

# The Meanings of Justice in the Bible

In Four Parts

# The Prophet Micah (6:8)

*“He has told you, oh man, what is good and what the LORD requires of you, but to do justice and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

# The Kingdom of God is at Hand

*“Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”*

*Mark 1:14*

## Social Justice in Isaiah and the Prophets

*“Wash yourselves, purify yourselves;  
turn away from my sight your evil acts; cease doing evil.  
Learn to do good; seek justice.  
Make happy the oppressed;  
defend the orphan;  
argue the widow’s case.”*

Isaiah 1:16-17

# Lecture series

Part 1: The Range of Meanings of Justice in the Bible

Part 2: Justice in the context of Human Relations

Part 3: Justice between humanity and God

 Part 4: Divine Justice in the world

## **Part 4: Divine Justice in the World**

The Kingdom of God and the Crucifixion

# Questions that Remain about Justice

- How can we believe in divine justice when there is so much wrongdoing in our world?
- Is God different in the Old Testament than Jesus is in the New Testament?
- Does God care about justice in the world today?
- These questions are part of what theologians and philosophers call: Theodicy
- While the Gospel tells the story of Jesus of Nazareth, the “passion of Christ” is Divine Justice in the World

# Theodicy



# Concerns about Divine Justice in the Bible

- The Flood Story (Genesis 6-9)
- The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)
- The Destruction of Sodom and Gamorah (Genesis 19-20)
- The Plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7-12)
- The Conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1-9)
- The Conquest and Exile of the People of Israel (Kings and Prophets)
- The Crucifixion of Christ (Gospel)

## The Book of Job

The Book of Job explicitly raises the question of Theodicy:

Why did Job suffer so much when he was such a good person?

For readers of the Bible, the character Job is, in a sense, every person

# Structure of the Book of Job

Prologue  
(Narrative)

Dialogue  
(Verse)

Epilogue  
(Narrative)

# Job's Character is Unquestionable

***"There once was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. Now that man was blameless [socially] and upright [morally], and he revered God and turned away from doing evil [harming others]."***

The remainder of the exposition tells us how many children Job had  
and the extent of his wealth, all of which are factors of ten.

