WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS ABOUT THE POOR AND THE RICH
AND HOW WE ARE TO TREAT THE POOR
Lars Wilhelmsson

“HE WHO Mocks THE POOR shows contempt for their Maker;
Whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.”
--PROVERBS 17:5

In biblical times the needy, the stranger, the alien were all poor. Therefore each of these categories will be treated as “the poor.”

POVERTY IS A REALITY

“. . . if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment . . .” (Job 31:19).

“The poor you will always have with you” (Matthew 26:11).

The Rich and the Poor Have The Same Maker and are thus Equal

“Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.”
(Proverbs 22:2)

“. . . both low and high, rich and poor alike . . .” (Psalm 49:2).

The Rich and the Poor are Equally Vulnerable to Certain Temptations and Events

“He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead” (Revelation 13:16).

The Poor are Not to be Treated with Favoritism

“. . . and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit” (Exodus 23:3).

The Rich are Not to be Treated with Favoritism

“. . . who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all work of His hands” (Job 34:19).
“Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes, and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court” (James 2:2-6).

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Neither the Poor or the Rich are to be Treated with Favoritism

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly” (Leviticus 19:15).

Blessed by God for Not Showing Favoritism Toward the Young and Rich

“‘The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. ‘This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier; You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor’” (Ruth 3:10).

Some are Poor Because of Laziness

“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Proverbs 10:4).

Some are Poor Because of their Love of Pleasure

“He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich” (Proverbs 21:17).

The Poor Cannot Always be Trusted

“If the man is poor, do not go to sleep with his pledge in your possession.”

(Deuteronomy 24:12)
The Poor May be Uninformed of God’s Word and Way
Because They are Concerned About Basic Physical Needs

“I thought, ‘These are only the poor; they are foolish, for they do not know the way of the LORD, the requirements of their God’” (Jeremiah 5:4).

There is the Temptation to Steal Among the Poor

“Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:9).

The Poor are More Likely to be Righteous

“Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse” (28:6).

Sometimes the Poor See Through the Facade of the Rich who are Conceited

“A rich man may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has discernment sees through him” (v. 11).

Some of the Poor are Wise but not always Given Credit for It

“Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning” (Ecclesiastes 4:13).

“Now there lived in that city a man poor but wise, and he saved the city by his wisdom. But nobody remembered that poor man” (9:15).

“So I said, ‘Wisdom is better than strength.’ But the poor man’s wisdom is despised, and his words are no longer needed”(v. 16).

The Poor Tend to be Shunned or Deserted by their “Friends”

“Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him” (Proverbs 19:4).

“The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.” (14:20)
“A poor man is shunned by all his relatives—how much more do his friends avoid him? Though he pursues them with pleading, they are nowhere to be found” (19:7).

There are some Advantages to Being Poor

“A man’s riches may ransom his life, but a poor man hears no threat” (13:8).

“Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse.” (19:1)

“What a man desires is unfailing love, better to be poor than a liar” (v. 22).

The Rich Tend to Trust in their Wealth

“The wealth of the rich is their fortified city, but poverty is the ruin of the poor.” (10:15)

The Poor Cry Out to God

“Hear, O LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and needy” (Psalm 86:1).

“For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me” (109:22).

“A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly” (Proverbs 18:23).

God Listens to the Poor

“The LORD hears the needy and does not despise his captive people.” (Psalm 69:33)

“The poor and needy search for water, but there is none; their tongues are parched with thirst. But I the LORD will answer them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them” (Isaiah 41:17).

Command of God to Help the Poor

“Defend the cause of the weak and the fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed” (Psalm 82:3).

“Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (82:4).
God Helps the Poor

“But he lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks” (Psalm 107:41).

“For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him” (109:31).

“He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor, his righteousness endures forever; his horn will be lifted high in honor” (112:9).

“I will bless her with abundant provision; her poor will I satisfy with food.”

(132:15)

“Sing to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked” (Jeremiah 20:13).

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; He seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor. For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’S; upon them He has set the world” (1 Samuel 2:8).

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap.”

(Psalm 113:7)

“They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that He heard the cry of the needy” (Job 34:28).

“He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.”

(Psalm 72:13)

“You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall and like the heat of the desert” (Isaiah 25:4).

“The poorest of the poor will find pasture, and the needy will lie down in safety. But your root I will destroy by famine; it will slay your survivor” (14:30).

“But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand. The victim commits himself to you; you are the helper of the fatherless” (Psalm 10:14).

“But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish.”

