

# Word Study on Poor in Scripture

## OT words used

### POOR (PERSON), WEAK (PERSON)

**`ani** OT:6041, "poor; weak; afflicted; humble." This word, which also appears in early Aramaic and post-biblical Hebrew, occurs in biblical Hebrew about 76 times and in all periods.

This noun is frequently used in synonymous parallelism with **'ebyon** ("needy") and **or dal** ("poor"). It differs from both in emphasizing some kind of disability or distress. A hired servant as one who is in a lower (oppressive) social and material condition is described both as an **'ebyon** and **`ani**: "Thou shalt not oppress a 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: 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" Deut 24:14-15. If wrongly oppressed, he can call on God for defense. Financially, the **`ani** lives from day to day and is socially defenseless, being subject to oppression. In its first biblical occurrence the **`ani** is guaranteed (if men obey God's law) his outer garment for warmth at night even though that garment might be held as collateral during the day: "If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as a usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury" Ex 22:25. The godly protect and deliver the "afflicted" Isa 10:2; Ezek 18:17, while the ungodly take advantage of them, increasing their oppressed condition Isa 58:7. The king is especially charged to protect the **`ani**: "Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy" Prov 31:9.

**`Ani** can refer to one who is physically oppressed: "Therefore hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine" Isa 51:21. Physical oppression is sometimes related to spiritual oppression as in Ps 22:24: "For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him...." Outward affliction frequently leads to inner spiritual affliction and results in an outcry to God: "Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me; for I am desolate and afflicted" Ps 25:16. Even apart from outward affliction, the pious are frequently described as the "afflicted" or "poor" for whom God provides: "Thy congregation hath dwelt therein: thou, O God, hast prepared of thy goodness for the poor" Ps 68:10. In such cases spiritual poverty and want are clearly in view.

Sometimes the word means "humble" or "lowly," as it does in Zech 9:9, where it describes the Messiah: "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass..." (cf. Ps 18:27; Prov 3:34; Isa 66:2).

Related to **`ani** is the noun **`oni**, "affliction." It appears about 36 times and in all periods of biblical Hebrew. **`Oni** represents the state of pain and or punishment resulting from affliction. In Deut 16:3 the shewbread is termed the bread of "affliction" because it is a physical reminder of sin, the cause of "affliction" Ps 25:18, the hardship involved in sin (especially the Egyptian bondage), and divine deliverance from sin Ps 119:50.

**`Ani** is also related to the word **`anawah**, "humility, gentleness." This word occurs only 5 times, setting forth the two characteristics gained from affliction. Applied to God, it represents His submission to His own nature Ps 45:4.

**dal** OT:1800, "one who is low, poor, reduced, helpless, weak." This noun also appears in Ugaritic. It occurs in biblical Hebrew about 47 times and in all periods.

**Dal** is related to, but differs from, **`ani** (which suggests affliction of some kind), **'ebyon** (which emphasizes need), and **rash** (which suggests destitution). The **dallim** constituted the middle class of Israel - those who were physically deprived (in the ancient world the majority of people were poor). For example, the **dallim** may be viewed as the opposite of the rich Ex 30:15; cf. Ruth 3:10; Prov 10:15.

In addition, the word may connote social poverty or lowliness. As such, **dal** describes those who are the counterparts of the great: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor" Lev 19:15; cf. Amos 2:7.

When Gideon challenged the Lord's summoning him to deliver Israel, he emphasized that his clan was too weak to do the job: "And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh..." Judg 6:15; cf. 2 Sam 3:1. God commands that society protect the poor, the lowly, and the weak: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to

decline after many to wrest judgment: neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause" Ex 23:2-3; cf. Lev 14:21; Isa 10:2. He also warns that if men fail to provide justice, He will do so Isa 11:4.

A fourth emphasis appears in Gen 41:19 (the first biblical appearance of the word), where *dal* is contrasted to "healthy" or "fat": "And behold, seven other kine came up after them, poor and very ill-favored and leanfleshed...." Thus, *dal* indicates a physical condition and appearance of sickness. It is used in this sense to describe Amnon's appearance as he longed for Tamar 2 Sam 13:4.

**Dal** is used (very infrequently) of spiritual poverty (in such cases it is sometimes paralleled to 'ebyon): "Therefore I said, Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the Lord, nor the judgment of their God" Jer 5:4. Some scholars argue that here the word means "ignorance," and as the context shows, this is ignorance in the knowledge of God's word.

Another noun, **dallah**, is related to *dal*. *Dallah*, which appears about 8 times, means "poverty; dishevelled hair." The word appears in 2 Kings 24:14: "...none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land," where *dallah* emphasizes the social lowliness and "poverty" of those people whom it describes. In Song 7:5 the word refers to "dishevelled hair" in the sense of something that hangs down.

