

Explore the Bible: January 19

Protection • Exodus 22:21-27; Leviticus 19:9-10

By Wayne VanHorn



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EXPLOITATION (Ex. 22:21-24)

God abhors exploitation of the vulnerable. Using strong prohibitive language, God decreed, “Thou shalt not afflict any widow or orphan.” In the English text, the phrase “widow or orphan” appears first in the verse for added emphasis (Ex. 22:21, CSB). Many have known widows who have had to choose between groceries and medicines due to their economic status. The plight of orphans is often dismal at best. God loves widows and orphans as much as He loves us. We demonstrate our love for God by ministering to those He loves. James characterized “pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father” as ministering to the needs of “orphans and widows in their distress” (Jam. 1:27).

The Hebrew of Exodus 22:23 combines a triple use of an emphatic grammatical construction. The verbs are magnified regarding our afflicting of the vulnerable, their crying out to God, and God’s guarantee to answer them! Can you imagine God working against us because we worked against the vulnerable? God fights for the exploited. Remember the reversal of fortunes of the rich man and Lazarus (Lk. 16:19-31). Those who ignore God’s prohibition of exploitation

will experience His wrath and judgment. The guilty will die, leaving their wives widows and their children orphans (Ex. 22:24)

LENDING PRACTICES (Ex. 22:25-27)

God challenged the rudimentary lending practices that could confront His people (Ex. 22:25). He forbade His people to charge interest on monetary loans to the poor among them. Today, it is the poor who pay the highest interest, if they can get a loan at all. God loves and provides for His people. So, why should those whom He has blessed abundantly act ruthlessly against their poor brothers and sisters? The Lord commanded them not to be “like moneylenders” (creditors). He also forbade “charging him interest.” The literal Hebrew is graphic, “Thou shalt not set upon him (the poor) interest.” The picture is one of crushing interest debt being dumped upon a feeble, poor person, unable to bear it.

Another practice outlawed by the Lord was for them to take a poor person’s cloak as collateral against a loan and then to keep it overnight. They were to return the cloak at sunset so the poor person could find warmth in the coolness of the night (Ex. 22:26-27). Making a poor person shiver in the night cold would lead to his woeful cry to God to end His misery. Once again, God promised to hear the cry of the poor. Notice how God’s hearing their cry is grounded in His graciousness (Ex. 22:27b). “Graciousness” renders the Hebrew term for “divine favor.” It is found two dozen times and in every segment of the Hebrew Bible: Law, Prophets, and Writings.

REAPING CROPS (Lev. 19:9-10)

The Book of Leviticus included instructions the priests were to teach God’s people. Among these instructions were laws concerning how to reap the harvest, an important aspect of agrarian life. Exodus 19:9 begins with the promissory “when you reap the harvest of your land...” The Hebrews would gain

possession of the land by God's graciousness. The Book of Joshua exalts God's role in both the acquisition of the land and the allotment of the land. The land of Canaan would become their land only by God's hand. So also, the harvest, the same God who granted the land, could send blight, mildew, insect plague, or drought to prevent crops. Thus, "When you reap the harvest of your land," served as a reminder of God's sovereign grace. God wanted His people to be sensitive to the needs of the poor among them. He commanded them to leave some of the crops unharvested so the poor could eat. Additionally, some grapes were to be left on the vines for the "poor and the foreign resident" (Lev. 19:10, CSB). As believers, we can demonstrate our love for God through a heightened awareness and proactive response to the needs of the widows, orphans, poor, and foreign residents, who live among us. God will bless us as we do.

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