

Hebrew Words Translated "Poor"

Each of the words translated "poor" has a spectrum of meanings. Careful study is rewarding. The use of each in its context shows "poor" to be inadequate of itself as a translation. The transliteration of Hebrew words is that of the "Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament" (Moody Press).

1. The poor as oppressed, downtrodden, humiliated

‘ānâ This verb means "to force to submission, reduce to subservience, oppress, subjugate, do violence to, violate, degrade, rape," "take a woman sexually by force" (EDOT). It "often expresses harsh and painful treatment" (EDOT) and involves reducing another to "social inferiority. This accords with the use of these terms . . . for the oppressed" (George). The verb is sometimes used reflexively.

‘ānî This is "a passive adjective meaning 'humbled' " (Snaith). It describes the person "forced to submission, reduced to subservience, brought to his knees, oppressed, subjugated, suppressed, downtrodden, violated, raped, degraded, humiliated, humbled." 'Ānî "denotes one who is wrongfully impoverished . . . The term is not used for deserved poverty" (TDNT). The 'ānî is "one who is in a lower oppressive social and material condition" and is "socially defenceless, being subject to oppression" (EDOT); " 'ānî refers to the oppressed poor" (Mealand), "oppressed by the rich and powerful" (BDB), "oppressed by the rich . . . , afflicted by the wicked" (IDB). It is a word to "emphasize pain or oppression" (TWOT). 'Ānî is the "downtrodden" (IDB), "the humiliated one" (Gutierrez). "The 'ānî is the humiliated who can no longer stand up because of economic and social pressure . . . 'Ānî is contrasted . . . with the man of violence, the oppressor who puts the 'ānî in his lowly position and keeps him there" (Boerma). "The antonyms for 'ānî are often words meaning 'violent,' which indicates that 'ānî means 'oppressed' " (Mealand). The 'āniyim are "the underdogs" (Kidner).

The Messiah is described as 'ānî in Zech. 9:9. This challenges the way many see the Messiah and they are "shocked to find 'ānî here" (Gelin). "Some explanation must be given for the addition of 'ānî and some attempt must be made to enter into the mind of a scribe who would propose such a re-reading of the text" (emphasis added). He sees it here as "a religious title," and gives the same "religious sense" to 'ānî in Zeph. 3:12 while admitting, "No explanation has been found that 'ānî . . . loses this meaning in the psalms and later texts." But what evidence that it ever had this meaning? The Messiah, as the Suffering Servant, was in fact oppressed, downtrodden, and humiliated.

‘ānāw If 'ānî refers to "the person forced to submit," then 'ānāw refers to the same "person as submissive to that forcing." Both are oppressed. Both are humbled rather than humble. " 'Ānî and 'ānāw must be taken together" (George). They are "virtually synonymous

terms" (IBD), "sometimes used interchangeably" (Boerma). 'Ānāw is "closely related to 'ānî and derived from the same verb. Sometimes this word is synonymous with 'ānî" (EDOT). 'Ānî is "perhaps only another form of 'ānāw" (BDB). So "there may be a difference . . . but it should not be exaggerated" (Mealand). "Isaiah seems to make no distinction" (TWOT).

Original Hebrew script was without vowels. The plural of 'ānî has the consonant [ʾ], where the plural of 'ānāw has [ʾ]; there is no other difference. So these words are "often confused by copyists" (George). In the OT, 'ānāw is always plural (except, if it is 'ānāw, Num. 12:3); so any occurrence of 'ānāwim may properly have been 'ānîyim (or vice versa).

