

# Justice and the Marginalized

Printed Text • Deuteronomy 24:10–21

Devotional Reading • 3 John 1:2–8

## Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will EXPLORE God's standards for justice, APPRECIATE how God loves those who are poor and marginalized, and SHARE love with those who are rejected by others.

## In Focus

Melissa couldn't believe her bad luck. She had been laid off three times in the past two years. Every time she was financially stable, her company announced plans to downsize, or shut down. That evening, Melissa needed time alone, but then her phone rang.

"Brandy told me about the cutbacks," her brother Adam said sympathetically.

Melissa said, "That wasn't her news to tell. And you need to mind your own business!" Adam quickly said, "Don't shut me out again! God has a purpose. He is your provider, not the company. He's always got your back!"

Melissa hated when her brother got all preachy. His religion was fine for him, but it wasn't her thing. "Adam, my dinner's getting cold. I've got to go."

"Sis, wait!" Adam said. "I know you don't care for Jesus, but He gave His church some very specific instructions about what to do when people hit hard times. I want to help, and my church has a program that might be just right for your current situation."

"I'm not some charity case, Adam" Melissa said.

"I know, Sis," Adam said. "Just give this a bit of a chance. It can't hurt. Can I come by and talk with you about it tomorrow?"

Melissa hated that her brother wouldn't take no for an answer. She hated her situation. But she also hated feeling so much hate at it all. "Tomorrow, then." Melissa hung up the phone as tears ran down her face.

*What programs does your church support to help the disenfranchised and marginalized in your community?*

## Keep In Mind

"But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing." (Deuteronomy 24:18, KJV)

## Words You Should Know

**A. Hired Servant (Deuteronomy 24:14)** sakir (Heb.) – A paid employee, contracted for a certain number of years

**B. Pervert (v. 17)** natah (Heb.) – Turn aside, repel, or decline

## Say It Correctly

**Pentateuch.** PEN-tuh-took

**Hammurabi.** Hah-muh-RAW-bee

## KJV

**Deuteronomy 24:10** When thou dost lend thy brother any thing, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge.

11 Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee.

12 And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge:

13 In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the Lord thy God.

14 Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates:

15 At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the Lord, and it be sin unto thee.

16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.

17 Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge:

18 But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the Lord thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.

20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

## NLT

**Deuteronomy 24:10** "If you lend anything to your neighbor, do not enter his house to pick up the item he is giving as security.

11 You must wait outside while he goes in and brings it out to you.

12 If your neighbor is poor and gives you his cloak as security for a loan, do not keep the cloak overnight.

13 Return the cloak to its owner by sunset so he can stay warm through the night and bless you, and the Lord your God will count you as righteous.

14 "Never take advantage of poor and destitute laborers, whether they are fellow Israelites or foreigners living in your towns.

15 You must pay them their wages each day before sunset because they are poor and are counting on it. If you don't, they might cry out to the Lord against you, and it would be counted against you as sin.

16 "Parents must not be put to death for the sins of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents. Those deserving to die must be put to death for their own crimes.

17 “True justice must be given to foreigners living among you and to orphans, and you must never accept a widow’s garment as security for her debt.

18 Always remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from your slavery. That is why I have given you this command.

19 “When you are harvesting your crops and forget to bring in a bundle of grain from your field, don’t go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigners, orphans, and widows. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all you do.

20 When you beat the olives from your olive trees, don’t go over the boughs twice. Leave the remaining olives for the foreigners, orphans, and widows.

21 When you gather the grapes in your vineyard, don’t glean the vines after they are picked. Leave the remaining grapes for the foreigners, orphans, and widows.

## The People, Places, and Times

**Deuteronomy.** Deuteronomy is one of the most significant books in the Old Testament. It is directly quoted over 40 times in the New Testament, exceeded only by Psalms (quoted 68 times), and Isaiah (quoted 55 times). In fact, Jesus Himself quoted from Deuteronomy each time He was tempted by Satan during His forty days and nights in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 6:13, 16; 8:3). When a lawyer asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the Law (Matthew 22:36), Deuteronomy again provided the answer, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (6:5). Verse 6 goes on to say, “These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.” It was obvious Jesus had obeyed the command and hidden the Word in His heart so that He would not sin against God (Psalm 119:11). We can do the same if we memorize the Word, meditating on it day and night in order to obey it and be blessed by it (Joshua 1:8).

