

# LAWS THAT PROTECT RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN SOCIETY: HOW TO PREVENT ABUSE DEUTERONOMY 24:14–22

## *Introduction*

One thing is an absolute essential within any society: good and healthy relationships. No nation can survive without healthy relationships among its citizens. Broken relationships lead to ill will, anger, strife, lawlessness, violence and killing among neighbours.

Sometimes it even leads to insurrection against government. Broken relationships result in the ruin and collapse of any society. The greatest threat to any nation's survival is not from without but from within. A nation of people — in fact, any body of people — can remain strong only if the relationships between people are strong and healthy.

Moses, the aged servant of God, knew the importance of healthy relationships among God's people. Remember, the Israelites were camped in the plains of Moab close to the Jordan River, camped right across from the great city of Jericho. The Israelites are poised to cross the Jordan River into the promised land. But before they enter the land promised by God, one thing is essential: the people must understand the importance of building strong relationships among themselves. They must protect relationships within society, protect the relationships between the various categories of people. They must learn the laws of God that protect these relationships. God revealed these laws for two purposes: to show the Israelites how their society was to be governed, and to show all future societies the very spirit and principles that were to underlie their laws. God gave His law to all people to illustrate the principles that were to govern their relationships to one another. God Himself has a very significant role to play in every society. This is the subject of this most important passage of Scripture: *Laws That Protect Relationships within Society: How to Prevent Abuse*, Deuteronomy 24:1-22.

- I. The protection of marriage, the issue of divorce and remarriage (vv. 1-4).
  - II. The protection of a newly married couple (v. 5).
  - III. The protection of livelihood (v. 6).
  - IV. The protection from kidnapping (v. 7).
  - V. The protection from people with infectious diseases (leprosy) (vv. 8-9).
  - VI. The protection from loan collectors (vv. 10-13).
  - VII. The protection of the poor worker (vv. 14-15).
  - VIII. The protection of justice (v. 16).
  - IX. The protection of the defenceless: Foreigner, orphan and widow (vv. 17-18).
  - X. The protection of the food supply for the poor and underprivileged (vv. 19-22).
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## **I. Deuteronomy 24:14–15 The Protection of the Poor Worker**

The seventh law concerned the protection of the poor worker.

This law is clearly stated: you must not take advantage of the poor and needy worker, no matter who he is, even if he is an alien or foreigner. You must pay him full wages and pay him on time. Within Israelite society, the wages were to be paid each day before sunset. This was necessary so that a person could purchase enough food to feed his family for that day. The poor would not have enough money to buy food ahead of time. They survived day by day.

Note the warning: the person who disobeys this law will become guilty of sin and face the judgment of God. The poor man who is cheated out of his wages will cry out to God against his oppressor, and God will hear his cry. The poor man has no one else to whom he can appeal. His only resource is God. Consequently, if he is cheated out of his wages, he is forced to cry out for help from the only person who will hear him, God Himself. Scripture is clear: God will vindicate the cry of the poor who are oppressed. The oppressor is guilty of sin and will face the eternal judgment of God.

*Col 4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

*James 5:1-6 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.*

*James 5:4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the LORD Almighty.*

*Lev 19:13 “Do not defraud your neighbour or rob him. Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.”*

*Jer 22:13 Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labour.*

*Mal 3:5 “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.*

## **II. Deuteronomy 24:16 The Protection of Justice**

The eighth law concerned the protection of justice, true justice — a justice that declares personal responsibility for crimes committed.

Each person is individually, personally responsible for his own crime; therefore, he must personally bear the punishment for the crime. Moses gives the example of a father or a child who steps forth to bear the punishment for the other. There is a tendency among parents to protect their children or among older children to protect their parents when facing the responsibility for a particular crime. The father or child willingly accepts responsibility for the crime in order to protect the other. But God is clear: each individual is responsible for his own behaviour, and each individual is to bear the punishment for his behaviour. If a parent is guilty, the parent is to bear the punishment of the crime. If the child is guilty, then the child is to bear the punishment of the crime. Every person is responsible for his own behaviour. Justice is to be upheld and protected, true justice. The guilty are to be held responsible for their crimes, and they are to bear the punishment for their crimes. Again, a person is to be held individually, personally responsible for his own behaviour.