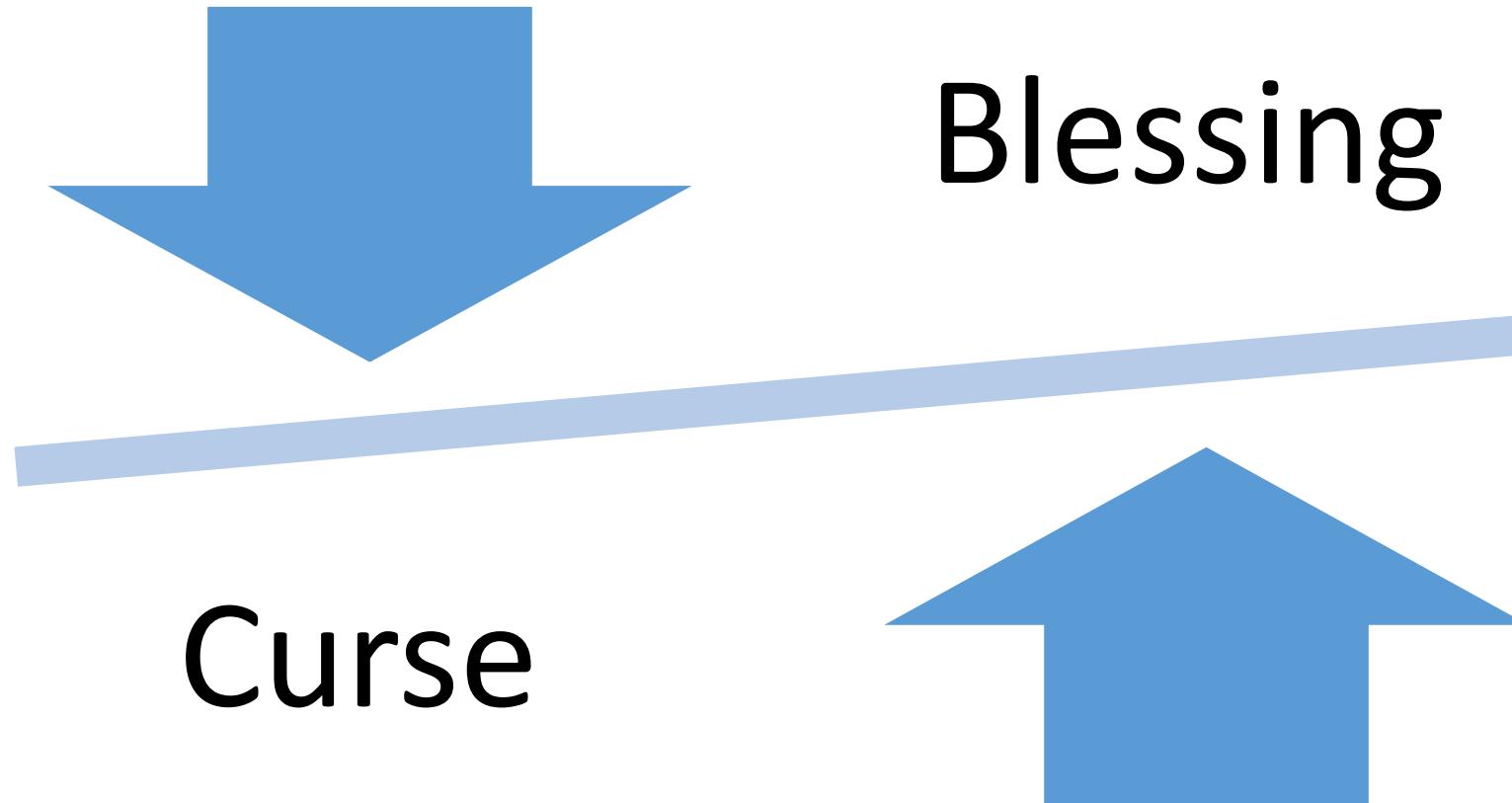
God repeats the description of Job's character to Satan:

***"Yahweh said to the adversary: have you considered my servant Job  
for there is none like him in the land. He is blameless and upright; he  
reveres God and turns away for doing evil."***

# Calamity Befalls Job Like Few Others

- Job loses everything: his large and small cattle along with the servants; all his children die in a single event.
- The reading perspective is important: only the reader knows about the conversation between God and the Adversary (Satan). Job knows nothing about this dialogue.
- Job knows only what was reported to him: he lost everything by two means: marauding human hoards and “natural” phenomena.
- The remainder of the Book of Job is a series of dialogues between Job and his three friends, followed by a young man named Elihu, and finally God speaks to Job.

# The Argument of Job and His Friends



# God's Response to Job & Job's Reply

## Divine Response to Job's Complaint

*"Who is this that darkens counsel  
In words without knowledge?"*

Job 38-41

God argues from creation

God argues from “mythology”

## Job's Response to God

*"I know you can do anything, and no  
devising is beyond You.*

*'Who is this obscuring counsel  
without knowledge?'*

*I spoke of things I did not understand,  
wonders beyond me that I did not  
know...By the ear's rumor I heard of  
You and now my eye has seen You.  
Therefore do I recant, and I repent in  
dust and ashes."*

Job 42:1-6

# Summary

- Many acts of God in the OT exemplify retributive justice against wrongdoing. God inflicts just punishment against the force and injustice of Kingdoms or Empires. Most of these acts of retribution justice could use fuller explanation. In short, I think each of them exemplify God's concern for justice in the world.
- It would appear that the Book of Job argues for the humble recognition of our human condition and limited understanding of the ways of God in the world.
- The Book of Job is probably a drama of sorts written to engage an audience on justice in the world from the point of view of Israelite monotheism.