**dalal** OT:1809, "to be low, hang down." This verb appears only 8 times in the Bible and always in poetical passages. It has cognates or near cognates in Arabic, Ethiopic, Akkadian, and extra-biblical Hebrew. The word appears in Ps 79:8: "O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us; for we are brought very low."

**ʿanah** OT:6031, "to afflict, oppress, humble." This verb, which also appears in Arabic, occurs about 74 times in biblical Hebrew and in every period. The first occurrence is in Gen 15:13: "Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years."

C. Adjective.

**ʿanaw** OT:6035, "humble; poor; meek." This adjective, which appears about 21 times in biblical Hebrew, is closely related to *ʿani* and derived from the same verb. Sometimes this word is synonymous with *ʿani*. Perhaps this is due to the well-known *waw-yodh* interchange. *ʿAnaw* appears almost exclusively in poetical passages and describes the intended outcome of affliction from God, namely "humility." In its first appearance the word depicts the objective condition as well as the subjective stance of Moses. He was entirely dependent on God and saw that he was: "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" Num 12:3.

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## NT words used

### POOR

A. Adjectives.

1. **ptochos** NT:4434, for which see BEG, B, has the broad sense of "poor," (a) literally, e. g., Matt 11:5; 26:9,11; Luke 21:3 (with stress on the word, "a conspicuously poor widow"); John 12:5,6,8; 13:29; James 2:2,3,6; the "poor" are constantly the subjects of injunctions to assist them, Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 14:13,21; 18:22; Rom 15:26; Gal 2:10; (b) metaphorically, Matt 5:3; Luke 6:20; Rev 3:17.

2. **penichros** NT:3998, akin to B, "needy, poor," is used of the widow in Luke 21:2 (cf. No. 1, of the same woman, in v. 3); it is used frequently in the papyri. In the Sept., Ex 22:25; Prov 28:15; 29:7.

B. Noun.

**penes** NT:3993, "a laborer" (akin to *penomai*, "to work for one's daily bread"), is translated "poor" in 2 Cor 9:9.

C. Verb.

**ptocheuo** NT:433, "to be poor as a beggar" (akin to A, No. 1), "to be destitute," is said of Christ in 2 Cor 8:9.

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## Scripture references

### OT words

#### ANI

Lev 19:9-10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

NIV

Lev 23:22 "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." NIV

Deut 15:11 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. NIV

Ps 12:5 "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." NIV

Ps 35:10 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." NIV

Ps 72:12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. NIV

Isa 41:17 "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. NIV

Isa 58:7 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? NIV

Ezek 16:49-50 "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. NIV

#### DAL

Ex 23:3 and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. NIV

Ps 41:1 Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble. NIV

Prov 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, NIV

Prov 19:17 He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done. NIV

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

Prov 22:9 A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor. NIV

Prov 22:16 He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich--both come to poverty. NIV

Prov 29:7 The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern. NIV

Prov 29:14 If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure. NIV

Amos 4:1 Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you women who oppress the poor and crush the needy NIV

## **NT verses**

### **PTOCHOS**

Matt 5:3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. NIV

Matt 11:4-6 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. NIV

Matt 19:21 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." NIV

Mark 10:21 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." NIV

Mark 12:41-42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. NIV

Luke 4:18 "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, NIV

Luke 6:20 "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. NIV

Luke 7:21-22 So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: 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. NIV

Luke 14:13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, NIV

Luke 16:20-21 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores NIV

Luke 18:22 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." NIV

Gal 2:10 All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. NIV

James 2:2-3 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. NIV

James 2:6 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? NIV

### **PENICHROS**

Luke 21:1-3 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. NIV

## **RICH, RICHES, RICHLY, RICH MAN**

### A. Adjective.

**plousios** NT:4145, akin to B, C, No. 1, "rich, wealthy," is used (I) literally, (a) adjectivally (with a noun expressed separately) in Matt 27:57; Luke 12:16; 14:12; 16:1,19; (without a noun), 18:23; 19:2; (b) as a noun, singular, a "rich" man (the noun not being expressed), Matt 19:23,24; Mark 10:25; 12:41; Luke 16:21,22; 18:25; James 1:10,11, "the rich," "the rich (man)"; plural, Mark 12:41, lit., "rich (ones)"; Luke 6:24 (ditto); 21:1; 6:17, "(them that are) rich," lit., "(the) rich"; James 2:6, RV, "the rich"; 5:1, RV, "ye rich"; Rev 6:15 and 13:16, RV, "the rich"; (II), metaphorically, of God, Eph 2:4 ("in mercy"); of Christ, 2 Cor 8:9; of believers, James 2:5, RV, "(to be) rich (in faith)"; Rev 2:9, of spiritual "enrichment" generally; 3:17, of a false sense of "enrichment."

