



**WELCOME to the 2023**  
**JOHN STOTT LONDON LECTURE**  
**No Worship Without the Poor**  
*with Dr Myrto Theocharous*

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**ALL SOULS**



‘We listen to **the Word** with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand.

We listen to **the world** with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolved not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathise with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it.’

**John Stott**

**JOHN STOTT LONDON LECTURE 2023**



**ALL SOULS**



**licc.**

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## JOHN STOTT LONDON LECTURE 2023



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Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code [8412 473](#)

How many times does  
the Bible call for justice,  
especially for 'the poor'?

<--- 0-99 times---100-499---500-1000---1000-1999---2000+ times--->



**ALL SOULS**



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## TECH-FAIL: NO POLL

### A. God's word **calls for *justice* over 2000+ times**.

This is especially on behalf of the poor, with over 300 direct references, further expanded if you include words such as 'needy', 'poverty', 'impoverish', and specific groups like widows, orphans, and refugees.

<--- 0-99 times---100-499---500-1000---1000-1999---**2000+ times**--->

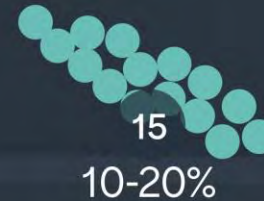
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What % of UK kids are living in poverty?

<----- 0-10%-----10-20%-----20-30%-----30+%----->



# What % of UK kids are living in poverty?



A. 29%, down from 1994, but a 186% increase since 2017.



Go to [www.menti.com](http://www.menti.com) and use the code 8412 473

**What words/images come to mind  
when you think of WORSHIP?**

*(Write up to two words/images for the word cloud)*



**ALL SOULS**



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What words/images come to mind when you think of WORSHIP?

89 responses

# Where does **inclusion of and honouring the poor** fit?





# Dr Myrto Theocharous

*on poverty, the Bible, & the church's identity*

Myrto, a Langham Scholar from Cyprus, is **Professor of Old Testament studies** at the Greek Bible College in Athens.

She has been active in **anti-trafficking street work** for many years and is President of the Greek anti-trafficking ministry, **New Life**.



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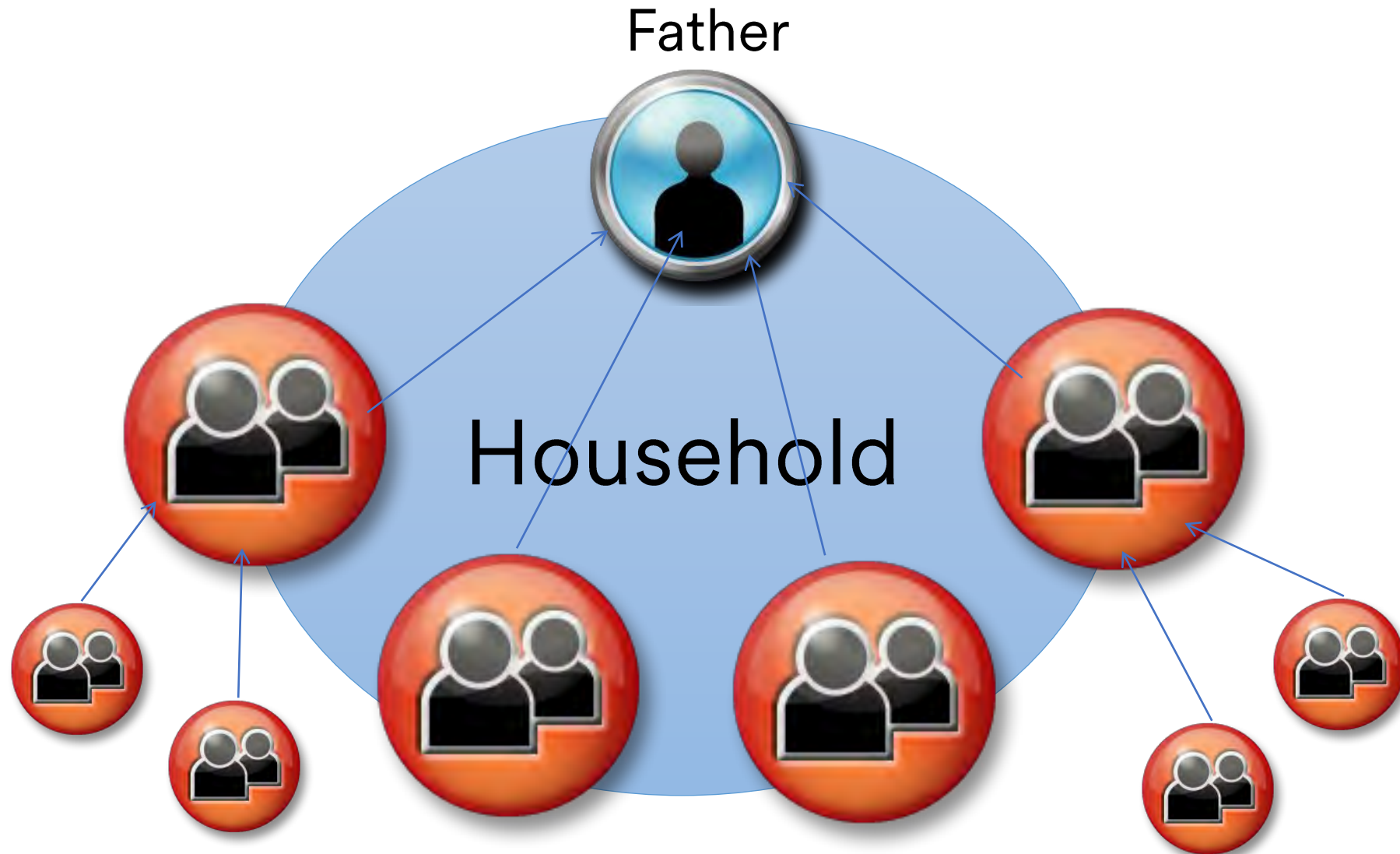
700 million people live on less than \$2.15 a day, the extreme poverty line 2022 (WorldBank.org)



