

**God's Honor is at Stake**  
**Deuteronomy 15:7-11**

**September 9, 2018**

7 If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. 8 You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. 9 Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, "The seventh year, the year of remission, is near," and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. 10 Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. 11 Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land."

To understand the meaning behind Today's Scripture we need an understanding of Israel's economic system throughout the Old Testament period. Society was primarily comprised of small farms that were handed down through the generations. Each family was self sufficient and social life centered around agriculture. Each household operated as a single economic unit with three generations living together comprising of the senior family, adult sons and their wives, and any unmarried children. The women left their family to go into the household of her husband due to skilled labor. The male skills were land specific and the woman's skills were portable. She could take her skills with her into the new household. The goal of household was economic survival and it depended upon having able bodied children. So, one very important goal was to produce children. Infant mortality was very high and life expectancy was short. So, it was very urgent to produce children. As a consequence of this necessity the women married very young, immediately after puberty, and spent most of her adult life nursing.

In this agriculture environment families relied on diversified crops for nutritional balance. If one crop failed they could rely on their other crops which are harvested at different times throughout the season. All of the work was domestic, every able-bodied person participated in the household labor which was divided by gender. Men were in charge of the production of staple crops, soil preparation, plowing, and planting. Their agricultural knowledge was location specific. Each farm was unique, due to the wind, rain, and soil composition. One farm would be different from the farm next door. A specific plot required specific skill and knowledge which was passed down through the generations. The women would process the crops and the animal products into food and clothing. The women and children tended to the garden staying close to house, they processed crops for storage, prepared food, cared for small children, and did small crafts for the household. The labor knowledge of the women was transferable to other households. So, woman would leave the birth family to join household of husband.

One thing that was very important for survival is solidarity. The households had very strong mutual support. Each household was bound by honor to help the vulnerable households. A loan was not made for the purpose of luxuries. A loan was made for survival. A household would only borrow what it needed to survive and people only borrowed when they faced a hardship. So, a financially secure household had the moral obligation to help others, to provide loans to a neighbor in need. It was immoral to profit from another's misfortune. It was immoral to place conditions on a loan that might jeopardize someone's health and it was immoral to humiliate a debtor. For example, you could not go into the house to take the collateral and you could not sleep in the garment that has been given as collateral - you had to give it back by sunset. It was

severely condemned if you exploit the misfortune of the poor or if you fail to offer them what they needed to survive. Gleaning became a common practice as the wealthy had the moral obligation to leave a portion of their harvest for the poor.

The lesson for us is in regards to how the Scripture speaks to us today. We would obviously be better off if we had the integrity to follow biblical principles. The ideal economic scenario is the elimination of poverty. The motive for lending is for the well being of the other person not for the economic advantage that one can gain from the disadvantaged. The seven year debt release was a system that converts oppression to social benevolence. Perfect obedience of the rule would lead to a society without poverty. Whereas, poverty is seen as an opportunity for generosity. It is an opportunity because allows both parties to receive a blessing from God. The recipient receives what God has created and is now receiving. The donor receives a blessing for doing the will of God, the benefit is one of pleasing God by doing the will of God. The loan will help the neighbor to survive until the next harvest. The lender commits to divine will and obeys the commandments of God such as love your neighbor and care for others. This is OT Scripture. It is not just Jesus preaching, Jesus preached a lot of OT scriptures. Deuteronomy 10:17-19 ...the Lord your God ... executes justice for the orphan and the widow ... loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. You shall also love the stranger...

We talk about what is right & wrong, the do's and don'ts, should and should not's. The ideal scenario is if people would just live by the biblical lessons. But what is really at stake is God's honor; the sovereignty of God over all aspects of community life, all the money, the property, the economic assets all ultimately come under God's lordship. The intent of the Scripture is to create an attitude of generosity. It is not just outward signs of benevolence or the action of giving to those in need, but an inward attitude of benevolence. Today's title is *God's Honor is at Stake*. When you fail to care for the most vulnerable then God's honor is at stake. Anytime you fail to help the homeless, poor, hungry, or needy, God's honor is at stake.

Old Testament Israel was truly one nation under God. Whereas, God was the royal head of the household of the entire nation. God cared for the people by providing enough - more than enough - for everyone. God's honor is at stake because it is up to the recipients to distribute the surplus provisions that God has provided. Some people have good years and some have bad years, some have better land than others, some have better health, some are more successful, and some are lucky. But God's honor is at stake in the welfare of the people, especially the most vulnerable, when the recipients distribute what has been received. Social justice is a matter of fairness, equality, and care for suffering and the poor. When God's honor is at stake that is a very serious thing. We are to live our lives according to the benevolence taught to us in the Bible because God's honor is indeed at stake.