

**January 26, 2020 - Deut. 15:7-16:17 - Aiding the Poor; Treatment of Slaves**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 15:7-16:17 - Aiding the Poor; Treatment of Slaves**  
**Psalm 119:137-176**  
**Haftarah: Amos 8:4-10 + 9:13-16, Isaiah 35:3-?**

### **Aiding the Poor; Treatment of Slaves**

In the Wilderness, the manna provided a miraculous way for Israel to be an equitable society, in which "whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack" (**Exodus 16:8**).

But settled in the Promised Land, the new situation would require a new set of guidelines.

Poverty should not exist in Israel, God says, if they would obey Him.

See previously in **Deuteronomy 15:4** NET- "However, there should not be any poor among you, for the LORD will surely bless you in the land that he is giving you as an inheritance, if you carefully obey him by keeping all these commandments that I am giving you today."

**Deuteronomy 15:7-8** - "If there be among you a poor man (*'ebyown*) of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth/lacks."

"poor" = *'ebyown* - poor, needy, oppressed, wretched

"If there be among you a poor man" - As there would be, according to the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem, if they did not keep the commandments of the law and continue in them (see **verse 4**)

"thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" - first, remember that what you have comes from the Lord and not from your own effort.

"thou shalt not harden thine heart" - "harden" = *'amats* - usually a good word for strength and courage. But in this instance it means insensitivity, and the same word is used elsewhere for hardening your heart against God (**2 Chronicles 36:13**).

"open thine hand wide" = *pathach* - be opened, let loose, throw open

To "open you hand" means to give freely, but also to "loose" the poor person from the constraints of your own opinions, judgments and biases. Set him free as much as you can, as you release not just your money but yourself, and as you open your heart as well as your hand toward that person.

Rashi - Some people stretch out their hand [to give], but then close it; therefore it says: "nor close your hand." - [Sifrei] [Rather] you shall open [your hand]: Even many times. If he does not want [your money] as a [charitable] gift, give it to him as a loan. (However, Rashi adds, you are not commanded to make him wealthy).

"that in which he is lacking" - This refers to a wife [i.e., you should help him marry a wife]. Similarly, it is stated: "I shall make for him (וְיָצַד) a helpmate opposite him" (Gen. 2:18). - [Keth. 66b]

Also, Jewish tradition says the best thing you can do for the poor person is to help him set up a business or be established in a trade.

In the same way that slavery was surrounded by so many restrictions that it was experienced more like being a hired worker, so "lending" to the poor (without interest) turned out to be more like a gift, since the seventh year did away with repayment.

Ideally, Israel as a community of faithful worshippers of Yahweh should not have the poor in her midst, since everyone is welcomed, incorporated and cared for. Human beings, however, are incompetent regarding the creation and maintenance of such an impeccable selflessness, and as such, the poor will always be there in the land.

Like all other aspects of the Law, it was waiting for Messiah to fulfill and complete it.

In one sense, believers will always identify with the poor since humility goes hand-in-hand with faith. Only the meek/poor will inherit the earth or Promised Land.

This ideal vision was realized in the early church:

In Mary's 'Magnificat' - "He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich (those enriching themselves) he has sent away empty." (**Luke 1:53**)

- **Acts 4:34-35** - "And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were NO needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need."

**Deuteronomy 15:9** - "Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee."

The cry of the poor and oppressed meant Israel was not obeying God in this, and He saw it as sin and rebellion.

**Deuteronomy 15:10** - "Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless

thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto."

Rashi - "You shall surely give him": Even a hundred times. — [Sifrei]

"and thine heart shall not be grieved" - Don't consider yourself a *victim* because of this!

**Deuteronomy 15:11** - "For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land."

And yet how can this be reconciled with:

- **Deuteronomy 15:4** NET- "However, there should not be any poor among you, for the LORD will surely bless you in the land that he is giving you as an inheritance, if you carefully obey him by keeping all these commandments that I am giving you today."

"poor" = *'ebyown* - poor, needy, oppressed, wretched

God's faithful will always be identified with the poor. God is depicted as continually coming to their rescue, so the type of picture of the humble/poor is always with us:

- **Psalm 37:11** - "But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

"meek" = *`anav* - meek, gentle, humble, poor, depressed, afflicted, miserable

- **Matthew 5:5** - "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

"Poor and needy" are often used together:

- **Psalm 37:14** - "The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor (*`anav*) and needy (*'ebyown*), and to slay such as be of upright conversation."