In a few Psalms, 'ānāwim has been thought to refer not to the "downtrodden poor" but to Israel as a nation oppressed by other nations, or to a group of powerful men reduced to the downtrodden by other powerful men for their loyalty to God. Others take 'ānāwim as "those who have put themselves in submission" and see them either as Israel submissive to God amid nations who were not, or as an association of individuals (however wealthy and powerful) who were metaphorically "submissive" to him and opposed by others who (however poor and powerless) were not in this sense "submissive." We must ask whether this last view does not demand that the texts be "inexplicably relativized in exegesis . . . We should not use as our reference point the half dozen passages where the Psalmist does not make the meaning of his expression clear (because he supposes it to be already known) . . . The only scientific approach is to get the meaning from the passages in which there can be no doubt" (Miranda). Certainly those who argue for the metaphorical use (in Psalms to which they give a late dating) have to come to terms with the fact that it must have been short-lived; 'ānāw "has completely lost any religious nuance in the Rabbis" (TDNT).

'ōnî This describes the experience of "downtroddenness" arising from oppression or forced submission. It is the "oppressed condition" (TDOT); it implies humiliation and suffering and expresses "the state of pain . . . resulting from affliction" (TWOT and EDOT).

'ānāwâ This "refers to the disposition of the one who humbles himself" (TDNT). It suggests "self-submission, self-abasement" and is the opposite of self-aggrandizement and oppression. It is the situation where others have been put before self, where domination or exploitation of others has given way to grace. It leads to "mutual subordination" or "being subject one to the other." It parallels justice (Zeph. 2:3). And the messiahed king will "ride on . . . in the cause of truth and 'an'wâ and justice" (Psalm 45:4).

2. The poor as powerless and diminished

dālal This verb means "to become powerless, impotent, ineffectual, debilitated, weakened; lose bulk and strength, be diminished; so be drooping, dangling, hanging down."

dal This refers to the "one who is powerless, impotent,

weakened, weak, incapacitated, rendered helpless." He is without "social strength" (TWOT) and socio-politically insignificant. Dal "describes those who are the counterparts of the great" (EDOT). It is powerlessness that dal emphasizes, rather than economic need; yet, since power and wealth were most often combined, dal is contrasted with the rich (Ex. 30:15; Ruth 3:10; Prov. 10:15) and "used of the position of the lowest social classes, of the peasants as poor, needy, unimportant" (DNNT). The writers, in using dal, "never mean people who have become poor by their own fault" (TDOT). Dal is used to describe the powerlessness of Manasseh's clan, and the state of Amnon in his longing for his half-sister. The dal lacks strength, power, and self-determination.

dallâ This is used of what is powerless and dependent, unable to stand up of itself. It describes the cows in Pharaoh's dream, and is applied to flowing hair and to threads hanging down on a loom. All other uses are for powerless folk. It "emphasizes the social lowliness and poverty of those people it describes" (EDOT). Significantly, it describes all those who were not deported to Babylon; "about ninety percent of the population must have belonged to . . . the dallâ" (TDOT).

3. The poor as yearning and insistent

'ābâ This verb means "to gasp for, pant for, show eagerness, longing, willingness, yearning"; in our texts it means "be willing, desire, have the intention or inclination" (usually with "not").

'ābiyônâ This is "the caperberry, so-called, because it was thought to stimulate desire" (Snaith). Its shape was seen as sexually symbolic and from it an aphrodisiac was made. The rabbis used the word for whatever increased appetite. The idea of longing, yearning, is evident.

'ebyôn This, "from the stem 'ābâ 'to will, to be willing' " (TDNT), is the one who is "always longing for what his poverty denies him. As the rabbis said, 'He is called 'ebyôn because he longs for everything' (Lev. Rabba p. 34)" (Snaith). But 'ebyôn in the OT has no sense of greed, or of coveting; he is the poor seen as yearning desperately for justice and right. It may be, as some hold, that 'ebyôn "implies an essential idea of pleading" and "expresses . . . an expectation and a demand" (Humbert). And it is "specially used of one who suffers undeservedly" (Gesenius), one who is "oppressed by the wicked and powerful" (TWOT) as in Prov. 30:14; Amos 4:1. It is used "generally for the poor and homeless" (DNNT), without food (Psa. 132:15) or clothing (Job 31:19) for the "poor in a material sense" (IDB). Starving and thirsty, the 'eb^eyônim are the marginalized of society.