*Rom 14:12 So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God.*

*Deut 16:20 Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

*Job 19:4 If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone.*

*Prov 9:12 If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you; if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer.*

*Prov 21:3 To do what is right and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*

*Isa 56:1 This is what the LORD says: "Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed."*

*Jer 31:30 Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes — his own teeth will be set on edge.*

*Ezek 18:20 The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.*

## **III. Deuteronomy 24:17–18 The Protection of the Defenceless: Foreigner, Orphan and Widow**

The ninth law concerned the protection of the defenceless — the foreigner, orphan and widow. The law is clear: a person must grant true justice and show compassion to the underprivileged and defenceless of society. The foreigner has absolutely no way to protect himself; neither does an orphan or poor widow. They are somewhat helpless

within society, completely dependent upon the laws and compassion of a community. When dealing with the underprivileged and defenceless, the law of God is clear: they must be granted true justice and shown compassion. The Israelites knew exactly what it meant to be helpless and defenceless, for they had been slaves in Egypt. But they also knew what it was to experience mercy, for God had mercy upon them and delivered them from Egyptian slavery. For this reason, the Israelites were to show compassion upon the less fortunate, the underprivileged and the defenceless of society.

**Thought 1.** God has shown compassion to us and redeemed us from the enslavement of sin and death. The lesson for us is clear: we must show compassion and grant true justice to the underprivileged, the defenceless and the needy of this world. In compassion and mercy, we must reach out to the foreigners, orphans and widows of our communities. We must do all we can to help them and to meet their needs.

**Luke 6:38** *“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”*

**Luke 12:33** *“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.”*

**Mat 25:25** *‘So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’*

**Acts 20:35** *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*

**Rom 12:13** *Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

**2 Cor 9:6** *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.*

**Gal 6:10** *Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

**James 1:27** *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

**Exo 22:21** *“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.”*

**Exo 22:22** *“Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless.”*

**Lev 19:34** *The foreigner living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.*

**Lev 25:35** “If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary resident, so he can continue to live among you.”

**Deut 24:17-18** “Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.”

**Deut 26:12** When you have finished setting aside a tenth of all your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that they may eat in your towns and be satisfied.

**Deut 27:19** “Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.” Then all the people shall say, “Amen!”

**Deut 31:12** Assemble the people — men, women and children, and the foreigner residing in your towns — so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of the law.

**Isa 58:6-7** “Is not this the kind of fasting [religion] I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter — when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

**Prov 11:25** A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.

**Prov 22:9** A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.

**Isa 1:17** Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow.

**Isa 58:10** And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

#### **IV. Deuteronomy 24:19–22 The Protection of the Food Supply for the Poor and Underprivileged**

The tenth law concerned the protection of the food supply for the poor and underprivileged. When Israel crossed the Jordan River and entered the promised land, there would be some persons who would eventually become poor. Poverty is caused by a host of reasons: bad judgment, poor business skills, bad health, accident, natural disaster, laziness or sin. Consequently, some Israelites would not be sharing directly in the land promised by God, not sharing in the fruit of the land, not having a part in the joy and rejoicing over the harvest of the land. This law was established so the poor and

underprivileged would have a part in the land promised by God. This law allowed them to participate in the fruit of the land.

1. The law stipulated that a landowner must leave some grain for the poor (vv. 19-21). When harvesting the field, the landowner was not to pick the field clean. He was not to go back over the field a second time. Whatever had been missed was to be left. Note the promise of God: the landowner who obeyed this law would be richly blessed by God, blessed in all his work.

The landowner was also to leave some olives and grapes for the poor (vv. 20-21). He was to harvest the olive trees and the grape vines only once, leaving whatever had been missed. This law meant several significant things:

- => The poor had to work, harvest their own food, to eat.
  - => The work gave the poor a sense of purpose, fulfilment and satisfaction.
  - => The poor were protected from the humiliation and shame of having to beg and depend upon welfare.
2. The reason why the landowner must obey this law is significant: God is the one who has blessed the landowner. God had compassion upon the landowner of Israel, saved him from slavery and poverty in Egypt (v. 22). The implication is clear: the landowner was to show compassion to the poor and underprivileged. He was to protect the food supply in the fields, make sure there was enough for the poor and underprivileged to harvest, enough to provide a livelihood for themselves and their families.

**Thought 1.** Work or employment must be provided for the poor and underprivileged. Any person who is able to work must be given the opportunity to earn a livelihood for himself and his family. If a person is not able to work — such as a foreigner, orphan, widow or widower — that person must be looked after and fed. We must protect the food supply for the poor and underprivileged, provide for whatever needs they have. This is the strong declaration of Scripture:

**Mat 19:21-23** *Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”*

**Acts 20:35** *In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’*

**Gal 2:10** *All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.*

**Deu 15:7** *If there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your poor brother.*

**Deu 16:17** *Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the LORD your God has blessed you.*

**Psa 41:1** *Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the LORD delivers him in times of trouble.*

**Psa 82:3** *Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.*

**Prov 19:17** *He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.*

**Prov 21:13** *If a man shuts his ears to the cry of the poor, he too will cry out and not be answered. ■*