

# Dr. Michael Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4: Widows, Orphans, and RA Provisions Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4: Widows, Orphans, and RA Provisions, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Michael Harbin's teaching, "Social Justice for Social Outliers in Ancient Israel, Part 4," examines provisions for widows, orphans, and resident aliens (WORA) within ancient Israelite society. The lecture outlines four specific programs intended to support this vulnerable group: Levirate Marriage (for childbearing-aged, childless widows), Gleaning, Tithes and Third Year Tithes, and Sabbath Year Garnering. **Harbin explains the structure and intent behind each provision, emphasizing the cultural context of an agrarian society where access to land was crucial.** He highlights principles like planned margins, community responsibility, and local-level support embedded in these ancient laws. **Ultimately, the session explores how these historical provisions, while specific to their time, reveal enduring principles that can inform contemporary approaches to social justice.**

**2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4 –  
Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Theology → Old Testament Theology).**



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### **3. Briefing Document: Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4: Widows, Orphans, and RA Provisions**

Briefing Document: Social Justice for Social Outliers in Ancient Israel - Provisions for Widows, Orphans, and Resident Aliens (WORA)

#### **Executive Summary:**

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented by Dr. Michael Harbin in Part 4 of his teaching series on "Social Justice for Social Outliers in Ancient Israel," specifically focusing on the provisions established for widows, orphans (fatherless), and resident aliens (collectively referred to as WORA). Dr. Harbin analyzes the social fabric of ancient Israel and identifies four key programs intended to support these vulnerable groups: Levirate Marriage, Gleaning, Tithes and Third Year Tithes, and Sabbath Year Garnering. He emphasizes that these provisions were embedded within a specific agrarian society with a strong emphasis on community and religious adherence. While the historical context differs significantly from modern society, Dr. Harbin suggests that the underlying principles of these provisions can inform contemporary approaches to social justice.

#### **Main Themes and Important Ideas:**

##### **1. Defining Social Justice in Ancient Israel:**

- Dr. Harbin defines social justice as a "balancing of two things: two questions. Am I pulling my fair load, the burdens, prescriptive guidelines, and am I getting my fair share, the benefits, which are redemptive guidelines? And both are expected."
- He highlights that the social fabric of ancient Israel was a dynamic structure requiring regular mending, particularly when death left individuals isolated.

##### **2. Identifying the WORA and Their Common Need:**

- The text specifically addresses three categories of social outliers: "widows, orphans, actually fatherless, and resident aliens, which we collectively denoted as the WORA."
- The primary commonality among these groups was their lack of direct access to agricultural resources in a society where most people were agrarian-based. "Without those agricultural resources, the WORA required special social justice provisions."

### 3. Four Key Social Justice Provisions for the WORA:

- **Levirate Marriage:**

- Applied uniquely to "widows still of childbearing age" who had no children.
- A relative of the deceased husband was to marry the widow to produce offspring who would care for her in her old age.
- The son born from this union would inherit the name and heritage of the first husband.
- If a widow already had children, it was expected that they would provide for her in her old age, aligning with the cultural expectation that "children were the primary source of support for the elderly."
- Paul's commentary in 1 Timothy 5 provides a more urban perspective, emphasizing the primary responsibility of children and grandchildren to care for elderly widows, with the church stepping in if there are no family supports.

- **Gleaning:**

- The "primary provision for the WORA" and applied to all three groups (widows, fatherless, and resident aliens).
- Involved going through harvested fields and orchards to collect leftover produce.
- Old Testament guidelines in Leviticus 19 and Deuteronomy 24 instructed landowners:
- Not to reap to the corners of their fields.
- To leave behind dropped sheaves.
- Not to go back through for missed produce.
- These guidelines applied to grain, vineyards, and olive trees, indicating a scope covering the entire harvest season.
- Dr. Harbin notes the principle of an "intentional margin" for farmers, suggesting they should plan to produce more than their needs to provide for others. "When producing, plan for more than you could use."
- Gleaning provided an opportunity for the WORA to obtain food through their own labor from land they did not own. "It's significant that the gleaning process provided an opportunity for the Wara to gather food from land that they did not

own and for which they had not participated in the sowing and tending of the crops. But they were required to put in the labor to gather that produce as well as to thresh it and then to take it home and process it."