But the Messiah is coming to the 'eb^eyônim (Psa. 72:12; Isaiah 29:19). In the second century AD, a group of messianic Jews emerged who had adopted 'ebyôn and called themselves "Ebionites"; some believe their origin to be in the earliest church (Rom. 15:26; Gal. 2:10).

4. The poor as defenceless and open to exploitation

ḥalak This word is not used in the OT, but the “primary idea . . . is that of burning, scorching” (Gesenius). There is a related word in Arabic meaning “to be blackened.”

ḥēlekâ Is this the person overcome by the might of the sun, the exhausted victim of relentless heat? “A probable Egyptian cognate has the sense of ‘overwhelmed’ or ‘demoralized’ ” (Kidner). It suggests one who is already debilitated, without the means of defending him/herself from further attack. A beaten man, he is defenceless, helpless, vulnerable and easy prey. Some suggest “doomed”; TDNT calls it “the uncertain” ḥēlekâ.

5. The poor as needy and in want

ḥāsēr This verb means “to be diminished, decreased, reduced, deficient, short, in want, without what is needed, lacking.”

ḥāsēr This adjective is used most often in Proverbs, and “in reference to the lack of . . . understanding” (TWOT) which the Hebrew calls a “lack of heart.” But it also describes shortage of bread, oil, etc.

maḥsôr This means “want, shortage, lack, deficiency, neediness.” (Other less common words—ḥeser, ḥōser and ḥesrôn—have the same meanings). They describe “those who are in need and want . . . the poverty-stricken” (IBD). Sometimes this want does not arise from direct injustice; for some come to want through laziness (Prov. 6:11;24:34), talk without action (14:23), or self-indulgent living (21:17). Such causes are not attributed in the OT to those trapped in poverty.

6. The poor as subject and dependent

sakan This means “to bring to the ground,” as a man by a tree wrongly felled (Eccles. 10:9); then “make someone assume a low position inferior to oneself, make subordinate and dependent”; from “be subjected” (Isa. 40:20), it came to mean “be useful, of use, profitable” to another.

sōkēn This participle describes “one of inferior and dependent status, a subordinate, servant, attendant”; it could be used of a servant of some standing (Isa. 22:15) since it denoted subject status relative to the one on whom he was dependent.

miskēn This “seems related to the Akkadian muskenu” (IBD) which “denotes the act of subjection” (TDNT). It “seems to indicate ‘he who depends, he who is subject’ ” (George). It “means ‘the dependent’ and then ‘the socially inferior’ ” (TDNT). The “general meaning is obvious in the contrast between the poor man and the king in Eccles. 4:13” (TWOT). It is “a term still used by the oriental beggars for themselves” (DNTT), and “the Arabic word miskin . . . has been borrowed into Italian and French” to describe a peasant (TWOT). The **miskēn** is never said to be responsible for becoming so.

miskēnūt This word occurs only once in the OT (Deut. 8:19) and suggests the meaning “subservience, subjection, dependency.”

miskenôt From the same root, this means either “service places” and “particularly storage cities” (TWOT), or cities “built by forced labour” (TDNT). This last is suggestive for miskēn.

7. The poor as diminished and impoverished

mûk This uncommon word has an Aramaic equivalent meaning “to sink or bend down,” and a Syriac one meaning “to be brought low.” It refers to a person of means (however acquired) who is “reduced to nothing.” It suggests (like yārash) a different social category from those trapped in poverty. Used only in Leviticus, it describes one “financially diminished, sunk into poverty,” but able to change his situation when finance can be found.