- **Psalm 72:4** - "He shall judge the poor (*`anav*) of the people, he shall save the children of the needy (*'ebyown*) and shall break in pieces the oppressor."

God is quick to hear the cry of the poor and oppressed:

- **Proverbs 19:17** - "Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward them for what they have done"

- **Proverbs 28:27** - "Those who give to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to them receive many curses."

- **Psalm 146:7** - "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry"

- **Isaiah 58:6–7** - "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?...to deal thy bread to the hungry, And that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; And that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

- **John 12:8** - "For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always."

Jesus quotes this passage in Deuteronomy. Those less fortunate than ourselves will always be with us, because without a place to give, we would be sucked into the black hole of self-seeking.

"me ye have not always" - There will always be opportunities to help the poor, but worship comes first, just as the tithe for the Levites comes before the 3rd year tithe given to the poor.

In fact, knowing God is the necessary step toward being able to give freely to those in need.

Bottom Line: God is insistent - He commands three separate times in this chapter to freely give to the poor - in **verses 8, 10 and 11**.

### **The Poor in the New Testament**

The Greek word *penes* where we get "penury" refers to the poverty of a daily laborer or one who has to work for their daily bread, living hand to mouth, but not destitute.

*Ptocheia* is the Greek word for poverty that is even deeper and more severe than the *penes* type of poverty. These would usually be destitute beggars, like Blind Bartimeus.

While the *penes* poor are looked on in favor by God, it is the *ptocheia* poor who constantly seem to be the victims of injustices committed against them and thus have a special place in the sphere of God's care.

- **2 Corinthians 8:9** "...yet for your sakes, he became poor..." or *ptocheia*. Jesus was stripped of everything - His clothes, his dignity and all earthly hope - and then hung on a Cross. Jesus became nothing in the eyes of this world, but He ushered in an unstoppable flow of God's grace, mercy and bounty for all.

Therefore:

- **Matthew 5:42** - "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you"

- **Luke 14:13-14** - "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous"

The ideal society foreshadowed in **Exodus 16:8** would be realized in the early church:

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common, And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people.” (**Acts 2:44-47**)

Our version of this is our “vow of poverty”: “Whatever I own that you need to own, you can have. Whatever you need that I don’t have, I’ll help you get.”

### **Remember Sodom**

Recall the Talmud’s description of Sodom. Charity was forbidden in Sodom because they believed it encouraged the proliferation of beggars. “Although the people of Sodom were guilty of all the sins, their fate was sealed against them only because they refused to give alms to the poor.”

The attributes of Sodom are described in **Ezekiel 16:49**: “...pride, fullness of bread and idleness, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor.”

### **Laws of Slavery**

**Deuteronomy 15:12** - "And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee."

(Specifically, at the end of the sixth, and beginning of the seventh year).

The previous rules about the Sabbatical year and release from debts were meant to prevent Israelites from selling themselves into slavery.

Here, the slave was "sold unto you" by someone else. Rashi says this would mean sold by the courts:

Rashi - "sold to you": By others [but not one who sells himself because of poverty]. Scripture is speaking here of one whom the court sold [for a theft that he had committed]. But has it not already been stated, “If you buy a Hebrew servant” (Exod. 21:2) and there, too, Scripture is referring to one whom the court sold (Mechilta)? Nevertheless, [it is repeated here] because of two points which are new here: The first is that it is written [here] “or a Hebrew woman,” that she, too, [like a manservant,] goes free at the end of six [years]. This does not mean a woman whom the court has sold, for a woman is not sold [by the court] on account of a theft, since it is stated [that the thief will be sold] “for his theft” (Exod. 22:2), not for her theft. Thus, [we are referring here to] a minor whom her father sold [as a handmaid], and it teaches you here that if six years terminate before she shows signs [of puberty], she goes free (Exod. 21:7-11). The

second new point here is: "You shall surely provide him." (in verses 13-14)

Just to be clear, in the Old and New Testaments presuppose slavery and do not altogether condemn it. But the scriptures do condemn those who kidnap persons and sell them into slavery.

**1 Timothy 1:10** includes "manstealers" (*andrapodistēs*) in a list of "the lawless and disobedient" along with murderers, manslayers and whoremongers.

The slave trade in the Americas differed from ancient slavery in one major way - it was exclusively based on "manstealing," in which humans were kidnapped in Africa and treated as property rather than persons, and bought and sold as commodities. This falls outside of these regulations in Deuteronomy. There is no biblical defense for the American slave trade or what is called "chattel slavery." It is directly in opposition to the Gospel.