- The example of Ruth highlights how a member of the WORA could follow the harvest season to sustain themselves.
- **Tithes and Third Year Tithes:**
- All Israelites were required to tithe one-tenth of their harvest.
- Initially, the tithe belonged to the Lord, but Numbers 18 clarifies that it was given to the Levites as their inheritance for their role as teachers and guides.
- Every third year, the tithe was handled differently: "Instead of having the celebration before God and giving the rest to the Levites, it was to be stored in the local towns." (Deuteronomy 14)
- This "third-year tithe" was specifically intended to provide produce for the WORA and the Levites on an "as-needed basis" in each local city, functioning as a "welfare pantry."
- Unlike gleaning, there seemed to be no requirement for the recipients to work for the third-year tithe distribution. "As such, the distribution from the third-year tithe would seem to be rather minimal, perhaps a short-term bridge to cover a temporary need."
- **Sabbath Year Garnering:**
- Every seventh year was a Sabbath year where Israelites were not to plant, tend, or harvest, allowing the "land was to rest."
- The purpose of the Sabbath year was primarily to let the land rest, though it also provided an opportunity for the poor.
- While harvesting was forbidden, Exodus 23 and Leviticus 25 suggest that volunteer produce that grew during the Sabbath year could be picked and eaten by everyone, including the farmer and the WORA. "Everyone was to put an equal basis of trust on God's provision, which means that the farm owner and the WORA were on an equal footing."
- The Sabbath year served as a reminder that God was the ultimate creator and provider.

- Failure to observe the Sabbath year was considered a serious offense, with 2 Chronicles 36 linking it to the exile.

#### **4. Underlying Principles and the Social Fabric:**

- Dr. Harbin emphasizes that these provisions were embedded within a specific social structure characterized by:
  - **Integrated extended families:** Providing a primary support network.
  - **Dispersed land parcels:** Potentially fostering cooperation among farmers.
  - **The third-year tithe:** A community-based resource administered locally by the Levites.
- The principle of "love your neighbor as yourself" (summarized in the last six of the Ten Commandments) underpinned these social justice measures.
- The Torah provided a "special safety net" for the WORA, recognizing their vulnerability in a fallen world.

#### **5. Balance and Intentional Margin:**

- The provisions demonstrated a balance:
  - Some required the recipient to work (gleaning, Sabbath year garnering).
  - Others addressed short-term emergency needs (third-year tithe).
- A significant aspect was the requirement for the community to maintain an "intentional margin" or "living below their means in order to provide a surplus to share." Farmers were expected to produce enough for their families, the tithe, and gleaners.

#### **6. Localized Nature of Social Justice:**

- Support for the WORA was largely embedded at the local (village) level, where there was familiarity and the extended family could play a role.
- The third-year tithe was stored and distributed within local Levitical cities.
- This emphasized "neighbors helping neighbors."

## 7. Applicability to Contemporary Society:

- While the specific provisions were designed for a homogeneous agrarian society, Dr. Harbin suggests that the "underlying principles noted could serve as a springboard for developing contemporary social justice provisions."

### Quotes:

- "We then define the concept of social justice as a balancing, concluding that it's a balancing of two things: two questions. Am I pulling my fair load, the burdens, prescriptive guidelines, and am I getting my fair share, the benefits, which are redemptive guidelines? And both are expected."
- "Without those agricultural resources, the WORA required special social justice provisions."
- "The underlying principle seems to lie simply in the admonition that widows were to be provided for. In that culture, children were the primary source of support for the elderly..."
- "So, our second provision is gleaning. This is the primary provision for the WORA and is applied to all three groups."
- "When landowners harvested grain, they were not to reap to the corners. The grain left standard was intended for the gleaners, that is, for the WORA."
- "It's significant that the gleaning process provided an opportunity for the Wara to gather food from land that they did not own and for which they had not participated in the sowing and tending of the crops."
- "Basically, it would appear that these goods were to be available on an as-needed basis for the WORA in that region as well as for the Levites... a short-term, bail-them-out-of-a-hard-situation idea."
- "During the Sabbath year, the land rested. Everyone was to put an equal basis of trust on God's provision, which means that the farm owner and the WORA were on an equal footing."
- "A third observation might be that a significant part of the social justice structure would require an intentional margin on the part of the overall community. Or, to put it in contemporary terms, living below their means in order to provide a surplus to share."