*Are you able to follow Jesus’ example to use the power of God’s Word to defend yourself against the attacks of the enemy?*

## Background

In chapter 24, the Israelites are introduced to a set of miscellaneous laws. It speaks to the understanding of marital commitments for grounds for divorce and remarrying after divorce (vv. 1–4). Verse 5 explains why newly married men are absolved of military duty for one year. The understanding of loan and collateral is interpreted in verse 6. If a person borrows anything, he is expected to provide collateral of his choosing, as a sign of good faith for the loan. Kidnapping to sell someone as a slave was forbidden (v. 7). Verses 8–9 are not laws, but reminders of the priestly directives on how to deal with those who have leprosy (Leviticus 13–14). This assortment of laws for the Israelites is presented in concert with previous laws framing a clear expectation of how to govern themselves. Their understanding and their ability, or inability, to appropriately practice these laws would have societal and divine consequences (Deuteronomy 24:15). These laws are not directed only to those who were wealthy, but are equally important for those who were poor. The remaining portion of chapter 24 is fixed on the dignity of the poor.

*Why was there such an emphasis on the dignity of the marginalized?*

### At-A-Glance

1. The Debtors (Deuteronomy 24:10–15)
2. The Disassociation (v. 16)
3. The Destitute (vv. 17–21)

## In Depth

### 1. The Debtors (Deuteronomy 24:10–15)

The theme of loans and collateral, initially sketched in verse 6, resurfaces in more detail in verse 10. Most often, debtors are viewed as being at the disadvantage of the loaner. Although in debt, the debtor should not lose their dignity or self-respect. The loaner oppressing the debtor or ignoring the debtor's family's needs is outlawed. God cares just as much for the well being of the debtor as He cares for the creditor's. Each person, regardless of status, is viewed equally in the sight of God. The loaner's job was not to intimidate or humiliate because someone owed a debt. As a symbol of good faith, the debtor was to initiate their repayment methods. Conversely, the loaner could not dictate what was to be used as collateral or payment. Further, he was not permitted to enter the debtor's home to demand his preferred method of payment.

If the only thing the debtor could afford to render were his sleeping clothes, then that should be deemed to be an acceptable form of payment. However, those were to be returned to the debtor by evening. The same courtesy is to be given to workers who live hand to mouth. They cannot wait overnight to receive their day's wages, so the employer must not force them to do so.

This was all enveloped with respect. Mutual respect was to be provided by both parties. The debtor knows he owes the debt and shows his willingness to pay. The creditor recognizes he is owed funds but trusts the fidelity of the debtor. It creates loving-kindness to treat your neighbor as you would also want to be treated (Mark 12:31).

*Should acts of kindness reciprocate kindness?*

### 2. The Disassociation (v. 16)

Moses reiterates that each person is to be treated individually. This means there is no generational penalty, where the children pay for the crimes of the parent or vice versa (Jeremiah 31:29; Ezekiel 18). Imposing a cumulative punishment would present unjust repercussions and unfair retaliation for offenses not committed by the person receiving the punishment. If this were to be allowed, families or villages could potentially be obliterated, all because of the offenses of another. Verse 16 seeks to eliminate such retaliatory actions.

What would happen if families had to pay for previous family members' delinquencies?

### 3. The Destitute (vv. 17–21)

Moses continues his dissection of the have and the have nots. He goes into further detail on how one must handle the disadvantaged. Regardless of one's social or economic class, each person must be treated the same. The imagery and remembrance of Israel being slaves are brought into focus. In Moses' use of the word slave, he does not want Israel to never forget how they too were disenfranchised in Egypt, classless and poor. Still, God chose to redeem them. Now freed, Israel is supposed to see the powerful and powerless as equal. They are so similar, we should consider the lowly as our neighbors. Taking care of your neighbors is something we should all do, especially the privileged. Gleaning—the process of sharing with the poor—is not only appropriate, but showcases true love for humanity. Their surplus is to serve as manna from heaven for the needy. Everyone has something to give.

*Do you think the poor have anything to give?*

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Why is God concerned about protecting people’s dignity (Deuteronomy 24:10–13)?
2. Why don’t we have to pay for the sins of our ancestors (v. 16)?
3. By calling them slaves, what did Moses want the Israelites to remember (v.18)?

### **Discuss the Meaning**

It is easy to think that if we have money or status that we are more important than others. In God’s eyes, each of us is considered the same and we should believe we are equal. How does God seek to deal with our ego and classism? How does Jesus’ bodily sacrifice coincide with an unredeemable debt?

### **Liberating Lesson**

The Urban Institute’s Well-Being and Basic Needs Survey found that nearly 40 percent of non-elderly adults report difficulty meeting basic needs such as food, healthcare, housing, and utilities. We are one of the wealthiest nations in the world, so why is this statistic still true? God blesses us so that we can be blessings to our neighbors. It is not a matter of the privileged and the underprivileged in the sight of God. It is never about lauding privilege, but being generous enough to share it knowing that we should love our neighbors as ourselves.

