

Rich & Poor, Part 1 IN RUTH AND THE LAW OF MOSES

September 2021

In God's laws for Israel given through Moses, God taught the Israelites how they should help their poor. The best example of how ancient Israelites carried out these instructions in everyday life appears in the story of Ruth. Here we will look at how society, and especially Boaz, cared for Naomi and Ruth, and how these practices were rooted in God's earlier commands to Israel. How did God intend for these commands, when carried out, to provide for the poor? to help those who were not poor? to stabilize society? (For reference, the Law was given to Israel some 200-400 years before the time of Ruth, and Proverbs was begun some 150 years after the time of Ruth and completed probably 400 years after Ruth.)

Issue #1: Why are the poor poor? (Ruth 1)

We discover in chapter 2 that Naomi and Ruth are poor—they cannot survive only on whatever food they are able to buy. According to chapter 1, why are they poor?

- **Ruth 1:21** — According to Naomi, why are they in this unfortunate situation?

The book of Proverbs recognizes that a number of factors might cause the poor to become poor. According to these passages, what might make a person poor?

- Proverbs 6:9-11 —
- Proverbs 10:4 —
- Proverbs 13:18 —
- Proverbs 13:23 —
- Proverbs 14:23 —
- Proverbs 20:13 —
- Proverbs 21:5 —
- Proverbs 21:17 —
- Proverbs 22:16 —
- Proverbs 23:19-21 —
- Proverbs 24:30-34 —
- Proverbs 28:19 —
- Proverbs 28:22 —
- *Bonus: Ecclesiastes 9:11-12* —
- *Which of these causes of poverty most closely matches the experience of Naomi and Ruth?*

in the Law of Moses...

Deuteronomy 15:11 — Moses told Israel, "There will always be _____ in the land. Therefore I command you to be _____ toward your fellow Israelites who are _____ and _____ in your land."

Issue #2: Providing for Immediate Needs (Ruth 2)

What did Ruth do to provide food for herself and Naomi?

- 2:2 —
- 2:3 —
- 2:7 —
- 2:17-18 —
- 2:23 —

What did Boaz do to facilitate Ruth's effort and provide her and Naomi with grain?

- 2:8-9 —
- 2:14-16 —
- 2:21 —

food for thought — Why do you think Boaz did not simply give Ruth grain that had already been collected, and save her some effort? What advantages were there to providing for her the way he did?

in the Law of Moses...

Leviticus 19:9-10 — What instruction did God give to farmers? Why?

Leviticus 23:22 — What instruction did God give to farmers here? What two groups was this instruction intended to help?

Deuteronomy 24:19-22 — What instruction did God give to farmers here?

- List the three groups for whom this food was intended. Which of these three categories did Naomi and Ruth fit into?
- Why might God have been especially concerned for the wellbeing of these three groups?
- What responsibilities did the poor have for providing their own food, according to these passages from Leviticus and Deuteronomy?

Deuteronomy 15:7-11 — What attitude and behavior did God expect from Israelites who had resources (food, land, money, etc.) toward those Israelites who did not?

- How did Boaz model this attitude and behavior for Ruth and Naomi, beyond merely allowing Ruth to glean on his property?

Deuteronomy 14:28-29 & 26:12-15 — What were the Israelites to do to provide for those in need in their own communities?

Issue #3: Providing for Long-Term Needs (Ruth 3-4)

Ruth 3:1 — Naomi wanted to find a home for Ruth so that Ruth would be...

Ruth 3:15-17 — What did Boaz do to again provide for Ruth's and Naomi's immediate needs?

Ruth 4:1-5 — The person who bought (redeemed) Naomi's land (that her late husband, Elimelek, had owned) would also acquire _____.

- Why? (See 4:5, 4:10.) How would this provide for Elimelek's family long-term?

in the Law of Moses...

Leviticus 25:8-55 — *This passage lays out several protections against poverty for the people of Israel.*

- 25:8-24 — In the fiftieth year, the Year of Jubilee, every person was to return to their own _____.
 - How do you think the restoration of property to someone who had sold it would...
 - ...help decrease poverty?
 - ...help maintain extended family relationships?
- 25:25-28 — Property (outside a city) that was sold could be redeemed...
 - ...verse 25 — by the original owner's nearest _____.
 - ...verses 26-27 — by the original owner, if they acquired sufficient means to buy it back.
 - ...verse 28 — by the original owner, at no charge, in the Year of _____.
 - Which of these scenarios applies to the land Naomi sold?
- 25:29-31 — The situation was different for houses inside a walled city. With those houses, how long did the seller retain the right of redemption?
- 25:32-34 — Levites always had the right to redeem the houses they sold in their own towns. (Certain towns belonged specifically to the Levites.) Their situation was unique because they had to be able to leave their towns and farms to serve at the tabernacle/temple when needed.
- 25:35-38 — What did God prohibit Israelites to do to one another when lending money?
- 25:39-43 — Israelite slaves, who sold themselves to pay off debts, were to be treated as hired workers and were to be released in the Year of _____.
 - **Exodus 21:2-6** — Notice that the maximum length of time an Israelite could keep another Israelite as a slave was _____ years; then the Israelite slave was to be set free (even if it was not the Year of Jubilee). *The slave could, however, choose to remain a slave to their master for life, particularly (in this passage) in order to keep from breaking up the slave's family.*
 - **Deuteronomy 15:12-18** — When an Israelite slave was released, what was the master supposed to do for the slave?
 - *Again, the slave could choose to remain a slave to that master for life, particularly (in this passage) because the slave loves the master and the master's family.*
 - **Leviticus 25:44-46** — The situation was different for foreigners: they could be held as slaves to Israelite owners permanently.
 - **Leviticus 25:47-55** — Israelite slaves owned by foreigners in Israel always had the right to redeem themselves or to be redeemed by a relative. If they were not redeemed, they were still to be freed in the Year of Jubilee.