- "All these factors indicate that, in essence, we see neighbors helping neighbors, not just somebody living next door, but somebody they really knew."
- "Still, keeping these provisions in mind, the underlying principles noted could serve as a springboard for developing contemporary social justice provisions."

**Conclusion:**

Dr. Harbin's analysis reveals a comprehensive system of social justice embedded within the laws and social structures of ancient Israel, specifically designed to care for the vulnerable WORA. These provisions, ranging from familial obligations to community-wide practices and reliance on God's provision, highlight the importance of both individual responsibility and collective action in ensuring the well-being of social outliers. While rooted in a specific historical and agricultural context, the underlying principles of intentional generosity, community support, and dignified assistance offer valuable insights for addressing social justice in contemporary society.

## 4. Study Guide: Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4: Widows, Orphans, and RA Provisions

Study Guide: Social Justice for Social Outliers in Ancient Israel, Part 4

### Key Concepts

- **Social Justice:** A balance between bearing one's fair share of societal burdens and receiving one's fair share of societal benefits.
- **Social Outliers (WORA):** Widows, Orphans (fatherless), and Resident Aliens, who lacked direct access to agricultural resources in ancient Israel.
- **Levirate Marriage:** A practice where the brother of a deceased man marries the widow who has no children to produce an heir who would care for her and inherit the deceased's lineage.
- **Gleaning:** The practice of allowing the poor to collect leftover crops from the edges of fields, dropped sheaves, and unpicked produce after the main harvest.
- **Tithes:** One-tenth of agricultural produce that Israelites were required to give. This tithe supported the Levites and, in the third year, the WORA.
- **Third-Year Tithe:** A specific tithe collected every third year and stored locally for the Levites and the WORA to address short-term needs.
- **Sabbath Year Garnering:** In the seventh year, the land was to lie fallow, and whatever grew voluntarily could be gathered by all, including the poor.
- **Extended Family:** The primary social unit in ancient Israel, providing a network of support and responsibility.
- **Kinship Groups:** Clans and extended families that formed the basis of community settlement and influenced social practices.
- **Planned Margin:** The principle of producing more than one's immediate needs to provide for tithes and those in need.
- **Local Level Provision:** The idea that social justice needs were primarily addressed within local villages and communities where people knew each other.

### Short-Answer Quiz

1. Define social justice as presented in the source material.



2. Who are the social outliers specifically discussed, and what was the primary challenge they faced in ancient Israel?
3. Describe the purpose and limitations of Levirate Marriage as a social justice provision.
4. Explain the practice of gleaning and provide at least two specific examples of how landowners were instructed to facilitate it.
5. How did the regular annual tithe function, and who were its primary beneficiaries?
6. What was unique about the third-year tithe, and what was its intended purpose concerning the WORA?
7. Describe the main principle of the Sabbath year and how it provided an opportunity for the poor.
8. According to the source, what role did the extended family and kinship groups play in the social fabric of ancient Israel?
9. Explain the concept of a "planned margin" and how it relates to the social justice provisions discussed.
10. What is the significance of the social justice provisions being primarily implemented at the local village level?

#### Answer Key

1. Social justice is defined as a balance between an individual carrying their fair share of societal burdens (prescriptive guidelines) and receiving their fair share of societal benefits (redemptive guidelines). Both are considered essential for a healthy society.
2. The social outliers discussed are Widows, Orphans (specifically fatherless), and Resident Aliens (WORA). Their primary challenge was a lack of direct access to agricultural resources in a society where most people depended on them for sustenance.
3. Levirate Marriage was intended to provide support for childless widows of childbearing age by requiring the deceased husband's brother to marry her and produce an heir to care for her in old age and continue the family lineage. It did not apply to widows with children or those past childbearing age.