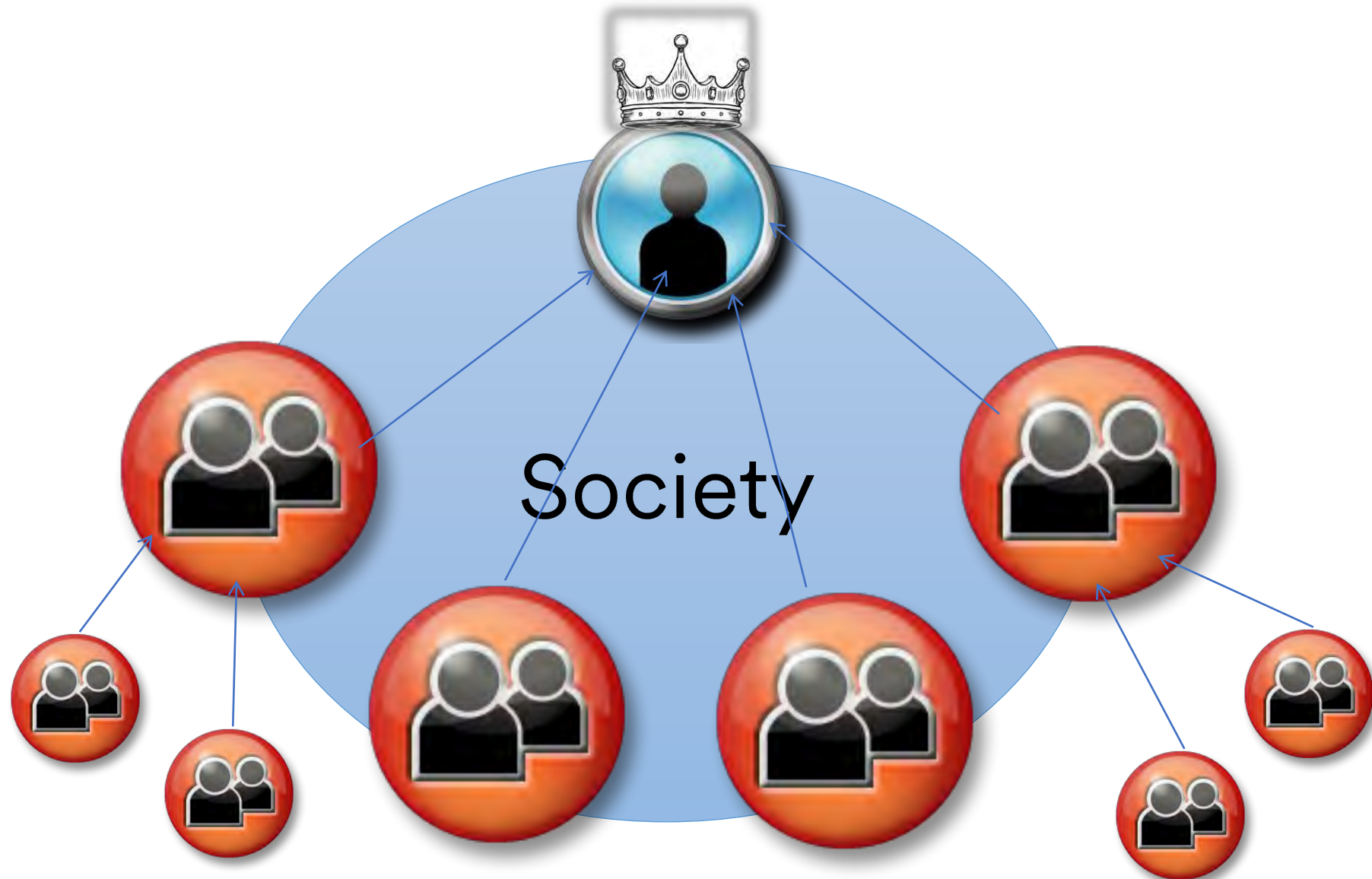
‘Poverty is a shameful existence and one that is eventually capable of destroying a person’s sense of self-worth and dignity, which should attend them as members of the human race.’