(9:18)

“. . . because I rescued the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to assist him” (Job 29:12).
“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says the LORD, ‘I will protect them from those who malign them.’”

(Psalm 12:5)

“You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.”

(14:6)

“This poor man called, and the LORD heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles” (34:6).

“My whole being will exclaim, “Who is like you, O LORD? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them” (35:10).

“The wicked draw the sword and bend the bow to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose ways are upright” (37:15).

“Yet I am poor and needy; may the Lord think of me. You are my help and my deliverer; O my God, do not delay” (40:17).

“Your people settled in it, and from your bounty, O God, you provided for the poor” (68:10).

“Yet I am poor and needy; come quickly to me, O God. You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay” (70:5).

“For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help” (72:12).

“Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever” (74:19).

“Do not let the oppressed retreat in disgrace; may the poor and needy praise your name” (74:21).

Denial of Justice

“Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits” (Exodus 23:6).

“He saves the needy from the sword in their month; he saves them from the clutches of the powerful” (Job 5:15).

“A poor man’s field may produce abundant food, but injustice sweeps it away.”

(Proverbs 13:23)
Command of God to Provide Justice and Fairness for the Poor

“I was a father to the needy; I took up the case of the stranger” (Job 29:16).

“His children must make amends to the poor; his own hands must give back his wealth” (20:10).

“Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:9).

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident so he can continue among you” (Leviticus 25:35).

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave” (25:39).

“If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living among you or to a member of the alien’s clan, he retains the right of redemption after he has sold himself” (v. 47).

“If anyone making the vow is too poor to pay the specified amount, he is to present the person to the priest, who will set value for him according to what the man making the vow can afford” (27:8).

“If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold.” (25:25)

God Secures Justice for the Poor

“I know that the LORD secures justice for the poor and upholds the cause of the needy” (Psalm 140:12).

“So the poor have hope, and injustice shuts its mouth” (Job 5:16).

“. . . but with righteousness He will judge the needy, with justice He will give decisions for the poor of the earth” (Isaiah 11:4).

“But the needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted ever perish” (Psalm 9:18).

“He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights” (Job 36:6).

“He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.” (Psalm 72:2)
“He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor” (v. 4).

The Righteous Show Justice Toward the Poor

“The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.” (Proverbs 29:7)

“If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure.” (29:14)

“Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood” (Isaiah 58:7).

Compassion Toward the Poor

“Have I not wept for those in trouble? Has not my soul grieved for the poor?” (Job 30:25)

“He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done” (Proverbs 19:17).

“A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor” (22:9).

“But Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard left behind in the land of Judah some of the poor people, who owned nothing; and at that time he gave them vineyards and fields” (Jeremiah 39:10).

“He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.” (Proverbs 14:21)

Command of God to be Compassionate

“Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice; Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue (Daniel 4:27).

“Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said, ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me’” (Mark 10:21).
“But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:13).

“The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind’” (Matthew 14:21).

“When Jesus heard this, he said to him, ‘You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me’” (Luke 18:22).

**Convicted by God to be Compassionate Toward the Poor**

“If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless” (Job 31:16).

**Generosity Toward the Poor**

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount’” (Luke 19:8).

**Command of God to be Generous Toward the Poor**

“However, 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, if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today” (Deuteronomy 15:4).

“If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving, you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother” (15:7).

“There will always be poor people in the Land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land” (v. 11).

“Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and alien” (19:10).
“When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God” (23:22).

“There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be open handed toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land” (Deuteronomy 15:11).

“Jesus answered, ‘if you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21)

The Poor are Given Resources Every Seventh Year in Old Testament Times

“. . . but during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor among your people may get food from it and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.” (Exodus 23:11)

“Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: “the seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near, so that you will not show ill will toward your needy brother and give him nothing. He may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin” (Deuteronomy 15:9).

The Poor as Examples of Generosity

“He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ‘I tell you the truth,’ he said, ‘this poor widow has put in more than all the others’” (Luke 21:2-3).

“But a poor widow came and put very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all others’” (Mark 12:42-43).

“For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem” (Romans 15:26).

“. . . sorrowful yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:10).

“Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability” (2 Corinthians 8:2-3).
“All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I [Paul] was eager to do” (Galatians 2:10).

**The Rich and Poor Are to Give According to their Ability**

“The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives . . .” (Exodus 30:15)

“If, however, he is poor and cannot afford these, he must take one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for him, together with a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering a log of oil . . .” (Leviticus 14:21).