4. Gleaning involved allowing the WORA to gather leftover crops after the main harvest. Landowners were instructed not to reap to the corners of their fields, to leave behind dropped sheaves, and not to go back to collect missed produce from crops like grain, olives, and grapes.
5. The regular annual tithe (one-tenth of the harvest) was primarily intended for the Levites as their inheritance and support, as they served religious and teaching roles for the nation. A portion of this tithe was also presented to the Lord, often involving a celebratory meal.
6. The third-year tithe was different because it was stored locally within towns instead of being taken to the Levitical cities. Its purpose was to serve as a welfare pantry for the WORA (widows, aliens, and orphans) and the Levites in that region, providing short-term assistance for immediate needs.
7. The main principle of the Sabbath year (every seventh year) was to allow the land to rest; no planting, tending, or harvesting was to occur. This provided an opportunity for the poor and landowners alike to gather any volunteer produce that grew without cultivation, fostering a reliance on God's provision.
8. The extended family and kinship groups formed the foundational social structure of ancient Israel, providing mutual support, shared responsibilities (like Levirate Marriage and Goel responsibilities), and a local network for addressing needs and ensuring social conformity and provision within villages.
9. A "planned margin" refers to the practice of individuals and communities intentionally producing more resources than they immediately need. This surplus allowed for the giving of tithes and the provision of gleanings and other forms of support for those in need, demonstrating trust in God's provision.
10. The emphasis on addressing social justice needs at the local level (village or nearby Levitical city) suggests a system of neighbors helping neighbors. This facilitated better knowledge of individual circumstances and needs within a close-knit, interrelated community.

## Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the effectiveness and limitations of the four social justice provisions (Levirate Marriage, Gleaning, Tithes/Third-Year Tithe, and Sabbath Year Garnering) in addressing the needs of widows, orphans, and resident aliens in ancient Israel.
2. Discuss the underlying principles of social justice that can be derived from the Old Testament provisions for the WORA, and consider how these principles might be applied in contemporary society despite differing social and economic structures.
3. Compare and contrast the different types of support offered to the WORA, highlighting which provisions required effort from the recipient and which were more direct forms of aid. What does this reveal about the ancient Israelite understanding of responsibility and assistance?
4. Examine the role of the community and the religious system (specifically the Levites and the tithe) in implementing social justice for outliers in ancient Israel. How did these structures contribute to the care and integration (or lack thereof) of the WORA?
5. Considering the homogeneous agrarian context of ancient Israel, evaluate the challenges and opportunities of translating the social justice principles and practices discussed in the source material to a diverse, industrialized, and often more individualistic modern world.

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Agrarian Society:** A society where agriculture is the primary means of economic production and social organization.
- **Assimilation:** The process by which a minority group gradually adopts the customs and attitudes of the prevailing culture.
- **Goel:** A Hebrew term referring to a male relative who had a responsibility to act as a "redeemer" or advocate for his family, including avenging blood, redeeming property, or marrying a childless widow (related to Levirate Marriage).
- **Homogeneous:** Consisting of parts or people that are similar or all of the same kind. In this context, referring to the relatively uniform agricultural lifestyle and Israelite ethnicity.
- **Prescriptive Guidelines:** Rules or commands that dictate what actions should be taken or what behaviors are expected.
- **Redemptive Guidelines:** Principles or practices intended to restore, help, or provide for those in need, often seen as acts of compassion or justice.
- **Resident Alien:** A person living in a country who is not a citizen. In ancient Israel, they often lacked the land ownership and kinship ties of native Israelites.
- **Shalom:** A Hebrew word meaning peace, wholeness, well-being, and completeness.
- **Subsistent Culture:** A culture in which people produce primarily what they need for their own consumption with little surplus for trade.
- **Torah:** The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy), containing the foundational laws and teachings of Judaism.

## 5. FAQs Harbin, Social Justice for Social Outliers, Session 4: Widows, Orphans, and RA Provisions [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Social Justice for Social Outliers in Ancient Israel

**1. Who were the primary beneficiaries of the social justice provisions in ancient Israel discussed in the source, and what term is used to collectively refer to them?** The primary beneficiaries were widows, orphans (specifically the fatherless), and resident aliens. These three groups are collectively referred to as the WORA. The rationale for these specific groups is that they often lacked access to the primary means of sustenance in that agrarian society – agricultural resources – and therefore required special consideration.