### **Application for Activation**

Daily, we have seen people on streets or near freeways holding signs that in essence say, “I need help.” Often we ignore their concern or don’t think we have enough to help them in their time of need. Yet our help, regardless of the increment, could be the assistance they need. Many of us have the privilege of going to a home, changing clothes, and having a meal. It may not be exactly what we want, but we have something. Maybe enough to share. Let’s do something! Look for ways to assist the underprivileged, whether providing for their needs, or advocating for their rights.

### **Follow the Spirit**

What God wants me to do:

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### **Remember Your Thoughts**

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Deuteronomy 24:10–21

The book of Deuteronomy reveals many attributes of God: He is jealous (4:24), faithful (7:9), loving (7:13), holy (26:15), merciful (4:31), and yet angered by sin (6:15). Indeed, it is these very attributes of God that makes Him concerned about His people and especially the marginalized. Deuteronomy 24:10–21 records some of the laws God established to protect the disenfranchised.

**24:10 When thou dost lend thy brother anything, thou shalt not go into his house to fetch his pledge. 11 Thou shalt stand abroad, and the man to whom thou dost lend shall bring out the pledge abroad unto thee. 12 And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: 13 In any case thou shalt deliver him the pledge again when the sun goeth down, that he may sleep in his own raiment, and bless thee: and it shall be righteousness unto thee before the LORD thy God.**

This law stipulates just dealings when making loans. If a pledge or security for the loan was required, the lender cannot go into the borrower's house and take anything he might want as security. He is required to wait outside the home for the borrower to bring the pledge to him. In this way the dignity of the borrower is preserved.

But God gives an additional stipulation to the lender. If the borrower is so poor that the only item he can give for security is his cloak, the lender must return the cloak by sunset. The borrower's cloak also served as his blanket at night, and he would need it to keep warm. However, this was not a new command. It was also given to the previous generation at Mt. Sinai in Exodus 22:26–27. "If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down: For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, when he crieth unto me, that I will hear; for I am gracious."

In other words, God takes note of what is done to the poor. If they cry out to the Lord due to an injustice, He firmly declares, "I will hear." Hear is the Hebrew word *shama'* (shaw-MAH). It does not only mean that God listens to the complaint with attention and interest, but that He will take action. The Lord is gracious, full of divine grace. This same gracious God will also "hear" us when we cry out to Him. In fact, He bids us to come boldly to His throne of grace to obtain mercy and help in the time of need (Hebrews 4:16). When the lender does what is commanded and returns the poor man's cloak, he will be blessed by the debtor, and approved by God as righteous.

**14 Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: 15 At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.**

Once again, Yahweh appears as the protector of the poor and the needy, this time on behalf of the destitute person who works as a laborer. It does not matter if the person is a fellow Jew or a resident alien, the day laborer must be paid his wages daily before sunset. The reason is that the poor "setteth his heart upon it," depending on the money to provide the daily necessities for himself and his family. As the word is commonly used elsewhere in Scripture, a "hired servant" (Heb. *sakir*, saw-KEAR) is usually with an employer for an appointed time of several years (Deuteronomy 15:18; Job 7:1; Isaiah 16:14). If that is the case in this verse, it seems reasonable to withhold wages from such a person and only pay them weekly, monthly, or even just at the end of their hiring period. They are not like day workers who might or might not be there the next day to collect accumulated wages. However, God

instructs His people that even hired servants who will be there for years need to be paid daily if they are living hand to mouth.

Consistent with the previous command, there is a warning to the employer. If denied his daily wages, the poor man's recourse was to cry to God, who will take appropriate action against the employer. Indeed, when Israel cried out to the Lord (Exodus 2:23, 3:9), God took action against Pharaoh through ten devastating plagues, and through drowning the entire army in the Red Sea (Exodus 14:28, 15:4). In like manner, the employer might find himself judged for withholding a poor man's wages.

Kindness to the poor was not only for employers. Proverbs provides this wise advice: "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor" (Proverbs 22:9), and "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given will he pay him again" (Proverbs 19:17). There are needy people today in similar situations that we can either give to personally or through donations to food banks, benevolence ministries, charities, etc. God's promise is to "bless" and to "repay" those who graciously give to the poor.

### **16 The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.**

This law regarding personal responsibility was straightforward: the person who sins is the one who should die for his sin. However, this law was necessary because in some nations, a son might be executed if his father's negligence caused the death of another man's son. For example, by the laws of Hammurabi (an 18th century BC Babylonian ruler), if a builder constructed a shabby house that fell and killed the son of the person who lived in the house, then the builder's son would be killed.