**Factual Account of the Poor**

“But the commander left behind some of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields” (2 Kings 25:12).

“When all the army officers and their men who were still in the open country heard that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam as governor over the land and had put him in charge of the men, women and children who were the poorest in the land and who had not been carried into exile to Babylon . . .” (Jeremiah 40:7).

“Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard, carried into exile some of the poorest people and those who remained in the city along with the rest of the craftsmen and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon.” (Jeremiah 52:15)

“But Nebuzaradan left behind the rest of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields” (Jeremiah 52:16).

**Oppression**

“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (Proverbs 14:31).

“On your clothes men find the lifeblood of the innocent poor, though you did not catch them breaking in . . .” (Jeremiah 2:34).
“This is what the LORD says: “For three sins of Israel, even for four, I will not turn back my wrath. They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals” (Amos 2:6).

“For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts” (5:12).

“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God” (Proverbs 14:31).

“If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered” (21:13).

“He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich both come to poverty” (22:16).

“Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court for the LORD will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them” (vv. 22-23).

“A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops.” (28:3)

“They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name” (Amos 2:7).

“Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy and say to your husbands, “bring us some drinks” (4:1).

“You trample the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine” (5:11).

“...buying the poor and needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat” (8:6).

“They thrust the needy from the path and force all the poor of the land into hiding.” (Job 24:4)

“The scoundrel’s methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just” (Isaiah 32:7).
“Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked man ruling over a helpless people” (Proverbs 28:15).

“Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land” (Amos 8:4).

“If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest” (Exodus 22:25).

“Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and counting on it. Otherwise he may cry to the LORD against you and you will be guilty of sin.” (Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

“The fatherless child is snatched from the breast; the infant of the poor is seized for a debt” (Job 24:9).

“He who increases his wealth by exorbitant interest amasses it for another, who will be kind to the poor” (Proverbs 28:8).

“When daylight is gone, the murderer rises up and kills the poor and needy; in the night he steals forth like a thief” (Job 24:14).

“In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises” (Psalm 10:2).

“He lies in wait like a lion in cover; he lies in wait to catch the helpless; he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net” (v. 9).

“Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land.” (Amos 8:4)

“Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. In your hearts do not think evil of each other” (Zechariah 7:10).

“They repeated these words to David. But David said, ‘Do you think it is a small matter to become the king’s son-in-law? I’m only a poor man and little known.’” (1 Samuel 18:23)

“The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, ‘There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor’” (2 Samuel 12:1).

“. . . but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him” (v. 3).
“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him” (v. 4).

“. . . those whose teeth are swords and whose jaws are set with knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind” (Proverbs 30:14).

“For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted” (Psalm 109:16).

“. . . to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless” (Isaiah 10:2).

“Feet trample it down—the feet of the oppressed, the footsteps of the poor” (26:6).

“The scoundrel’s methods are wicked, he makes up evil schemes to destroy the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just” (Isaiah 32:7).

“What do you mean by crushing my people and grinding the faces of the poor?” declares the Lord the LORD Almighty” (3:15).

“Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy” (Ezekiel 16:49).

“He oppresses the poor and needy. He commits robbery. He does not return what he took in pledge. He looks to the idols. He does detestable things” (18:12).

“The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice” (22:29).

“It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD” (Zechariah 11:11).

“If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice and rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official is eyed by a higher one, and over them both are others higher still” (Ecclesiastes 5:8).

“The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.” (Proverbs 22:7)

“A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops” (28:3).
God Will Judge the Oppressors

“He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished” (Proverbs 17:5).

“The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: ‘It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses.’” (Isaiah 3:14)

“He who gives to the poor will lack nothing, but he who closes his eyes to them receives many curses” (Proverbs 28:27).

The Poor find Hope and Joy in the Lord

“Once more the humble will rejoice in the LORD; the needy will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 29:19).

“The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.” (Matthew 11:5)

“The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

“Looking at his disciples, he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the kingdom of God’” (Luke 6:20).

“So he replied to the messengers, ‘God back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind who receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the good news is preached to the poor.” (Luke 7:22)

To Help the Poor is Evidence of Knowing God

“He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me?’ declares the LORD” (Jeremiah 22:16).

Those who Help the Poor are Blessed by God

“Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble” (Psalm 41:1).
“He who despises his neighbor sins, but blessed is he who is kind to the needy.”
(Proverbs 14:21)

The evidence from all these verses that address the poor clearly and overwhelmingly point to oppression as the main cause of poverty.