William Robert Dromeris, *Touching the Heart of God: The Social Construction of Poverty among Biblical Peasants* (New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

# The Benevolent Ancient Near Eastern King



# The Benevolent Ancient Near Eastern King





‘The Widow and the Orphan’

‘Charity’ (1865), by William-Adolphe Bouguereau | Public Domain



# Prologue to King Hammurabi's Law Code

'he will bring justice in his land, he will terminate evil, and stop the powerful from oppressing the weak.'

# Epilogue to King Hammurabi's Law Code

'in order that the powerful will not wrong the weak, in order to give justice to the orphan and the widow, I wrote down my priceless instruction on this stele.'

'...make my daily portents auspicious...'

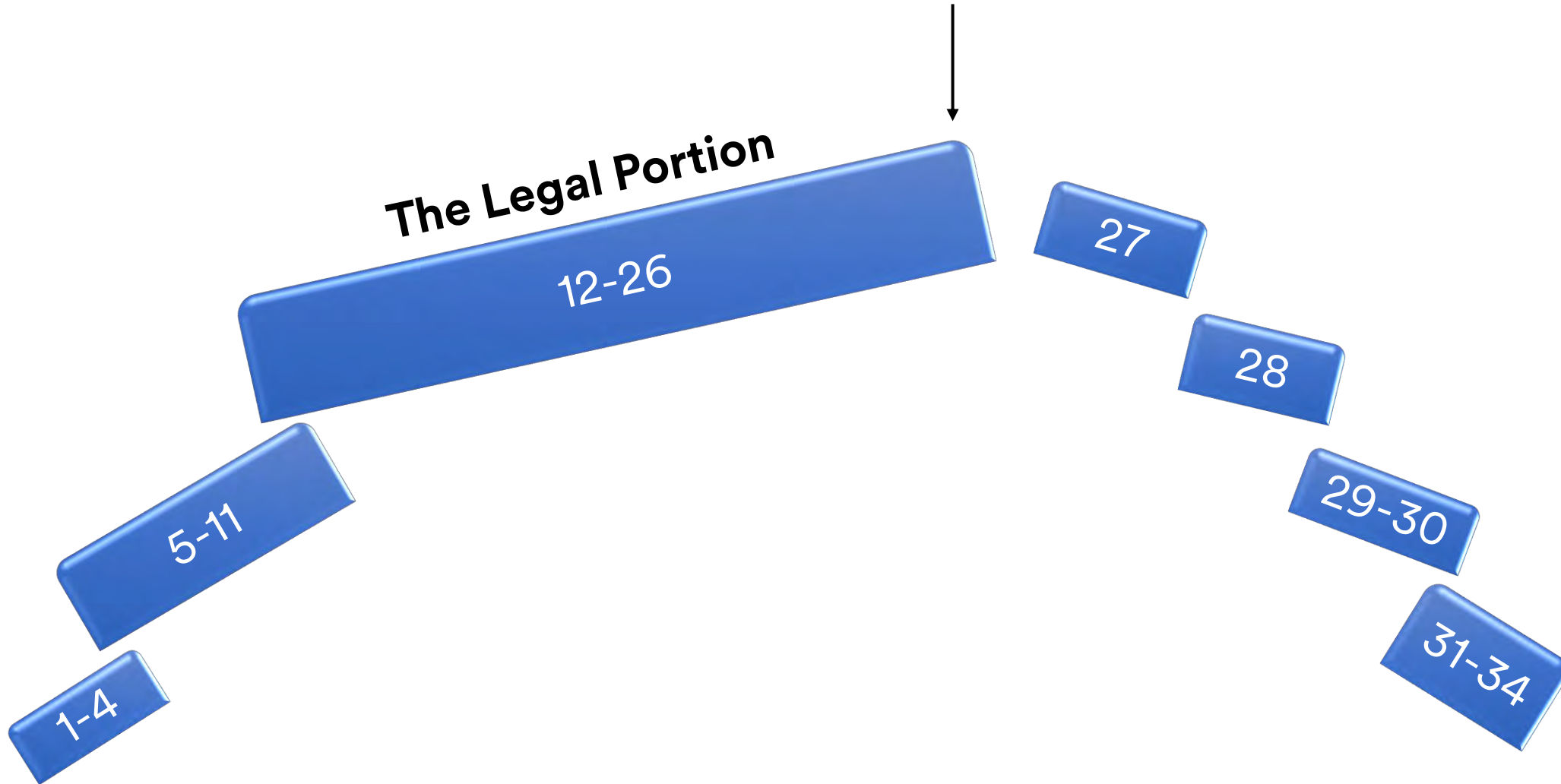
# Mesopotamian King Ur-Namma

‘I did not hand over the orphan to the rich.  
I did not leave the widow into the hands  
of the powerful.’

# Care for the Poor as the Climax of Worship



Liturgical Epilogue (26:12-15)



Structure of Deuteronomy

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year  
(which is the year of the tithe),  
giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows,  
so that they may eat their fill within your towns,  
<sup>13</sup> then you shall say before the LORD your God:

‘I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites,  
the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows,  
in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me;  
I have neither transgressed nor forgotten any of your commandments:  
<sup>14</sup> I have not eaten of it while in mourning;  
I have not removed any of it while I was unclean;  
and I have not offered any of it to the dead.  
I have obeyed the LORD my God, doing just as you commanded me.  
<sup>15</sup> Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and bless your people Israel  
and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors  
– a land flowing with milk and honey.’ (Deut. 26:12-15 NRSV)

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*Democratisation of the royal responsibility*

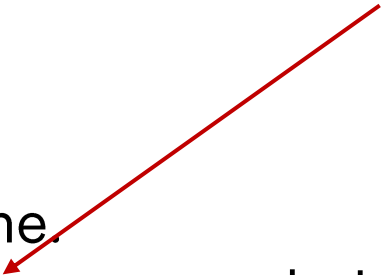
**2** When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns,  
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<sup>15</sup> Look down from your holy habitation, from heaven, and **ble**ss your people Israel and the ground that you have given us, as you swore to our ancestors -- a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deut. 26:12-15 NRSV)



‘...then they will bless you and it will be regarded as righteousness for you before the Lord your God.’

(24:13)



**3** When you have finished paying all **the tithe of your produce in the third year** (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns,  
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**Chapter 14**

