.
3. Of a foreigner, you exact it, but whatever of yours is with your brother, you shall release
4. Because not one is in need among you, for the Lord will bless you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you as a land to occupy
5. If only you hear the voice of your Lord your God by diligently observing every commandment I command you today

6. When the Lord your God blesses you, you will lend to many nations and you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations but they will not rule
7. If there is a needy among you, a brother in one of your towns in the land which the Lord your God has given you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbour.
8. You should open your hand willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever is needed.
9. Be watchful for your heart thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission is near,” and therefore view your neighbour with hostility and give nothing; your neighbour might cry to the Lord against you, and you will incur guilt.
10. Give liberal and ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your works and all your undertakings.
11. Since there will never cease to be some in need on earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.”

4.3 Structural Analysis of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

a. Surface Structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

Surface structures refer to literary structures of a text that are obvious and easily detected.¹ An example, is the twofold structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 by Jeffrey H. Tigay.² He divided the text as follow;

1. vv. 1-6 Remission of Debts
2. vv. 7-11 An Exhortation to Lend to the Poor

¹ H. J. Hayes and R. C. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis a Beginner's Handbook*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1983), 111.

Tigay here divided Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 thematically. This means that the dominant theme in vv. 1-6 is the command to release debts while vv. 7-11 exhibits a forceful exhortation to lend to the poor regardless of the situation and time.³ This twofold structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 led to Tigay's claim that the purpose for the release of debts is for the benefit of the poor.⁴

I also divide the structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 into two sections similar to Tigay's twofold structure but with an ideological view.

1. vv. 1-6 Cancellation of Debts

2. vv. 7-11 Re-Lending and Re-Borrowing

I see Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 presenting a vicious cycle that encourages the poor to remain in debt. That is vv. 1-6 orders the cancellation of debts. The command relieves the poor of old debts freeing them up to loan again. In other words, the command in vv. 1-6 set up an ideal situation that allows the poor to take extra loans. These extra loans are made possible through the instructions given in vv. 7-11. The instructions encourage the creditors to lend without hesitations making loans accessible to the poor again. In such a scenario the poor remains poor and the burden of loan repayments remains.

So who are the real beneficiaries of the law on remission of debts? Apparently, from the above structure the situation for the poor does not really improve. They remain in debt. The easing of restrictions for re-lending and re-borrowing suggests that they could end up taking more loans and become deep in debt. In this way, the release of debts benefits the rich or the creditors. The situation allows them to reset terms for loan

²Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Deuteronomy," *JPS Torah Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 145-146.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., 146. Other scholars see Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 arranged in a threefold structure. For example, see Christopher J. H. Wright, "Deuteronomy," *New International Biblical Commentary* (Massachusetts: Henderson Publisher, 1996), 187-192.

repayments. This allows them to impose repayment terms favourable for them, giving them extra profits. In summary, this reading of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 is suggestive of the text as an ideology that poses to benefit the poor while in reality benefit the rich. In this light, the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 therefore widens the gap between the rich and poor.

The orientation of the text towards benefitting the rich is also clear in the following structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11;

1. vv. 1-3 Release of Debts
2. vv. 4-6 Blessings for the Creditor
3. vv. 7-9 Lend Willingly
4. vv. 10-11 Blessings for the Creditor

This fourfold structure clearly depicts that Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 presents the creditor as the one benefitting and blessed from the transactions demanded by the law on the release of debts. The first transaction is the release of debts demanded in vv. 1-3. Following this transaction diligently will reward the creditor as suggested in vv. 4-6. The creditor will be blessed on the land the Lord will give him and he will be able to lend to many nations. These blessings suggest the rich benefitting from the release of debts. The former suggests the promise of more land while the latter blessing envisioned an expansion of the creditor's business abroad. The second transaction is the command to lend willingly as depicted in vv. 7-9. This can be viewed as encouragement for the creditor to continue on with their business operations. Such a move will also reward the creditor through the assurance that his works and endeavours will be profitable as evidenced in vv. 10-11.

Evidently, this second structure pays special attention to the creditor. It portrays the creditor benefitting from the release and reissuing of debts. This means that the

creditor will become richer through the transactions of the law on debt release in the expense of the poor who remains in the land. From an ideological perspective this is ample evidence that the law on the release of debts is not designed for the benefit of the poor but for the preservation of the businesses of the rich. This therefore suggests that the law in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 widens and contributes to the disparity between the rich and poor.

b. Deep Structures of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

Deep structures refer to complex structures in a text governed by underlying laws like binary opposition, chiasmus and so forth.⁵ The following list is a chiastic structure of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11.

