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Justice for the Poor

24: 17-22

Justice for the poor DIG: How were the disadvantaged to share in the blessing of the Land? What was the three-fold command? Was this a hand-out? Why? Why not? What was the responsibility of the farmer? Was this merely charity? Why? Why not?

REFLECT: What would it be like to live in a society like the one described here? How do you leave the gleanings from your bounty for the poor and helpless? What happens in your life when you start thinking about others? Who is looking at you and will notice this viewpoint?

ADONAI made sure that the outsider, the orphan, and the widow, though not owning any land for themselves, might share in the blessings of the Land.

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 fourteen**.

Justice towards defenseless people, such as **the outsider** (the alien resident), the orphan, and the widow, is a classical theme of all ancient moralists whether in Egypt, Canaan, or Isra'el. The TaNaKh insists that the protection of the weak is a duty not only for kings (**Psalm 72:12-14**), but also for the whole society (**Deuteronomy 10:18, 27:19; Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:33; and Proverbs 22:22**). The reason for such concern for the weak

and vulnerable is that **Isra'el** was once a helpless slave in **Egypt**, and **ADONAI** redeemed **her**.⁵³⁵



Justice for all (24:17-18): You are not to twist justice (Hebrew: *mishapt*, meaning *the rights of*) **for an outsider or orphan, and you are not to take a widow's coat, her blanket at night, as collateral.** This obviously applies to legal **justice**, legal *rights*, and therefore highlights the importance of treating the cases of the poor with equal care and *justice*. But *mishapt* has a broader meaning than courtroom justice, and includes a person's rights in general. The mitzvot that follow are thus a matter of *rights*, and not hand-outs. **But you are to remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and ADONAI your God redeemed you from there. Therefore, I am commanding you to do this thing (24:17-18).**

A share of the Land for all (24:19-22): The topic of the socially disadvantaged continues with this **threefold** command, which gives **them** a stake in the three typical crops in **the Land**. The underlying idea of this mitzvah is that all members of the covenant community have rights (see [Eh - Compassion for Travelers](#)), and are, in principle, to a share in the blessings of **the Land**, which ultimately is given to the people as a whole.⁵³⁶

When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you are not to turn back to get it. A sheaf was a very large thing to forget. So, if you *ignored the sheaf*, it probably meant that your bounty was so great that you really didn't need it. It meant that it wasn't as important to you as it was to others. This person was too busy gathering all his blessings. And that **sheaf** was either **forgotten** or *ignored*. This commandment was concerned with the proper distribution of goods. **The Torah** always brings mankind to think about the welfare of his or her neighbors and to share with them (see the commentary on [Ruth Aq - Ruth Gleans in the Field of Bo'az](#)). **It is for the outsider, for the orphan and for the widow - in order that ADONAI your God may bless you in all the work of your hands (24:19).** That is the core of the commandment. If

everyone obeyed this mitzvah, everyone would have been satisfied; there would be no hoarding and no waste.⁵³⁷

When you beat your olive tree, one of the ways of gathering olives, you are not to search through the branches afterward. It is for the outsider, for the orphan and for the widow (24:20). It was mercifully ordered that **the Israelites** should give **the olive trees** but one **beating**, leaving for the poor all the fruit that did not fall off the first time.⁵³⁸ So, those who did not, for various reasons, have a share in *the ownership* of **the Land**, were still to be given the chance to share in *the blessing* of **the Land** as the abundance of the true landowner.⁵³⁹

When you harvest your vineyard, you are not to pick over it afterward. It is for the outsider, for the orphan and for the widow (24:21). **The resident aliens** who came to live in the land of **Isra'el** knew that they would never go hungry. And in turn, **Isra'el** became a safer place because people did not have to steal and rob to eat. **The orphan and widow** were always taken care of.⁵⁴⁰ In this way **the needy** were not reduced to the humiliation of begging or seeking welfare. **They** could still work for **their** food.

In **Isra'el**, such gifts offered to the poor of **the Land** were really offerings to **ADONAI**. **The farmers**, who had allowed some produce to remain, were not simply being charitable to those less fortunate than **themselves**; **they** were expressing **their** gratitude to **God**, who had brought **them** out of **the slavery of Egypt** and given **them a Land of their own**.⁵⁴¹ **You are to remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt. Therefore, I am commanding you to do this thing (24:22).**

If the resident **alien, the orphan, and the widow of Deuteronomy** have anything in common with the legal immigrant, the homeless, the single parents, and the aged of today, then it is clear that our society is guilty of **twisting justice** from many people. The picture we see here in **Deuteronomy** is a caring society with an understanding of moral and social values. And **God** was at the center of it. Today, while many people are doing their best to help the vulnerable, in general, we have lost our way. The gods our society worship, though unrecognized as gods, are not the gods of the Exodus. The gleanings for the poor are, accordingly, very lean indeed.⁵⁴²

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that though there is a special love for **Isra'el**, **Your first born**, **You** also allow into **Your** heavenly kingdom **the Gentiles** who love and follow **You**. No longer are **the Gentiles** aliens, but are fellow citizens with **Isra'el** because of **Yeshua's** **breaking down the middle wall of separation**.*

You were dead in your trespasses and sins. At that time, you walked in the way of this world, . . . Therefore, keep in mind that once you - Gentiles in the flesh - were called "uncircumcision" by those called "circumcision" (which is performed on flesh by hand). At that time, you were separate from Messiah, excluded from the commonwealth of Isra'el and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Messiah Yeshua, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of the Messiah. For He is our shalom, the One who made the two into one and broke down the middle wall of separation. Within His flesh He made powerless the hostility . . . and to reconcile both to God in one body through the cross - by which He put the hostility to death. And He came and proclaimed shalom to you who were far away and shalom to those who were near - for through Him we both have access to the Father by the same Ruach. So then, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household. . . In Him, you also are being built together into God's dwelling place in the Ruach (Ephesians 2:1a, 11-14, 16-19, 22).

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). Praise you dear Father that Gentiles who love and confess Yeshua as Lord, are no longer aliens but part of the household of God! You are so awesome! In Yeshua's name and His power of resurrection. Amen