

# The Meanings of Justice in the Bible

In Four Parts

# Cultural Context

Calls for Justice in the courts and streets of America

- Me Too Movement
- DACA and DREAMers
- Black Lives Matter

Pledge allegiance to “Liberty and Justice for All”

Prejudices that block some from “the pursuit of happiness”

## 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.”*

# 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 2: Justice in the Context of Human Relations

Political Order: Divine Justice through Human Institutions

# 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*

# The Sovereignty of God in Ancient Israel

# Divine Kingship in the Deliverance from Egypt

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*“Then were the chieftains of Edom dismayed,  
the dukes of Moab, shuddering seized them,  
all the dwellers of Canaan quailed.  
Terror and fear did fall upon them,  
as your arm loomed big they were like a stone.  
Till Your people crossed over, O LORD,  
till the people you made Yours crossed over.  
You’ll bring them, you’ll plant them, on the mount of Your estate,  
a firm place for Your dwelling You wrought, O LORD,  
the sanctum, O Sovereign, your hands firmly founded.  
The LORD shall be king for all time”*

Exodus 15:15-19, trans. R. Alter



# Divine Kingship through the Covenant with Israel

*“On the third new moon of the Israelites going out from Egypt, on this day did they come to the Wilderness of Sinai. And they journeyed onward from Rephidim and they came to the Wilderness of Sinai, and Israel camped there over against the mountain. And Moses had gone up to God, and the Lord called out to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus shall you say to the house of Jacob, and shall you tell to the Israelites: ‘You yourselves saw what I did to Egypt, and I bore you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me. And now, if you will truly heed My voice and keep My covenant, you will become for Me a treasure among all the peoples, for Mine is all the earth. And as for you, you will become for Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites”*

Exodus 19:1-6, trans. R. Alter

# The Legal System in Ancient Israel

*“Judges and overseers you shall set up for yourself within all your gates that the LORD your God is about to give to you according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgement [i.e. righteous]. You shall not skew judgment. You shall recognize no face and no bribe shall you take, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the innocent [righteous]. Justice, justice [i.e. righteousness] shall you pursue so that you may live and take hold of the land the LORD your God is about to give you”*

Deuteronomy 16:18-20, trans. R. Alter

# Instituting Justice

## Deuteronomy 16:18-20

*“**Judges and overseers** you shall set up for yourself **within all your gates** that the LORD your God is about to give to you according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with **just judgement** (i.e. righteous).”*

## The language is worth our attention:

“Judges and overseers” = Officials

“within all your gates” Metaphor for administration in each town

“just judgement” Here another phrase for “just” is used: mishpat tsedeq

# Just Judgment

## Deuteronomy 16:18-20

*“You shall not **skew** judgment. You shall **recognize no face** and no bribe shall you take, for a bribe **blinds the eyes of the wise** and **perverts the words of the innocent** [righteous].”*

## The language:

To “skew” is to make crooked

Impartiality: justice is “blind”

Bribes “blind” the wise judgment

Discredit the innocent (tsedeq)

# Impartiality in “Doing Justice”

*“These too are from the wise:*

*showing favor in justice cannot be good.*

*Who says to the guilty, “You are innocent,”*

*peoples will curse him,*

*and nations will damn him”*

Proverbs 24:23-24

# Justice is life itself

## Deuteronomy 16:18-20

*Justice, **justice (i.e. righteousness)** shall you pursue so **that you may live** and take hold of the land the LORD your God is about to give you”*

## The language:

Justice and righteousness in law and prophets

That you may live

Compare this to Dtr. 30:11-16

# Moshe Weinfeld

*“The book of Deuteronomy appears indeed to have the character of an ideal national constitution representing all the official institutions of the state: the monarchy, the judiciary, the priesthood, and prophecy”*

1992, p. 168

# Justice in the Israelite Monarchy

The Covenant with David was his descendants would rule over Israel in Jerusalem  
in perpetuity 2 Samuel 7

*“David reigned over all Israel, and David established justice and righteousness for  
all his people”* 2 Samuel 8:15

The Covenant with David is an enduring concept in ancient Israel Psalm 2



# Solomon's Prayer for Wisdom

“A listening heart” for judging the people (v.9)

“...to understand [discern, distinguish] between good and evil [right and wrong]”

In response, God reformulates the words of Solomon:  
“you asked to discern and understand justice”

I Kings 3

# Justice in the Messianic Kingdom

# Monarchial Justice in the Messianic Visions of Isaiah

Isaiah 9:1-6

Isaiah 11:1-9

Isaiah 61:1-4

# Messianic Justice in Isaiah

## Isaiah 9:1-6

*“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given and governance shall be upon his shoulders...increasing governance and peace without end **on the throne of David** and his kingdom, to found it firmly through **justice and righteousness** forever more.”*

## The language:

Hope for the kingdom of Israel

A new prince to govern in the line of David

The kingdom is well established by means of “justice and righteousness” (hendiadys)

# Messianic Justice in Isaiah

## Isaiah 11:1-9

*“And a shoot shall sprout **from the stump of Jesse**, a branch shall bloom from his root.*

*And the **Spirit of the LORD** shall light upon him, a spirit of wisdom and insight*

*A spirit of counsel and valor, a spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.*

*And his very breath by the fear of the LORD.*

*Not by appearance shall he judge and not by rumor shall he decide*

*But **he shall judge the poor in justice**, and render **right verdict for the lowly of the land**.*

*And justice shall be the belt round his waste, faithfulness the belt round his loins.”*

## The language:

Jesse is the father of David

All his attributes are by the Spirit of the LORD

This offspring of Jesse’s stock, establishes justice especially for the oppressed

# Messianic Justice in Isaiah

## Luke 4:18-19 (Isa 61)

*“The **Spirit of the LORD** is upon me as the LORD has anointed me to bring **good tidings to the poor...** He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and the recovering a sight to the blind, to set at liberty **those who are oppressed**, to proclaim a year of favor for the LORD.*

## The language:

In Luke the Spirit leads Jesus

The words for justice are not here

Justice is nevertheless here in the words “good tidings”, the poor, and the oppressed.

# Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven

*“Seek, first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then all these things shall be added onto you.”*

Matthew 6:33

# Conclusion

1. The Kingdom of God is ethically motivated by justice
2. The kings in ancient Israel were evaluated by what was “right” in the eyes of God
3. Jesus proclaims that the kingdom of God is among you
4. The “church” and others are urged to be ministers of justice in the world



# The Role of the Church

*“The Church was a manifestation of the kingdom of God to the extent that it served as a moral organization of humanity through its love inspired action”*

B. Childs, 1992, p.627

# Three Contexts of Biblical Justice

1. Justice among humans: Political Order

 2. Justice in relation to God: Moral and Ethical Devotion

3. Divine Justice in the World: the Kingdom of God and the Crucifixion

# Thank you