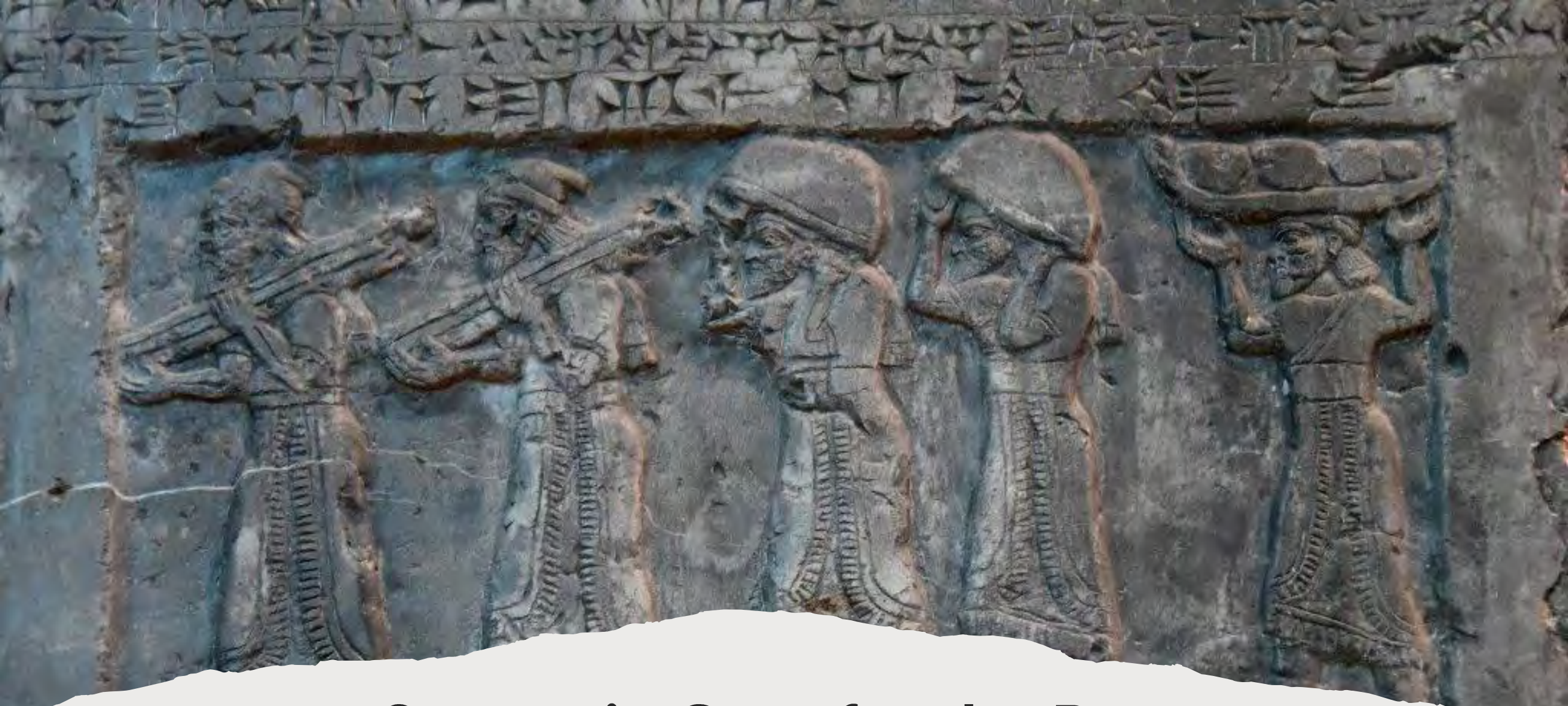


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**Systemic Care for the Poor**

# The Triennial Tithes

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it **within your towns**;  
<sup>29</sup> the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake. (Deut. 14:28-29 NRSV)

# The Triennial Tithes

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## Chapter 26

When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows,

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<sup>13</sup> then you shall say before the LORD your God:

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'Drive out, get rid of' (*bi'ēr*)

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...on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree.  
(Deut. 12:2 NRSV)



# The Triennial Tithes

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## **Levitical Landlessness and the Sanctity of the Poor**

# The Levites' Landlessness

(Deut. 10:9; 12:12; 14:27; 18:1)

Aaron's landlessness (Num. 18:20-25)

Landless groups: Widow, orphan, alien

# Dependence on God

‘Do not neglect the Levites’ (12:19; 14:27, 29) // ‘Do not neglect Yahweh’ (8:11)

Give them cities and pastures (Num. 35:6-8; Josh. 21)

# Shared Sanctity

Levites in charge of holy things (10:8-9)

Appearing together and sharing the *qadosh*  
(12:12, 18; 14:29; 16:11, 14; 26:11, 12, 13)

# The Levite as Israel's Ideal

## Israel as Royal Priesthood

‘The relation of Levi to Israel in Deuteronomy is such as to be an ideal representation of how the whole people should stand both to Yahweh and to the land.’

