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The Poor and Interest

25: 35-38

The poor and interest DIG: What kind of a Hebrew word is “poor.” Why was the poor Jew likened to a Gentile foreigner? How were the Israelites supposed to treat the Gentiles? Who could Jews lend money to and gain interest? How were they to treat fellow Jews?

REFLECT: On a scale of 1 (low) to 10 (high) rank the priority of importance you place on work? On earning your own way? On earning the highest rate of interest you can on your money? How does the way you ranked yourself help or hinder your relationship with God?

The Israelites were instead, to show the same merciful love the LORD had shown them.

The Hebrew word for **poor** (*mook*, meaning *to be low or depressed*, or *to grow poor*) is rare, and you only see it three times in the TaNaKh, and all are contained in **Leviticus Chapters 25 and 27**. This speaks of **Israelites** (or anyone for that matter) who, for whatever reason, have become impoverished and unable to support themselves and, perhaps, had to see themselves into servitude in order to either pay back debts or to survive. The mitzvot of the Shemittah (**to see link click [El](#) - The Sabbath Year**) and the Yovel Year (see **[Em](#) - The Year of Jubilee**) are followed by teachings regarding how such relationships are to be conducted. To put it simply, the Torah regulates such relationships so that there is equal fairness to both the one who has become **poor** and the one who has become his master.⁵¹³

Sustaining the poor (25:35): The community of faith contains both **Jews** and **Gentiles**, and both were to be looked after with equal concern. **If a member of your people has become poor, so that he can't support himself among you, you are to assist him as you would a Gentile foreigner or a temporary resident, so that he can continue living with you (25:35).** On the most literal level, **the poor Jew** is compared to a **Gentile foreigner or a temporary resident** because **he** had become landless. Like **the foreigners in Isra'el**, **he** does not own agricultural property and is therefore without livelihood. The **Jewish** community is commanded to support **him**, preferably by hiring **him** or finding some

form of employment for **him**, as it would naturally do so for even **the foreigner** in **their midst**. Throughout history, much of the success of the **Jewish** community has come as a result of this internal concern for one another.⁵¹⁴



Interest (25:36-38): The Torah forbids us to charge **interest** from any of **God's people**. **Do not charge him interest or otherwise profit from him, but fear your God, so that your brother can continue living with you (Leviticus 25:36)**. A **Jew** could **not** lend money to another **Jew** with interest. They could lend money to **Gentiles** and gain interest, but not **Jews** (**Leviticus 25:35-37; Deuteronomy 15:7-11, 23:19; Nehemiah 5:7-12; Job 24:9; Proverbs 28:8; Ezeki'el 18:13 and 22:12**). Generosity in such matter was extended even further by **Yeshua** (**Luke 6:34-35**). **If you lend money to one of My people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender and charge him interest** (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ef - Don't Gouge Your Brother**). **If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (Exodus 22:25-27)**.

The prophet **Ezeki'el** lists charging interest as a great evil on the level with idolatry, adultery, and robbery (**Ezeki'el 18:11-13**). When **the Israelites** returned from the Babylonian Captivity (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule**) and needed to borrow **money** from the wealthy among them to pay the Persian taxes, the wealthy among them lent **money** at a high interest rate and even began to foreclose on property and families when the debt could not be paid. **Nehemiah** rebuked **the money-lenders** soundly (see the commentary on **Ezra-Nehemiah Cf - The Complaints of the Poor Israelites**).

In the Talmud (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ei - The Oral Law**), **the prohibition on charging is extended to avoid even the "dust of interest."** Gifts and favors offered by the borrower for the lender are forbidden. Anything that might be

construed as payment for the use of another's money is forbidden by the Talmudic extensions. Yet, at the same time, other Talmudic legislators struggled to find creative ways by which the prohibition might be avoided.⁵¹⁵

Do not take interest when you loan him money or take a profit when you sell him food. In addition, **the Israelites** were not to take advantage of fellow needy **Israelites** by **selling food** to them for a **profit**. The purpose of these mitzvot was to prevent the complete devastation of those who fell on hard times and consequently went into debt.⁵¹⁶ **They** were instead, to show the same merciful **love the LORD** had shown **them. I am ADONAI your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt in order to give you the land of Canaan and be your God (25:37-38).**

In practical terms, the prohibition on charging interest is one that applies on a personal level, but not necessarily on the institutional level. A bank or other **money**-lending institution is not necessarily in view here. Still, a believer would do well to avoid any financial entanglement whereby he will directly profit from any interest paid on a loan by another believing **Gentile** or **Jew**, or for that matter, an unbelieving **Jew**.⁵¹⁷

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise and thank **You** for **Your** mercy and grace to poor sinners. **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not from yourselves - it is the gift of God. It is not based on deeds, so that no one may boast (Ephesians 2:8-9).** Too often when we have food and clothes we do not feel poor, but real wealth is in an eternal loving relationship with **You. David** wrote **Psalms 63** when **he** was in the wilderness, probably when **he** was being sought after by King Sha'ul to be killed. **David** chose to focus not on the poverty of living in a wilderness, but on the joy of **God's steadfast love**; which lifted **his** heart to joy and praise. **Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; in Your name I will lift up my hands (Psalms 63:3).***

*Thank you dear Heavenly **Father** that no matter how poor we may feel due to our circumstances on earth, we can trust with absolute confidence in **Your steadfast love** for **Your** children and that **Yeshua** is preparing an eternal home (**John 14:1-3**) in heaven for those who **love You**. No earthly trial can take away our joy when we focus on **Your steadfast and eternal love. For I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be compared with the coming glory to be revealed to us (Romans 8:18).** In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*