8. The poor as destitute and bereft

rûsh “This root implies destitution” (TWOT), “suggests destitution” (EDOT), means “to be destitute” (George). It has been surmised that words in this group are “derivatives of y r s” and “related to the dispossessed” (IBD), i.e., those deprived of family heritage in land, etc. (Prov. 30:8).

rāsh This is the participle, “the destitute” (TWOT). More than any other term, rāsh describes the person who is economically poor per se. It is used “especially as a contrast to ‘rich’ ” (DNNT). It refers not only to the one whose destitution comes from injustice, but also to the one who has lost wealth and become destitute (Eccles. 4:14; Prov. 10:4; 13:7). “It is striking that this more neutral term is never used by the prophets” (Boerma). Was it essentially a “court” word used among the powerful?

rêsh This noun (with rē’sh and rîsh) means “destitution.” Each implies deep material poverty which is exclusively economic (TDNT and DNNT). Some note that “hunger is involved” (IBD). While this is “the condition common to the lower class” (TWOT), the wealthy may come to it through debt (Prov. 22:7), laziness (6:11; 24:34) or worthless pursuits (28:19).

9. The poor as dispossessed and evicted

yārash This means “to take possession of” (something) from another, either by inheriting it or by depriving him of it (legally, illegally, or by conquest). “When people are the object, yārash sometimes means ‘to dispossess’ . . . putting them in such a social position that they cannot hold possession or inherit . . . To cause someone to be dispossessed is to impoverish him” (EDOT). Again, “dispossession” may come through laziness (Prov. 20:4,17) or self-indulgence (23:20-21). The yārash is not born into poverty but reduced to it.

Conclusion

Not without reason does one Hebrew scholar give “wretched” as a rendering for ‘ānî, for dal, for ’ebyôn, for ḥēlekâ, and for miskēn (Feyerabend); not a translation, it is a true description. The language of poverty in the OT indicates an understanding that demands the attention of Christians. The poverty of “the wretched of the earth” is clearly shown to be caused by injustice. They are oppressed and downtrodden (‘ānî, ‘ānāw), subjected and dependent (miskēn), powerless (dal), defenceless and exploited (ḥēlekâ), yearning for justice and dignity (’ebyôn). The economic poverty they experience is the result of a prior social poverty that is politically structured and maintained. Biblically, they are powerless and poor because others are powerful and rich; they are kept dependent to conserve the position of the privileged. Most often in the OT they are also economically and materially destitute (rash), experiencing deprivation and want (mahsôr). This situation they share with those not in prior social poverty but who have become dispossessed (yārash), or have fallen on hard times (mûk). God knows the causes of poverty, and has not hidden from us where he stands in relation to the victims of oppression and injustice.

OT BOOK	HEBREW WORDS FOR THE POOR									
	'ANĀW	'ANĪ	DAL	'EBYŌN	ḤĒLEKĀ	MAḤSŌR	MISKĒN	MŪK	RĀSH	YĀRASH
Gen.		16:11 ^b 29:32 ^b 31:42 ^b 41:52 ^b	41:19 ^f			8:3 ^h 8:5 ^h 18:28 ^h				45:11 ^t
Ex.		3:7 ^b 3:17 ^b 4:31 ^b 22:25	23:3 30:15	23:6 23:11		16:18 ^h				
Lev.		19:10 23:22	14:21 19:15					25:25 25:35 25:39 25:47 27:8		
Num.	12:3	(12:3) ^{a/c}								
Deut.		15:11 16:3 ^b 24:12 24:14 24:15 ^b 26:7 ^b		15:4 15:7 15:7 15:9 15:11 15:11		2:7 ^h 8:9 ^h 15:8 15:8 ^h 28:48 ^k 28:57 ^k	8:9 ⁿ			
Judg.			6:6 ^B 6:15			18:10 19:19 19:20				

