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Protection for Hired Workers

24: 14-15

Protection for hired workers REFLECT: Two-thirds of the world's population has horrific working conditions. Employers keep workers only up to the point at which they would get benefits, then lay them off with impunity. Small firms with a few workers are forced out of business by large firms who deliberately delay payment of bills for work done. Part-time workers are denied many benefits. It seems we need the moral force of Torah's mitzvot today? Yes? No? Why not?

The compassion or affliction that God's people heap upon the poor in their midst serves as a clear indicator of their loyalty to ADONAI, or their commitment to rebellion.

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

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

The interest in economics continues with this mitzvah regarding the proper treatment of workers. Conditions needed to be fair so as **not to take advantage of** hired day workers. These were people who had no permanent employment, but were hired for short-term jobs, and were often paid a daily wage. They were, therefore, more valuable and easily exploited than slaves, for whom owners had a legal and economic duty of care.



You are not to take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, namely, those who have no property, are destitute, and are experiencing some kind of affliction, **whether he is from your brothers or the outsiders in your land within your town gates (24:14)**. The prophets in the TaNaKh often refer to the oppression of **the poor and needy**, orphans, widows, and aliens (all of whom existed at the fringe of society) as the classic indication of a life of covenantal treachery. An Israelite could generally obey the Torah's mitzvot and appear to YHVH. However, God is always interested in the condition of His people. **He has told you, O man, what is good, and what ADONAI is seeking from you; to practice justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).**⁵²⁸

Just as **the lender** should return **the coat** to a **debtor by sunset** (see **En - Collecting a Pledge**), **Israelite employers** must pay **their hired workers** by the same time. **On that day you are to give him his wages - the sun is not to set on it - for he is poor and sets his heart on it.** Since daily pay was essential for daily food, any delay in payment meant immediate hunger for **the worker** and his family. Hence the urgency seen here, and the point of the generosity of the vineyard owner, whose decision to pay a day's wages for an hour's work recognized the need of the man who had to feed his family regardless of how long he worked (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ II - The Parable of the Rich Young Ruler: The Parable of the Landowner**).

It would have been easy for a wealthy employer to withhold the poor man's wages. But the employer was to remember that Isra'el was at one time oppressed by Pharaoh until she cried out to the LORD (Exodus 2:23 and 3:9). Likewise, if the poor man should cry out to ADONAI, the employer might find himself judged as Pharaoh was.⁵²⁹ **Otherwise, he will cry out against you to ADONAI, and you will have sin on you (24:15)**. When an employer failed to pay **his worker** on the day **he** worked, **the sin** was **his** to bear. This violated the care for the covenant community so prevalent in **Deuteronomy**. Not only that, workers' rights were also **God's** concern. Horrible working conditions and failure to pay were, and are, not just social problems. They are sins against YHVH. For this reason, the prophets in the TaNaKh directed the judgment of **Ha'Shem** against those who failed to pay workers

properly and on time (**Jeremiah 22:13ff** and **Isaiah 58:3b**), and an apostle in the B'rit Chadashah could do the same with equal vehemence (**James 5:4**).⁵³⁰

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, How wonderful that **You** are the powerful **King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 19:16)**, **You** have a kind heart for the lowly and poor. Praise **You** that a poor person has someone to cry out to, and you listen and hear. **Do not be anxious about anything - but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6)**. **You** promise **Your children (John 1:12)** something much better than prosperity on earth. **You** promise us a loving fatherly relationship with **You** where **You** take care of our needs, not necessarily our wants but **You** will supply what we need. **For whatever circumstance I am in, I have learned to be content. I know what it is to live with humble means, and I know what it is to live in prosperity. In any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of contentment - both to be filled and to go hungry, to have abundance and to suffer need. I can do all things through Messiah who strengthens me (Philippians 4:11c-13)**.*

***You** also promise those who love and follow **You** to never suffer shame but to have eternal life with you in heaven forever and ever! **For if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart it is believed for righteousness, and with the mouth it is confessed for salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever trusts in Him will not be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all - richly generous to all who call on Him (Romans 10:9-12)**. What joy and peace it is to know, love and to follow **You**! In **Yeshua's** holy name and **His** power of resurrection. Amen*