

Laws About the Poor

- God's concern for the poor is baked into his law. What do these laws show us about how to care well for those in need?

Protections for the poor

- Guaranteed rest. In the sabbath law, the lower classes must be allowed to rest too (Exod 20:10; 23:12).
- Required inclusion in the feasts (Deut 16:11, 14).
- No unmerciful pledges (a pledge is a promise that you will pay a debt), where you take something they need to live: e.g., taking a millstone or a garment that they sleep in (Exod 22:26–27; Deut 24:6, 12–13, 17–18).
- The poor should be paid their wages right away (Deut 24:14–15).
- No misleading the blind (Deut 27:18).
- Justice for all classes.
 - A curse on any who distort the justice due to the alien, orphan, and widow (Deut 27:19).
 - But judges must not favor the poor in a lawsuit (Exod 22:3; Lev 19:15).
- Orphans, widows, sojourners must also not be oppressed (Exod 22:21–24).
- Slaves cannot be mistreated or ruled ruthlessly (Lev 25:53).
- Must not be required to pay interest on debts (Exod 22:25; Deut 23:19–20).
- No kidnapping people to sell into slavery (Deut 24:7).

Alleviation of poverty

- Every third year, the tithe is deposited in towns for the needy (Deut 14:29; 26:12–13).
- Every seventh year, fields should lie fallow. The poor may eat the produce that grows on them (Exod 23:11).
- When the Israelites harvest, they are not supposed to take everything. They leave the produce on the edges for the poor (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 24:20–22).
- More wealthy Israelites are required to lend to poorer Israelites (Deut 15:7–8).
 - They should also provide for those who can't support themselves (Lev 25:35–38).
- Debts are to be relinquished every seven years (Deut 15:2).
- When offering sacrifices, the poor can offer less than normally required.
 - For cleansing from unintended uncleanness (Lev 5:7, 11).
 - For cleansing after delivering a baby (Lev 12:8).
 - For cleansing from leprosy (Lev 14:21–22).
 - For special vows (Lev 27:8).

Providing exit ramps out of poverty

- Every seven years, slaves are released (Exod 21:1–6; Deut 15:12–17). They are also released at the Jubilee every fifty years (Lev 25:39–40, 54).
 - Slaves can also always be redeemed by relatives or themselves (Lev 25:47–52).
- Escaped slaves must not be given back to their masters (Deut 23:15–16).
- Land that was sold reverts back to those who sold it once every fifty years at the Jubilee (Lev 25:25–28).