- a Release of debts (v1)
- b Not exact - God's release (v2)
- c Exact from foreigner (v3)
- d No one in need in the land (v4)
- e Obey God diligently (v5)
- f Blessings - lender for many nations (v6)
- f' Blessings – not a borrower (v6)
- e' Hard-hearted (v7)
- d' Lend sufficiently (v8)
- c' Hostility to the natives (v9)
- b' Give liberal - God's blessing (v10)
- a' Open hand (v11)

⁵Hayes and Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis*, 99 & 111. Hayes and Holladay suggest that purpose of a chiastic structure is to highlight the main message of the text. A chiastic structure is an

Similar to the surface structures identified above, the six pair chiastic structure also revolves around the creditor and the creditor's role in the institution of lending. This can be illustrated by explaining the different pairings of the chiastic structure above.

The combination aa' provides the *inclusio*⁶ of the passage, emphasising the creditor and their role in the law. That is, both a and a' refer to the creditor's role in the lending process. On the one hand, a, portrays the role of the creditor as a loan owner who releases the debts of the poor at the end of every seven years. On the other hand, a' illustrates the creditor's role as a lender who is expected to openly and willingly lend part of his/her wealth for relieving the hardships faced by the poor as depicted in the expression "open hand." Therefore, the pairing aa' suggests that the success of the law is dependent on the creditors. If they are motivated by greed, then the law becomes a tool for their personal gains.

The pair bb' demonstrates the Divine's sanction of the law. This combination compliments each other by connecting the law as Yahweh's proclamation that must be carried out by the creditor. The proclamation in b seems to benefit the debtor since it instructs the release of loans. The blessing as in b' inverse are directed to the creditor in all his work and undertaking as a reward for implementing the divine instruction. The creditors are given a picture of their endless compensation if they adhere to the commandment. In comparison, the benefits for the creditors seem to outweigh those for the debtors. This suggests an imbalance in benefits between the creditors and the debtors, thus leading to economic disparity between the two groups.

arrangement of elements of a text in a symmetrical pattern corresponding to each other. It is a literary device to assist readers to identify and understand the main emphasis of the text.

⁶An *inclusion* is the upper and lower limit of a text or passage.

The pairing cc' portrays actions for the creditors in dealing with their clients. On the one hand, c reveals actions the creditors should take when dealing with foreigners. That is, the creditor should not relieve them of their debts. The foreigners are exempt from the law on the release of debts and they should pay the creditor the full amount owed. Meanwhile, c' suggests that the creditor should not hesitate to issue debts to their neighbours. This can be looked at as a precaution for the creditors to safeguard them from lost revenues. However, this discriminates towards aliens in the land thus driving them to poverty. This adds to the problem of the poor by adding aliens to the group.

The combination dd' portrays a different situation. It reveals a utopian portrait of the elimination of poverty due to sufficient lending. This is clear through a consideration of d which indicates that there is no one in need in the land. This explains the possible outcome of the law on debt release. It could potentially alleviate poverty and poor of their burdens. Thus d' inverses, complements this by encouraging the creditor to lend out sufficiently. This is preventive measure for the creditor, to eliminate foul play and lend appropriately. If business is carried out accordingly, then the problem of the poor could be resolved. However, from an ideological perspective the portrait of society given here, could be an ideology to veil the abuses of the creditors.

The pairing ee' are binary opposites. On the one hand, e is an exhortation to follow and obey the Lord's command on debt release diligently. This command is directed towards the creditor ordering them to do as the Lord instructs. This also reveals a positive portrait of the creditor and their action. The command verifies the action of the creditors even if their dealings are corrupt and abusive towards the poor. Such a depiction could be harmful for the poor and the have-nots, who are at the receiving end of the creditors' wrongful dealings. The creditors' abuses of the law in debt release are alluded to in e'. The expression "hard hearted" suggests the unwillingness on the part of

the creditors to lend sufficiently to poor. The hesitation suggests the creditors' hunger for profits, and their desire to protect their own interests.

The pairing ff' manifests the beneficiaries of the law on debt release. On the one hand, f indicates that the creditor will be blessed, and his role as a lender will be elevated from being a local lender to becoming an international moneylender. This indicates an improvement in the creditor's wealth and the potential to lend overseas. Such transaction will mean further profits and rewards for the creditor thus the gap between the creditor's wealth and the poor increases. It should be noted in this law, the creditor is allowed to lend unreservedly to the foreigners. Meanwhile, the f' inverse reaffirms the blessing in f. The inverse f' reveals the ideal situation for the creditors that they will never become borrowers. This is assurance that the creditor will never become bankrupt and their fortunes are secured. In this light, the creditor will always be rich, while the poor and lender are always caught in the vicious cycle of borrowing. This means that the law on remission of debts will not eliminate poverty as intended, rather it maintains the situation of the poor and preserve the privileges of the rich.