## Divine Justice and the Crucifixion

The Gospels tell the story of the Passion of Christ with a double meaning: Jesus teaches compassion for others. He believes this compassion is the fulfillment of the Kingdom of Heaven (see Previous Lecture).

At the same time, the Gospels tell the story of the suffering of Christ (passion)

# The Way to the Cross: Caesarea Philippi

- Jesus' Questions & Peter's Confession

Mtt. 16:13ff

- Jesus informs the disciples of His Passion

*“From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised”*

Mtt. 16:21

- Jesus explains the necessity of his “suffering” within the framework of the apocalypse

## The Way to the Cross: Caesarea Philippi

Jesus invites his disciples to follow him in the “passion of the cross”

*“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life.”*

Matthew 16:24-26

## The Way to the Cross: Caesarea Philippi

Jesus explains the necessity of his “suffering” within the framework of the apocalypse

*“For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”*

Matthew 16: 27-28

# The Way to the Cross: Gethsemane

## Matthew 26

- The Last Supper (Passover)
- The New Covenant
- Jesus agonizes over the way to the cross in Gethsemane

*“Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane...Then he said to them, ‘I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here and stay awake with me’...*

# The Way to the Cross: On the Cross

Matthew 27:45-54

- Darkness overtakes the light
- Jesus cries out:  
*“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”*
- The curtain of the temple
- Earthquake
- Resurrection of the dead
- The crucifixion is the fulfillment of the end of the age

## The Passion of Christ is the initiation of the Apocalypse

The passion of Christ fulfills the will of God,  
the Kingdom of God

Those who follow Christ share in His passion:

    passion for justice: like Micah “*doing justice*”  
    and “*loving kindness*”

    passion of giving oneself to the Kingdom of  
    God rather than the kingdoms of this world

# Paul's Interpretation of the Crucifixion

- Paul interprets the Crucifixion accomplishes divine justice

Romans 1:17

- The crucifixion is the final atonement for human failure

Romans 3:21-26

- Paul also interprets the crucifixion as the model for Christians to emulate:

Galatians 2:20;

Philippians 3:7-11;

II Corinthians 5:17

# Have the Mind of Christ

*"Let your bearing towards one another be like that which was in Christ Jesus:*

*Who, having divine nature from the beginning,  
did not use this equality with God.*

*Rather, He relinquished it;  
taking the form of a servant,  
He became like human being.*

*Assuming human form,  
He further humbled himself in obedience  
even unto death on a cross."*

*Philippians 2:5-8*

# *The Way of Jesus Christ*

Jurgen Multmann, (Fortress Press 1993, p. 157)

# Jurgen Multmann

*"If this death is viewed against an apocalyptic horizon, and not as something normal or natural, then the great apocalyptic dying, the death of all things, has already begun. 'This world' is passing away.*

*The human systems of injustice in the world-wide economy and the political hegemonies cost the lives of millions year for year, first and foremost the lives of children in the Third World. Scientific and technological exploitation systems are destroying the earth's biosphere, and are wiping out hundreds of animal and vegetable species every year. The system of nuclear deterrent is progressively destroying the humanity of the nations through fear and cynicism. In the face of this annihilation of the world caused and threatened by human beings, the victims of injustice and violence are today becoming the witnesses of God's indictment, and witnesses too to the necessity of conversion; for they are the least of the brothers and sisters of the Son of man who is the judge of the world (Matt. 25). But if these 'least' belong within the fellowship of Christ, their sufferings are also 'sufferings of Christ', for he is one of their own, and they are his people. The message of the human and non-human creation which is dying of injustice and violence is its collective martyrdom. 'Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world,' wrote Pascal. But the reverse is also true. In the agony of Christ this world finds its end.*

Fortress Press 1993, p. 157

# Thank you