God wanted to ensure that Israel did not adopt that practice. Nevertheless, in spite of this law, the Jews sometimes used a proverb to excuse their sin: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). In other words, their forefathers were the ones that sinned (i.e., ate sour grapes), but now they were the ones unfairly enduring the bitter punishment (i.e., teeth set on edge). However, they were dishonest for they too had followed in the sinful footsteps of their ancestors; therefore, the Babylonian invasion and captivity they were enduring was just punishment for their own sins.

So God was reiterating to the people, through the prophet Ezekiel, the basic principle of this law by asserting, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Then Ezekiel summarized some of the sins a person must pay for. "If a man has a son that is a robber... that has oppressed the poor and needy... has not restored the pledge... has given forth upon usury... he shall surely die; his blood shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:10–13). Not surprisingly, among the offenses listed are sins against the marginalized, emphasizing once again God's concern for the poor and needy.

Although God's command is "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," yet He graciously announces that He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but desires that they should turn from their sin and live (Ezekiel 18:23, 32). It is for this reason that the plan of salvation is so extraordinary. After declaring that "all have sinned" (Romans 3:23), that "there is none righteous" (Romans 3:10), that "the wages of that sin is death" (Romans 6:23), God then upends His own Law. He sent His sinless Son to die on Calvary, the innocent in place of the guilty, paying the penalty so that the soul that sins but repents and "believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). If you have not yet accepted this incredibly gracious gift, today is your day of salvation (Hebrews 3:15), your day to choose to live and not die and declare the works of the Lord (Psalm 118:17).

**17 Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: 18 But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.**

The focus on the less fortunate continues and now the attention is turned to assuring that the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow—those who are particularly vulnerable—are treated justly and with love and respect (10:18). The righteous judgments given the marginalized in the courts should not be “pervert[ed]” (Heb. natah, naw–TAW), meaning turned aside, repelled, or declined. The judgment they receive must be enacted and not simply ignored. God is so serious about this that He issues this severe warning if His command is not followed. “Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow” (27:19), and “my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless” (Exodus 22:23–24). Mistreating the poor was a grave sin, and God would administer punishment accordingly. Israel was to treat foreigners with love, remembering they were oppressed as “bondmen” (Heb. ebed, EH–bed, “slaves”) in Egypt and how God punished the Egyptians as a result, delivering them with a mighty hand (15:15, 24:22). Israelites should have pity for those experiencing economic hardship, because they have the cultural memory of experiencing the same hardship. They also saw what happened to the nation that oppressed such people. Egypt was thoroughly destroyed, so they know God is powerful enough to visit a similar fate on them if they mistreated the needy.

**19 When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. 20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. 21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.**

The focus of this particular law is again on the marginalized: foreigners (strangers), the fatherless (orphans), and widows. It deals with the principle for providing food for the poor during harvest. The first of the three main crops mentioned was the “harvest in the field” which was either barley or wheat, both commonly referred to as grain. The overlooked sheaf (bundle) of grain was to be left for the underprivileged so that the Lord would bless the owner. Leviticus 23:22 gives this additional detail: “When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field..., neither shalt thou gather any gleaning of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger.” Gleaning is the act of collecting leftover crops from the fields after they have been harvested by the owner. This was the privilege of the poor so that they were not reduced to the humiliation of begging or seeking welfare. In so doing, they could still preserve their dignity by working for their food. Such was the case with Ruth who went to glean in the fields of Boaz (Ruth 2:3). Ruth is three times over the kind of person this law was written for: she is foreign, not protected by a father, and widowed. For his generosity toward Ruth and Naomi, the Lord blessed Boaz indeed and he was honored as the progenitor of King David and ultimately Jesus, the Messiah (Ruth 4:17; Matthew 1:5).

A similar procedure was to be followed for harvesting the other staple two crops, olives and grapes. Olives were harvested by laying down a sheet under the tree and sending a small person up the tree to hit its branches with a hard stick. The ripe olives would then fall to the sheet and be gathered up. This law instructs that only once were the olive trees to be beaten with poles to harvest olives. The remaining olives were for the alien, the widow, and the orphan. During grape harvest, the vines were gone over only once so that the needy could have the remainder.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **MONDAY**

God Executes Justice for the Poor  
(Psalm 140)

## **TUESDAY**

Remembering Our Marginalized Ancestors  
(Deuteronomy 26:1-11)

## **WEDNESDAY**

Woe to Those Who Mistreat Workers  
(James 5:1-11)

## **THURSDAY**

Justice for the Weak and Orphaned  
(Psalm 82)

## **FRIDAY**

Jesus' Compassion for the Helpless  
(Matthew 9:27-38)

## **SATURDAY**

Do Not Oppress the Alien  
(Leviticus 19:32-37)

## **SUNDAY**

Justice for the Poor  
(Deuteronomy 24:10-21)