(Gordon McConville)

## The Levites teach:

1. Land and material possessions relativised
2. Poor also sacred
3. Levites called to solidarity with the poor
4. The Levites' poverty is the people's disobedience

# Poverty and Christian Identity

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Jesus' priesthood  
=  
solidarity with the poor

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Deuteronomy 16:11, 14

## Israelite's Household

1. Sons
2. Daughters
3. Male servants
4. Female servants



## God's Household

1. Levites
2. Foreigners
3. Orphans
4. Widows



**Thank you!**

[mtheocharous@grbc.gr](mailto:mtheocharous@grbc.gr)



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Go to [www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) and use the code [8412 473](#)

What **question** do you have  
for Myrto & Chris?

Any short & sharp **comment**  
to enrich the conversation?



## QUESTIONS + COMMENTS FOR MYRTO & CHRIS | **Bold = answered at the event.**

Could you please tell some stories of what this looks like on your life and through your ministry among refugees and trafficked people.

**Are there ways in which you might invite churches to reimagine giving and how they handle their finances in light of these passages in Deuteronomy?**

**Why is it that the link between Levites and the poor has been lost in most modern Christian teaching ?**

Is this why Jesus specifically mentions the poor in inauguration of his kingdom of God at the start of his ministry. Eg Luke 4:18

**What does Deuteronomy speak to our desire to spend money on Church ornaments as well as the poor? Should one be prioritised?**

**You spoke of the 'poor church'. What does that look like today?**

You allude to the implications for the local church and its leadership. What about the implications for the larger structures of the institutional church?

Would other forms of poverty, such as mental health struggles, enrich this discussion or is the Western church too far from the basics for this and needs to baby step towards honouring the poor?

**What suggestions do you have for churches to encourage all of us to be engaged with loving & serving the poor - as it would seem God desires?**

How might disobedience in this area, adversely affect the community of God's people, the church of Jesus Christ?

Could there be a centralised model to support churches in following this as a new paradigm?

**How can the church address the fact that it has benefitted from the poor through Colonialism in the past and global capital in the present that perpetrates poverty globally?**

**What is today's equivalent of the triennial tithe?**

**The church through various agencies (CAP and foodbank to name just 2) already try to draw alongside the poor etc. Do you consider these to be modern 21st century UK examples of Levite models?**

It's good to hear from a female theologian who has a different non-conservative interpretation of Scripture than the standard evangelical one that is so often heard. Can Myrto do a sermon on this?

**Jesus said 'the poor you will always have with you'. What do you make of this comment in the context of the passage?**

Should we save income for ourselves and our children (retirement, university), or give more /all away and trust God to provide for our own future needs?

Can you suggest ways we can be giving to the poor today?

Please explain the relation between poverty and salvation

It can feel difficult to know where to start in terms of solidarity with the poor - do you have any advice on a first step?

**How do we dismantle an 'us and them' mentality in a (largely) privileged church? How do we do authentic proximity to the poor?**

No worship without the poor... how incomplete is the worship in our local (eg suburban) church contexts?

How much should the church today be replicating the model of Israel? I.e. - the model of tithe that supports the Levite and the poor.

What does the link of landlessness between the Levites and the poor say to our western obsession with landowning and house-ownership?

If we identify with the Levite and the poor, widow, alien... and Jesus identifies with the poor, prisoner, hungry, how do we decide who we are, who gives and/or receives. Who are we if we are to give?

How can we integrate this liturgy into our families especially when we have small children?

The Levites are temple keepers and not full priests. How does this relate to the priesthood and the high priests?

How should we measure how well the church is doing in caring for the poor? What should we look for?

**You mentioned that when these tithes are fulfilled, then the land will be blessed. Is there any connection between the neglect of the poor and our current ecological crisis?**

In what ways can a local church measure their effectiveness in caring for the poor?

Given that so many European politicians seem to want to push the economic migrant poor away , what should we the church be doing? Is it time to challenge the status quo?

To what extent do you believe the New Testament corroborates a priority for the poor?

Is this vision of caring for the poor essentially Communism? Is this a Biblical argument for a more socialist society?

Do we need to change our definition of what 'excessive wealth' is? We picture billionaires ... but actually most of us probably live with more than we need

You have talked about bringing the poor up to a level where they can be part of a church & society's decision making. Does this have implications for inequalities in our society?

'The economy is a wholly owned subsidiary of the environment'

**2024 LECTURE**

**THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER**

# AI and Authentic Intergenerational Disciplemaking

*with Dr. John Wyatt*



**JOHN STOTT LONDON LECTURE 2024**



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