### B. Verbs.

**plouteo** NT:4147, "to be rich," in the aorist or point tense, "to become rich," is used (a) literally, Luke 1:53, "the rich," present participle, lit., "(ones or those) being rich"; 1 Tim 6:9,18; Rev 18:3,15,19 (all three in the aorist tense); (b) metaphorically, of Christ, Rom 10:12 (the passage stresses the fact that Christ is Lord; see v. 9, and the RV); of the "enrichment" of believers through His poverty, 2 Cor 8:9 (the aorist tense expressing completeness, with permanent results); so in Rev 3:18, where the spiritual "enrichment" is conditional upon righteousness of life and conduct (see GOLD, No. 2); of a false sense of "enrichment," 1 Cor 4:8 (aorist), RV, "ye are become rich" (KJV, "ye are rich"); Rev 3:17 (perfect tense, RV, "I... have gotten riches," KJV, "I am... increased with goods"), see GOODS, Note (3); of not being "rich" toward God, Luke 12:21.

2. **ploutizo** NT:4148, "to make rich, enrich," is rendered "making (many) rich" in 2 Cor 6:10 (metaphorical of "enriching" spiritually). See ENRICH.

### C. Nouns

**ploutos** NT:4149 is used in the singular (I) of material "riches," used evilly, Matt. 13:22; Mark 4:19; Luke 8:14; 1 Tim. 6:17; Jas. 5:2; Rev. 18:17; (II) of spiritual and moral "riches," (a) possessed by God and exercised towards men, Rom 2:4, "of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering"; 9:23 and Eph 3:16, "of His glory" (i. e., of its manifestation in grace towards believers); Rom 11:33, of His wisdom and knowledge; Eph 1:7 and 2:7, "of His grace"; 1:18, "of the glory of His inheritance in the saints"; 3:8, "of Christ"; Phil 4:19, "in glory in Christ Jesus," RV; Col 1:27, "of the glory of this mystery... Christ in you, the hope of glory"; (b) to be ascribed to Christ, Rev 5:12; (c) of the effects of the gospel upon the Gentiles, Rom 11:12 (twice); (d) of the full assurance of understanding in regard to the mystery of God, even Christ, Col 2:2, RV; (e) of the liberality of the churches of Macedonia, 2 Cor 8:2 (where "the riches" stands for the spiritual and moral value of their liberality); (f) of "the reproach of Christ" in contrast to this world's treasures, Heb 11:26.

2. **chrema** NT:5536, "what one uses or needs" (chraomai, "to use"), "a matter, business," hence denotes "riches," Mark 10:23,24; Luke 18:24; see MONEY, No. 2. D. Adverb.

**plousios** NT:4146, "richly, abundantly," akin to A, is used in Col 3:16; 1 Tim 6:17; Titus 3:6, RV, "richly" (KJV, "abundantly"); 2 Peter 1:11 (ditto).

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### **Key NT Verses.**

#### **PLOUTEO**

Luke 1:53 He has filled the hungry with good things NIV

Rom 10:12-13 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile-the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, NIV

2 Cor 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. NIV

1 Tim 6:8-10 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. NIV

1 Tim 6:18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. NIV

### **PLOUTOS**

Matt 13:22 The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. NIV

2 Cor 8:1-3 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. NIV

1 Tim 6:17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. NIV

Luke 21:1-3

He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others.

### **MAMMON**

(mam'-un) (Mamonas): A common Aramaic word (mamon) for riches, used in **Matt 6:24** and in **Luke 16:9,11,13**. In these passages mammon merely means wealth, and is called "unrighteous," because the abuse of riches is more frequent than their right use. **In Luke 16:13** there is doubtless personification, but there is no proof that there was in New Testament times a Syrian deity called Mammon. The application of the term in Matthew is apparent and requires no comment. In Lk, however, since the statement, "Make to yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness," follows as a comment on the parable of the Unjust Steward, there is danger of the inference that Jesus approved the dishonest conduct of the steward and advised His disciples to imitate his example. On the contrary, the statement is added more as a corrective against this inference than as an application. 'Do not infer,' He says, that honesty in the use of money is a matter of indifference. He that is unfaithful in little is unfaithful in much. So if you are not wise in the use of earthly treasure how can you hope to be intrusted with heavenly treasure?' The commendation is in the matter of foresight, not in the method. The steward tried to serve two masters, his lord and his lord's creditors, but the thing could not be done, as the sequel shows. Neither can men serve both God and riches exalted as an object of slavish servitude. Wealth, Jesus teaches, does not really belong to men, but as stewards they may use wealth prudently unto their eternal advantage. Instead of serving God and mammon alike we may serve God by the use of wealth, and thus lay up treasures for ourselves in heaven. Again, the parable is not to be interpreted as teaching that the wrong of dishonest gain may be atoned for by charity. Jesus is not dealing with the question of reparation. The object is to point out how one may best use wealth, tainted or otherwise, with a view to the future.

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