The above chiasmic structure reveals that the law concerning the cancelation of debts works in favour of the rich or creditor, instead of the poor. The chiasmus reveals the law as a mechanism of the rich to preserve and maintain their status in society. Having the debtor debt free is not ideal because it only gave them borrowing power to borrow again. Thus, their status will never improve. They are caught up in the vicious cycle of borrowing. The chiasmic structure also reveals the ideological orientation of the law of remission of debts. The law yields the impression that the debtor is the sole beneficiary while in actual fact it serves the profit hunger of the rich. The law therefore unveils the increasing gap between the rich and the poor in Israelite society.

4.4 Grammatical Analysis of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11

This analysis focuses on the key Hebrew words that might have unravelled the ideologies engraved in the text. This will not be an exhaustive word study of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 but an analysis of selected terms that may shed light on the ideological dimensions of the text.

The first term to consider is שְׁמִיטָה (*šemita*) meaning “release,” “thrown down,” “let fall” or “to remit.”⁷ This Hebrew feminine noun is used four times in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 (vv. 1, 2, 3 & 9). F.Brown, S.Driver, and C.Briggs identified the remittance of debts the term refers to as temporary, release.⁸ Reading this meaning into the text reveals the release commanded in the instruction as temporary thus the creditor is expected to exact full payment. This suggests that the law in Deuteronomy 15; 1-11 only provides temporary relief for the debtor. Therefore, the debtor’s situation remained unchanged. Viewing this reading from an ideological perspective reveals the law on the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 working against the poor, and for the rich, thus the disparity between the rich and poor remain unresolved.

Furthermore, the term is a derivative of the Hebrew word שָׁמַת (*šmita*) meaning “be desolate” or “lay waste”⁹ and figuratively denotes the removal of power from someone.¹⁰ Reading this meaning into the text provides an alternative meaning for the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11. That is, laying waste debts reveals a negative view on the process of debt cancellation. It yields the idea that money lent is money

⁷William Wilson, *New Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1987), 346.

⁸F.Brown, S.Driver, and C.Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1030.

⁹F.Brown, S.Driver, and C.Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publisher, 1906), 127.

¹⁰Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament* (Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1161.

wasted. This supposition from an ideological perspective reveals another perspective on debt cancellation. It perceives investing into the lending business as an unprofitable enterprise. In this sense, the law therefore could be seen as a warning for the rich not to engage in lending money to the poor. This attitude of the rich potentially contributed to the disparity between the rich and poor.

Interestingly enough, there is no clear reference made to prior years of debt servicing. The release is only for the seventh year. Therefore, if the creditor has exacted and aggressively followed up repayments in the other six years, then by the seventh year the loan should by then be fully settled. This law is silenced as to the other years of debt servicing; meaning the creditor can operate as usual and aggressively in the other six years. In this sense, the time revealed in the text can be seen as a warning to the creditor of the time frame they should operate. That is, creditors should be conscious to offer the repayment scheme in a six year period. This will impose harsh repayment conditions on the debtor that could drive them deep into debt. In this light, the law on remission of debts therefore is for the benefit of the creditor instead of the debtor, and contributes to widening the gap between the rich and poor.

The second Hebrew term to consider is the masculine noun **בַּעַל** (*ba'al*) in v. 2 meaning “creditor,” “lord,” “owner,” “ruler” or “husband.”¹¹ Considering the various nuances of the term reveals the social and economic situation of the creditor. The different nuances of the term reveal the creditor to be a person of power and of high social standing in society. The different nuances not only suggest the creditor to be a person of the elite but they also reveal the creditors’ imposition of power and control over the debtors. The former allows for an oppressive relationship between the creditor

and the debtor. In such a relationship the creditors could impose their power over the debtor enslaving them for their own benefits and gains.

The Hebrew term to ruminate on is the third masculine singular verb **יָגִישׁ** (*yigis*) translated as “exacting.” The verb is a derivative of the verb **נָשָׂא** (*naš'*) meaning “to drive,” “to press,” “to lend on interest” or “require a payment.”¹² In the text, the term is used to describe how the creditor should approach his local and foreign debtors. The nuances “to drive” and “to press” reveal the exacting process as a forceful undertaking. They imply that the creditor has to collect his repayments by the use of force. The use of force depicts the tendency to injured or hurt the debtor in order for creditor to collect payments. Such undertaking puts the debtors at risk of extortion and abuses.

