

Proverbs 19:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Analysis

This proverb presents charity to the poor as lending to God: 'He that hath pity on the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.' Showing pity (chanan—showing grace, compassion) to the poor constitutes lending to Yahweh Himself. The metaphor is striking—God considers Himself the debtor for kindness shown to the poor and promises repayment. This doesn't mean charity is investment for profit, but God pledges to reward those who help the needy. Jesus taught similarly: deeds done to 'the least of these' are done unto Him (Matthew 25:31-46). This grounds charity in theology—we serve God by serving the poor.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern societies included significant poverty—widows, orphans, landless laborers, and the disabled faced economic vulnerability. Mosaic Law extensively protected the poor through gleaning rights, debt forgiveness, and prohibition of oppression. Proverbs extends this covenant concern, presenting care for the poor as spiritual obligation God rewards. Neglecting the poor violated covenant faithfulness.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does viewing generosity to the poor as 'lending to the LORD' change your perspective on charitable giving?
2. What specific opportunities do you have to show compassion to the poor in your community?

Interlinear Text

מַלְאֵה	הָיָה	לְזִקְנָה	לְפָנָי
lendeth	unto the LORD	He that hath pity	upon the poor
H3867	H3068	H2603	H1800
וְנִתְּנֵה	וְשִׁלְבֵּן	לְזִקְנָה	
and that which he hath given	will he pay him again		H0
H1576	H7999		

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 28:27 (Parallel theme): He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.

Hebrews 6:10 (Parallel theme): For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

Luke 6:38 (Parallel theme): Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

Matthew 25:40 (Parallel theme): And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 (Parallel theme): Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.

Proverbs 14:21 (Parallel theme): He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he.

Proverbs 14:31 (Parallel theme): He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor.

Philippians 4:17 (Parallel theme): Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

Proverbs 12:14 (Parallel theme): A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth: and the recompence of a man's hands shall be rendered unto him.

Proverbs 28:8 (Parallel theme): He that by usury and unjust gain increaseth his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.