**2. What were the four main social justice provisions outlined in the Old Testament to support the WORA?** The four main provisions were:

- **Levirate Marriage:** A practice where a brother or close relative of a deceased man would marry his widow if she was childless and of childbearing age, with the intention of producing an heir to care for her and continue the deceased's lineage. This provision was specifically for widows without children.
- **Gleaning:** Allowing the WORA to go through harvested fields and orchards to collect leftover produce. Landowners were instructed to leave margins and not to collect everything, ensuring that there would be something for the needy to gather. This applied to grain, vineyards, and olive trees, providing sustenance throughout the harvest season.
- **Tithes and Third-Year Tithes:** Israelites were required to tithe one-tenth of their produce annually. While the regular tithe was primarily for the Levites (who served religious and social roles), the tithe of every third year was stored locally and specifically designated as a welfare pantry for the WORA and the Levites within their towns.
- **Sabbath Year Garnering:** During the seventh year (Sabbath year), the land was to lie fallow, and Israelites were not to plant or harvest. Any volunteer produce that grew during this year was available for the WORA (and potentially the landowners as well) to gather. This provision highlighted dependence on God's provision and provided a period of rest for the land.

**3. How did the principle of "balancing" define social justice in ancient Israel according to the source?** Social justice was defined as a balance between two key questions: "Am I pulling my fair load?" (referring to the burdens and prescriptive guidelines of society) and "Am I getting my fair share?" (referring to the benefits and redemptive guidelines). Both contributing responsibly and receiving adequate support when needed were considered essential components of a just society.

**4. How did the extended family structure and local community play a role in the social safety net for the WORA?** The extended family was the primary social unit and provided an initial layer of support. It was expected that children would care for their widowed mothers in their old age. The interconnectedness of village life also fostered a sense of communal responsibility. Practices like gleaning and the local storage of the third-year tithe were designed to function within the context of these close-knit communities, where neighbors would have knowledge of each other's needs and could provide support at a local level.

**5. What were the underlying principles behind the provision of gleaning, and how might these principles be applied in contemporary society?** The underlying principles of gleaning included the idea of a "planned margin" – producing more than needed to share with others – and the recognition that the needy should have the opportunity to work for their sustenance. In contemporary society, this could translate to individuals and communities intentionally creating a surplus (whether financial, material, or in terms of time and skills) to support those in need. It also suggests empowering individuals through opportunities for contribution rather than solely relying on handouts.

**6. What was the purpose of the third-year tithe, and how did it differ from the regular annual tithe?** The regular annual tithe was primarily given to the Levites to support their role as religious leaders and teachers throughout Israel. The third-year tithe, however, was specifically designated as a local welfare provision. It was stored within local towns and administered (likely by the Levites) to meet the needs of the WORA and the Levites in that community. Unlike gleaning and Sabbath year garnering, there seemed to be no requirement for the recipients to work for these provisions, suggesting it was intended for short-term emergency assistance.

**7. What was the main purpose of the Sabbath year, and how did it relate to providing for the poor?**

The primary purpose of the Sabbath year was to allow the land to rest, emphasizing God's ownership and provision. While the rest for the land was the central idea, a secondary effect was that any volunteer produce that grew during this year was available for the poor (and potentially the landowners) to gather. This put everyone on a more equal footing of dependence on God's natural provision during that year.

**8. Despite the differences between ancient Israelite society and modern society, what key underlying principles of social justice for vulnerable populations can be gleaned from these Old Testament provisions?** Several key principles remain relevant:

- **Community Responsibility:** The emphasis on local action and neighbors helping neighbors highlights the importance of communal involvement in caring for the vulnerable.
- **Balancing Support and Effort:** While providing aid, some provisions also required the beneficiaries to actively participate in obtaining what they needed, fostering dignity and self-reliance.
- **Intentional Provision:** The idea of a planned margin and setting aside resources (like the tithe) demonstrates the need for intentionality in addressing poverty and vulnerability.
- **Addressing Specific Needs:** Recognizing the unique vulnerabilities of specific groups (widows, orphans, resident aliens) allows for tailored support.
- **Theological Foundation:** The underlying belief in God's provision and the call to reflect His justice in their social structures provided a strong ethical basis for these practices.