

God's Old Testament Laws

Often we find that those who have material wealth take advantage of those who have little, often gaining more at the expense of the exploited poor. The Bible has much to say about how believers are to treat the poor and needy.

In various ways God has expressed His great concern for the poor, the needy and the oppressed. The Lord God is the champion of the poor and the needy. He reveals Himself as:

- * **Their refuge.**
(Ps 14:6; Isa 25:4)
- * **Their help.**
(Ps 40:17; 70:5)
- * **Their deliverer.**
(1 Sa 2:8; Ps 12:5; 34:6; 35:35:10; 113:7; Lk 1:52-53)
- * **Their provider.**
(Ps. 10:14; 68:10; 132:15)

Elimination of Poverty

God gave to the Israelites a number of ways to eliminate poverty. "There should be no poor among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you." Dt 15:4.

*God forbade the charging of interest on loans to the poor. (Ex 22:25; Lev 25:35-36)

*If the poor gave something as security for a loan, the person loaning the money has to return the item by sunset.

*If a poor person was hired to work for a rich man, he was to receive his pay every day so that he could buy food for himself and his family. (Dt 24:14-15)

*During the harvest season, grain that was dropped was to be left so that the poor could glean it for themselves. (Lev 19:10; Dt 24:19-21)

*Every seven years, all debts of poor Israelites were to be canceled. (Dt 15:1-6; 15:7-11)

Additional Laws

***In addition to providing the year for canceling debts, God provided a year for return of property – the Year of Jubilee (every fifty years), when he commanded that all land that had traded hands since the previous Year of Jubilee was to be returned to its original family owner. (Lev 25:8-55)**

***Justice was to be impartial; neither the rich nor the poor were to receive any favoritism in the law courts. (Ex 23:2-3,6; Dt 1:17; Pr 31:9).**

God sought to protect the poor from being exploited by those with material means and to ensure justice for them. Unfortunately, the Israelites did not always keep these laws. Instead, many of the rich took advantage of the poor and increased their misery. For such actions the Lord through the prophets spoke severe words of judgment against the wealthy Israelites. (Isa 1:21-25; Jer 17:11; Am 4:1-3; 5:11-13; Mic 2:1-5; Hab 2:6-8; Zec 7:8-14)

“...you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. Seek good not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is.” Am 5:12-14

Jesus' Example

Much of Jesus' ministry was to the poor and disadvantaged in Jewish society whom no one else seemed to care about, such as the oppressed and downtrodden (Lk 4:18-19), Samaritans (Lk 17:11-19; Jn 4:1-42), those with leprosy (Mt 8:2-4; Lk 17:11-19), widows (Lk 7:11-15; 20:45-47), and the like. He had harsh words of judgment for those who clung tightly to worldly possessions and ignored the poor. (Mt 10:17-25; Lk 6:24-25; 12:16-20; 16:13-15,19-31). Jesus assumed and expected that his people would give generously to the poor and needy. (Mt 6:1-4) Jesus and his disciples had a money bag from which he and his disciples would give to the poor. (Jn 12:5-6; 13:29) Such giving was not regarded as optional by Jesus.

Our Responsibility To the Less Fortunate

The apostle Paul demonstrated deep concern for those in need. Early in his ministry, He took an offering to Jerusalem for the needy Christians in Judea. (Ac 11:28-30) The council encouraged Paul and his associates to “continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” (Gal 2:10) Paul regarded giving so highly that he states in the book of Romans that one of the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to Christians is the ability to give generously for the needs of God's work or people. (Ro 12:8; 1 Ti 6:17-19) “Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” (Gal 6:10) Those who have plenty are to share with those who have needs. (2 Co 8:14-15)