The irony is that the creditors should “not” exact - **לֹא-יָגִישׁ** (*lo'-yigis*) from a neighbour in the seventh year, they should only exact from foreigners. Such a move could mean assurance for the creditor of some form of compensation to balance out lost revenues from the release of local debts. This from an ideological perspective spurs nationalistic feelings and discrimination towards the aliens in society thus, creating social upheavals in society.

On the other hand, the use of the Hebrew phrase **כָּל-בָּעַל** (*kal-ba 'al*) “every creditor” in v. 2 suggests the inclusiveness of the law. That is it could include the poor who lends and become creditors themselves. This could mean that any unpaid wages, goods and services supplied by the poor labourers will be subject to cancellation as they could also be treated as debts. This means that the law drives the poor into further

¹¹F.Brown, S.Driver, and C.Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 127. See also, Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Tennessee: AMG Publishers, 2003), 151

¹²Ibid., 620.

hardships rather than relieving them of their burdens. From an ideological perspective, this means that the law on the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 does not eliminate economic disparity as it poses to do. Instead, it generates more problems for the poor and thus widening the gap between them and the rich.

Nevertheless, the foreigners נִכְרִי (*nuakariy*) could also refer to people of another family or tribe or a person of unknown origins.¹³ Consideration of these definitions of the concept implies that exacting claims from foreigners can be inclusive of other poor Israelites who were unknown or may not be in any familial relation to the creditor. This from an ideological view reveals a loophole for the creditor to exempt the debtors from the law. In this sense, the law therefore is not as inclusive as it poses to be but rather there are avenues for the creditors to safeguard their interests and wealth. In this sense, the law does not affect the creditors' revenues or solve the economic inequality between the rich and poor.

The last word to consider is בָּרַךְ (*barake*) meaning to “bless” “to kneel,” “to salute” or “to greet.”¹⁴ This word is mentioned three times in the passage and in all three occasions, it demonstrates as a reward if the creditors obey the law. The three-fold usage of the term suggests the passage is emphasising blessings and rewards for the creditors. This from an ideological perspective reveals the beneficiaries of the law to be the creditors rather than the poor who the law poses to alleviate of their problems. In this light, economic inequality is widened between the rich and poor.

In summation, the analysis of the selected Hebrew terms reveals that the law concerning the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 is for the benefit of the rich

¹³Ibid., 649.

¹⁴Baker and Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament*, 166.

creditor, rather than helping the poor. So, from an ideological perspective the law clearly seems to be an ideology of the rich to protect their interests and status.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the intrinsic analysis of the text reveals that the law on the release of debt is an ideology of the rich to preserve their interests and business enterprises. Both the structural and grammatical analysis support the above claim and both identify the creditor to be the main player and beneficiary of the law. In this light, the law does not really aid the poor in relieving them of their burden, rather it carries ideologies that preserve the status of the creditor, resulting in widening the gap between the rich and poor.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In this project I approached the text with the suspicion that the law on the release of debts in Deuteronomy 15:1-11 is an ideology of the elite and rich to serve their interests and maintain their status in society, which to some extent increase the gap between the rich and poor. To prove my suspicions, I employed the three-fold method of ideological criticism to analyse the chosen text. Ideological criticism requires the interpreter to identify his or her ideologies, the ideologies in the context of the text and the ideologies engraved in the text.

In determining the ideologies of my context as a reader, I drew special attention to the *matai* (chiefly) system because it is the core organisational structure of Samoan society. In my analysis, I highlighted the ideologies attached to the *matai* system to preserve its status, and how these interests led to hardships face by the *tautua* (service) group. The *matais'* ideologies contribute to Samoan society's economic, and social inequality by widening the gap between the haves and have-nots. This investigation shapes and defines my perspective in approaching the text.

In my investigation of the world behind the text, I claimed Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 as the work of the elite in the Josianic reign. This period is characterised by religious reforms such as worship purification and centralisation of worship in Jerusalem. This reform resulted in the destruction of local shrines and altars, and at the same time legitimised Jerusalem as the only place for worship. Hidden in these reforms are the political and economic ambitions of the elite. In other words, the reforms can be viewed

as the ideologies of the monarchy and elite which served their economic enterprises and to preserve their status in the society. It is an ideology that maintained, and contributed to the increasing the gap between the poor and the rich.