This also shows how a whole society can be deceived about their basic values.

### Provision for the Freed Slave

**Deuteronomy 15:13-14** - "And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him."

Rashi - One might think that I must [give him] only these things [listed in the verse here]. Therefore, Scripture states, "from what the Lord, your God, has blessed you," meaning, from everything with which your Creator has blessed you. This [therefore] excludes mules, [which are sterile, and are thus not considered within the realm of blessing] (Kid. 17a).

Not only to supply his present wants, but for his future use, and to set him up in the world: "loading thou shall load him"; give him as much as he can carry, and stand up under.

Just as God loads us with blessings and grace when He delivers us from bondage to sin and Satan.

**Deuteronomy 15:15** - "And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day."

Rashi - And I loaded you up [with booty], and then did so a second time, from the spoil of Egypt and from the spoil at the Sea [of Reeds]; so too should you load him up, and then do so a second time. — [Sifrei]

The Bible's discussion of slavery is always accompanied by a reminder that Israel was a slave in Egypt. They had to identify with those in bondage.

## The Servant "Forever"

**Deuteronomy 15:16-17** - "And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise."

Not at the door of the master's house, but at the Court of the Sanhedrin, where this was declared publicly.

Rashi - forever: Heb. לְעוֹלָם. One might think that [לְעוֹלָם, "forever"] is to be interpreted literally. Therefore, Scripture states: "[And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It will be a Jubilee for you;] and you shall return, every man to his property, and you shall return, every man to his family" (Lev. 25:10). Consequently, you learn that the term לְעוֹלָם here can mean only the period until the Jubilee. [This period is also called לְעוֹלָם.]- [Mechilta 21:6]

Rashi - a manservant (עֶבֶד) must have his ear pierced, but not a maidservant. — [Sifrei] The "do likewise" for her means to generously provision her the same as the manservant when set free.

## Messiah the Willing Slave

Jesus is the great fulfillment of this picture of the willing slave.

Jesus said prophetically through David in **Psalm 40:6**: "My ears You have opened," it speaks of this "opening" of the ear in the bond-slave ceremony. He was the willing bond-slave of God the Father.

Compare **Isaiah 50:5-6** - "The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting."

Paul refers to himself as just such a slave in **Galatians 6:17**: "From now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Paul was a slave for life to Jesus.

As the Master's slave, He became a servant to all, even washing his own disciples' feet (**John 13:1-17**).

Jesus "did not come to be served but to serve" (**Mark 10:45**).

God's faithful will not only be identified always with the poor, but with slaves, and the "offscouring of all things." (**1 Corinthians 4:13**)

**Deuteronomy 15:18** - "It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away

free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest."

or, "You shall not be troubled when you send him free from you"

Why is he worth a double hired servant?

One explanation is that a hired servant works only in the day, but a slave is on call through the night as well. But Rashi has an interesting alternate explanation:

Rashi - "for twice as much as a hired servant": From here our Rabbis said: A Hebrew slave serves both by day and by night, and that is double the amount of labor of a man hired only for day work. And what is his service during the night? That his master gives him a Canaanite maidservant [as a wife], and the [resultant] children [belong] to the master. — [Sifrei , Kid. 15a]

### **Firstborn**

**Deuteronomy 15:19-20** - "All the firstling males that come of thy herd and of thy flock thou shalt sanctify unto the LORD thy God: thou shalt do no work with the firstling of thy bullock, nor shear the firstling of thy sheep. Thou shalt eat it before the LORD thy God year by year in the place which the LORD shall choose, thou and thy household."

See **Exodus 13:2**

"If any man weave an hand's breadth of the wool of a firstling into cloth, the cloth is to be burnt" (Mishnah Orlah, c.3, sect. 3)

**Deuteronomy 15:21-23** - "And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the LORD thy God. Thou shalt eat it within thy gates: the unclean and the clean person shall eat it alike, as the roebuck, and as the hart. Only thou shalt not eat the blood thereof; thou shalt pour it upon the ground as water."

**The Three Pilgrimage Festivals**, which we have discussed in detail elsewhere:

Passover - **Deuteronomy 16:1-8**

Pentecost - **Deuteronomy 16:9-12**

Tabernacles - **Deuteronomy 16:13-15**

See in the New Testament: the Passover, **Luke 2:42**, Pentecost, **Acts 2:5**, and Tabernacles, **John 7:2**.

**All Males Required to Appear**

**Deuteronomy 16:16-17** - "Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty: Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD thy God which he hath given thee."

See the same command in **Exodus 23:17**