	'ĀNĀW	'ĀNĪ	DAL	'EBYŌN	ĤĒLEKĀ	MAĤSŌR	MISKĒN	MŪK	RĀSH	YĀRASH
Ruth			3:10							
1 Sam.		1:11 ^b	2:8	2:8		21:15 ⁱ			18:23	2:7 ^t
2 Sam.		16:12 ^b 22:28	3:1 13:4			3:29 ^j			12:1 12:3 12:4	
1 Kings						17:14 ^h 17:16 ^j				
2 Kings		14:26 ^b	24:14 ^f 25:12 ^f							
1 Chr.		22:14 ^b								
Neh.		9:9 ^b				9:21 ^k				
Esther				9:22						
Job	24:4	10:15 ^b (24:4) ^a 24:9 24:14 29:12 30:16 ^b 30:27 ^b 34:28 36:6 36:8 ^b 36:15 ^b 36:15 36:21 ^b	5:16 20:10 20:19 28:4 ^s 31:16 34:19 34:28	5:15 24:4 24:14 29:16 30:25 31:19		30:3 ^j				
Psa.	(9:12) ^a 9:18 (10:12) ^a 10:17	9:12 9:13 ^b (9:18) ^a 10:2 10:9 10:9 10:12 12:5		9:18 12:5	10:8 10:10 10:14	8:5 ^h				

	‘ANĀW	‘ĀNĪ	DAL	‘EBYŌN	ĤĒLEKĀ	MAĤSŌR	MISKĒN	MŪK	RĀSH	YĀRASH	
Psa. contd.	22:26	14:6 18:27 22:24 ^d 22:24									
	25:9	25:16 25:18 ^b 31:7 ^b				23:1 ^h					
	34:2	34:6				34:9 34:10 ^h			34:10		
	37:11	35:10 35:10 37:14 40:17		35:10 37:14 40:17							
		44:24 ^b	41:1		49:2						
	69:32	68:10 69:29 70:5 72:2 72:4 72:12		69:33 70:5 72:4 72:12 72:13 72:13							
	76:9	74:19 74:21		74:21							
		82:3	79:8 ^g 82:3 82:4		82:4 86:1				82:3		
		86:1 88:9 ^b 88:15 107:10 ^b 107:41 ^b 109:16 109:22		107:41 109:16 109:22 109:31 112:9 113:7							
		119:50 ^b 119:92 ^b 119:153 ^b	113:7 116:6 ^g								
		140:12		132:15 140:12							
		147:6 149:4		142:6 ^g							
	Prov.	(3:34) ^a	3:34				6:11 6:32 ⁱ 7:7 ⁱ 9:4 ⁱ 9:16 ⁱ			6:11 ^p	
										10:4	

	'ANĀW	'ANĪ	DAL	'EBYŌN	HĒLEKĀ	MAḤSŌR	MISKĒN	MŪK	RĀSH	YĀRASH
Prov. contd.	(14:21) ^a (16:19) ^a	14:21 15:15 16:19	10:15 14:31 19:4 19:17 21:13 22:9 22:16 22:22 22:22	14:31		10:13 ⁱ 10:21 ⁱ 11:12 ⁱ 11:24 12:9 ⁱ 12:11 ⁱ 13:25 ^h 14:23 15:21 ⁱ 17:18 ⁱ 21:5 21:17 22:16 24:30 ⁱ 23:34 28:16 ⁱ 28:22 ⁱ 28:27 31:11 ^h			10:15 ^q 13:7 13:8 13:18 ^q 13:23 14:20 17:5 18:23 19:1 19:7 19:22 22:2 22:7 24:34 ^q (28:3) ^s 28:6 28:19 ^r 28:27 29:13 30:8 ^p 31:7 ^f	20:13 ⁱ 23:21 ⁱ 30:9 ⁱ
Eccles.		6:8				1:15 ^m 4:8 ^h 6:2 ⁱ 9:8 ^h 10:3 ⁱ	4:13 9:15 ⁱ 9:15 ⁱ 9:16		4:14 5:8	
Song of Sol.			7:5 ^f			7:2 ^h				
Isa.	11:4	3:14 3:15 10:2	10:2 11:4							