In my third and final analysis, I aimed at uncovering the ideologies presented in the literary dimensions of the text. In this analysis, I highlighted that the law on debt release seems to favour the creditor instead of debtor. The law is oriented to safeguard the interests and the businesses of the rich rather than easing the burdens of the poor it pose to alleviate. In this regard, the law on the release of debts therefore can be perceived as an ideology of the rich to preserve their interests. Thus contributing to economic and social inequalities and widening the gap between the rich and poor.

The three-fold analysis of ideological criticism conducted in this thesis, revealed similarities between my world as a Samoan reader and the world of the text. The analysis revealed that the *matai* of my Samoan context, the elite of the Josaianic reign and the creditors of Deuteronomy 15: 1-11 share the same interests and employed ideological measures to safeguard their wellbeing and status at the apex of society. Their attempts to preserve their interests undermine the underclass and poor in society. This to an extent leads to economic disparity – widening the gap between the rich and poor.

This research provides significant insights to the church and our daily life. We learn that the elite are very self centred and have little or no consideration the poor and those of lower status in the community. The elite took advantage of their status and political power to push through their own interests, preserving their status and privileges. In this situation, the interest of the elite compels everyone to follow without consideration of the social and economic situation of the others or their views. Thus, the laws and regulations, policies and standards are ideologies actually driven for the

betterment of only a few. More so, these fundamentals of the elite society widens the gap between the have and the have nots. The church has to review its structure in order to assess if the voice of the weak and others in the lower hierarchy are considered. Congregationalism, which is the organisational basis of the Congregational Christian Church in Samoa means people's voice is significant in its deliberations and establishment.

Secondly, the function of leadership or the elite has proven powerful. Such power should be favourably utilised to promote equality, justice and policies, and procedures that help people live and cope with life. In our local context, the church leadership should encourage and foster spiritual and faithful living in Jesus Christ at the same time consider the social and economic situation of the weak and the poor in the church. The status of the church and the faifeau is always at the top of the hierarchy in our society. Thus, the church should promote activities or procedures alleviating social, economic and cultural pressure to the poor and the weak. This in my view strengthens the spiritual growth of the church and its members.

Thirdly, the church must be mindful and critical of decisions that make the church look good in the eyes of the public but resulting in burdensome on church members creating social gaps in the community. Thus, the church leaders should be leading its people by paying special attention to the problems of the weak, the despair and those who are in the grassroot level. This means that the church should be implementing policies and procedures to improve everyone's standards instead of focusing on only a few. The church should also discard practices and activities that satisfy the political interest of its leaders and the elites but proved useless to the development of church and its people.

Glossary of Samoan Words and Phrases

Words

<i>Aiga</i>	<i>family</i>
<i>Aiga potopoto</i>	<i>extended family</i>
<i>Aumaga</i>	<i>untitled men</i>
<i>Faaaloalo</i>	<i>respect, gesture of</i>
<i>Faalavelave</i>	<i>an event out of ordinary disrupting the normal daily activity</i>
<i>FaaSamoa</i>	<i>The Samoan Way</i>
<i>Fale</i>	<i>house</i>
<i>Faletua ma Tausi</i>	<i>married women/wives of chiefs</i>
<i>Matai</i>	<i>chief</i>
<i>Matai system</i>	<i>chiefly system</i>
<i>Sa'oao/tamaitai</i>	<i>daughters of the chiefs of a respective village</i>
<i>Tautua</i>	<i>service, one who serves, to serve</i>
<i>Tulaga fale</i>	<i>placement of a house in a village</i>

Phrases

<i>A e iloa au i Togamau, out e iloa foi oe i Siulepa</i>	<i>If you do good deeds to me in Togamau, I will reciprocate in Siulepa</i>
<i>E sa ona soli le fono matai:</i>	<i>no one is allowed to come near the place of the chief council</i>
<i>E tupu mea avea</i>	<i>what you Donated/gave for others, the return is manifold</i>
<i>Faalavelave o le teuga tupe</i>	<i>similar to a bank deposit where you invest today by contributing for your family</i>
<i>Na tofia e le Atua Samoa ina ia tofia e matai</i>	<i>God destined and chose Samoa to be led and governed under the authority of chiefs</i>
<i>O le ala i le pule o le tautua</i>	<i>path to leadership is through service</i>
<i>O le malosi o le nuu</i>	<i>physical strength of the village</i>
<i>O Samoa ua uma ona totofi</i>	<i>each person knows his/her place/position within the society</i>

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