	'ANĀW	'ANĪ	DAL	'EBYŌN	ḤĒLEKĀ	MAḤSŌR	MISKĒN	MŪK	RĀSH	YĀRASH
Isa. contd.	29:19 32:7 61:1	14:32 26:6 (32:7) ^a 41:17 48:10 ^b 49:13 51:21 54:11 58:7 66:2	14:30 17:4 ^g 19:6 ^g 25:4 26:6 38:12 ^f 38:14 ^g	14:30 25:4 29:19 32:7 41:17		32:6 ^h 51:14 ^h	40:20 ^o			
Jer.		22:16	5:4 39:10 40:7 ^f 52:15 ^f 52:16 ^f	2:34 5:28 20:13 22:16		44:18 ^h				
Lam.		1:3 ^b 1:7 ^b 1:9 ^b 3:1 ^b 3:19 ^b								
Ezek.		16:49 18:12 18:17 22:29		16:49 18:12 22:29		4:17 ^h				
Dan.		4:27 ^c				5:27 ^b				
Amos	2:7 8:4	(8:4) ^a	2:7 4:1 5:11 8:6	2:6 4:1 5:12 8:4 8:6		4:6 ^k				
Hab.		3:14								
Zeph.	2:3	3:12	3:12							
Zech.		7:10 9:9 11:7 11:11								

Notes

Unless a symbol is attached to a text, the word reads as at the head of its column. No other words are included in the table; for additional forms, see below.

- ⌋ Square brackets indicate recurrence in the same verse of the same form.
- a Given as a marginal reading by the Jewish massoretic scholars who added vowels to the ancient consonants at c700 AD; it reflects their tradition or massōreth.
- b 'ōni
- c 'ānāyw, the massoretic marginal reading, may simply be to ensure that 'ānāw was read here, not 'āni (see BDB). If they were right, we have this one instance of 'ānāw in the singular.
- d 'ēnūt
- e 'ānēh, not Hebrew but Aramaic; but it is cognate to 'āni.
- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------|
| f dallā | i ḥāsēr (adj) | l ḥasîr |
| g dālal | j ḥeser | m ḥesrōn |
| h ḥāsēr (vb) | k ḥōser | n miskēnūt |
- o Text obscure; possibly reads "He shall call."
- | | | |
|---------|--------|--------|
| p rē'sh | q rêsh | r rîsh |
|---------|--------|--------|
- s Text probably reads "A powerful ruler," not "A destitute man."
- t For fuller treatment of yārash, see next section (6).

Additional forms not included in the above table:

- 1 The verb from which 'āni and 'ānāw are derived is 'ānā. It appears in several texts and is important for our study. Gen. 15:13; 16:6,9; 31:50; 34:2; Lev. 16:29,31; 23:27,29,32; Exod. 1:11,12; 10:3; 22:22,23; 32:18; Num. 24:24; 29:7; 30:13; Deut.8:2; 3:16; 21:14; 22:24,29; 26:6; Judg. 16:5,6,19; 19:24; 20:5; 2 Sam. 7:10; 13:12,14,22,32; 1 Kings 2:26; 8:35; 11:39; 2 Kings 17:20; 2 Chron. 6:26; Ezra 8:21; Job 30:11; (37:23); Ps. 35:13; 55:19; 88:7; 89:22; 90:15; 94:5; 102:23; 105:18; 107:17; 116:10; 119:67,71,75,107; 132:1; Eccles.1:13; 3:10; (5:20); Isa. 25:5; 27:2; 31:4; 53:4,7; 58:3,5,10; 60:14; 64:12; Lam. 3:33; 5:11; Ezek. 22:10,11; Dan. 10:12; Nahum 1:12,12; Zeph. 3:19; Zech. 10:2
- 2 In the same family are ta'ānit (Ezra 9:5), 'an*wā (Ps. 18:35;45:4) and 'ānāwā (2 Sam. 22:36; Prov. 15:33; 18:12; 22:4; Zeph. 2:3)
- 3 With dālal, some would link zālal, a "spiral form going back to the same root" (TDOT) and meaning "to be treated as without value, as insignificant, as worthless, to be reduced to the lowest level"; in usage it refers to those seen as deserving the estimation. We may discount efforts to derive Delilah from dālal; instead it means "devotee" and implies that she was a sacred prostitute in a Baal cult.
- 4 The verb from which 'ebyôn comes is 'ābā. Its occurrences are not significant for this study, but are given for completeness: Gen. 24:5,8; Exod. 10:27; Lev. 26:21; Deut. 1:26; 2:30; 10:10; 13:8; 23:5; 25:7; 29:20; Josh. 24:10; Judg. 11:17; 19:10,25; 20:13; 1 Sam. 15:9; 22:17; 26:23; 31:4; 2 Sam. 2:21; 6:10; 12:17; 13:14,16,25; 14:29,29; 23:16,17; 1 Kings 20:8; 22:49; 2 Kings 8:19; 13:23; 24:4; 1 Chron. 10:4; 11:18,19; 19:19;

2 Chron. 21:7; Job 39:9; Ps. 81:11; Prov. 1:10,25,30; 6:35; Isa. 1:19, 28:12; 30:9,15; 42:24; Ezek. 3:7,7; 20:8

- 5 In the same family is the word for the “caperberry,” ’ābîyônâ, not in the table but found in Eccles. 12:5; it has been rendered simply “desire” (Davidson), or read with different vowels as the feminine of ’ebyôn (see BDB). Job 34:36 has ’āb which the Targum takes as “desire,” and some relate to an Arabic word for “entreaty”; a letter change gives “but” (as in LXX); a different word of the same letters means “my father” which the context rules out. Prov. 23:29 has ’ābôy, “an exclamation of pain” (BDB), the cry of the yearning, pleading one despairing of justice.
- 6 We might have given fuller treatment to yārash. In addition to the texts in the table are many which refer to the “dispossessing” of peoples; this clearly involves impoverishing them. They are: Exod. 15:9; 34:24; Num. 14:12,24; 21:32; 24:18; 32:21,39; 33:52,53,55; Deut. 4:38; 7:17; 9:3,4,5; 11:23; 18:12; 28:42; Josh. 3:10,10; 8:7; 13:6,12,13; 14:12; 15:14,63; 16:10; 17:12,13,13,18; 23:5,9,13; Judg. 1:19,19,20,27,28,28,29,30,31,32,33; 2:21,23; 11:23,24,24; 1 Kings 14:24; 21:26; 2 Kings 16:3; 17:8; 21:2; 2 Chr. 20:7,11; 28:3; 33:2; Ezra 9:12; Job 13:26; 20:15; Ps. 44:2; Zech. 9:4. Other forms of the verb mean “take possession of, inherit”; this includes the promise quoted by Jesus, “The downtrodden shall inherit the land”; these forms add 155 references. Related words are yarushshāh (14), to possess; yareshāh (2), something to be possessed; mōrāshâ (9), possession or inheritance; mōrāsh (2), a place possessed; and reshet (22), something (usually a net) to take and keep possession of man or creature (e.g., Ps. 140:5; Prov. 29:5; Job 18:8; Hos. 5:1).

Other terms for consideration

The above invites a study of words regularly translated “poor.” What is required of us is wider research into passages dealing with the poor but not employing one of the words before us. This would include consideration of the fatherless, widows, resident aliens, settlers, hired servants, male and female slaves. We need also to come to terms with the vastness of the Bible’s language on oppression, which so marks the references to the poor. The major families are those of dākā’, ḥāmas, yānâ, laḥas, nāgaś, ’ānāh, ’āṣar, ’āras, ’ashaq, sūq, ṣarar, rāmas, rāsaṣ, shādad and tōk. To these we need add rasha, which may be more specific about “wickedness” or “injustice” than we care to know.