

The Meanings of Justice in the Bible

In Four Parts

The Sovereignty of God in Ancient Israel

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

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

John Imprisoned

John sends his disciples to
Jesus questioning Jesus'
identity



John the Baptist Questions Jesus

“Are you the one to come or should we expect another?”

Matthew 11:3

Jesus' Reply to John

*“Go and tell John what you hear and see:
‘The blind see and the lame walk;
lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear;
and the dead are raised
and good news is proclaimed to the poor.’”*

Matthew 11:4-5

A Cento of Prophetic Passages

Jesus' reply to John

*“The blind see and the lame walk;
lepers are cleansed and the deaf
hear;
and the dead are raised
and good news is
proclaimed to the poor.”*”

Prophetic passages:

Isaiah 29:18; Isa 35:6

Isa 35:5-6

Isa 26:19

Isa 29:19; Isa 61:1-2

Cf. Isa 42:18f Metaphorically
“blind” and “deaf”

Isaiah on Social Justice

Isaiah 1:16-17

*“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 5:16-17

*“The Lord of Hosts is exalted by
judgment,
the Holy God proved holy by
justice”*

Leviticus 19

“And should a sojourner sojourn with you, you shall not wrong him. Like the native among you shall be the sojourner who sojourns with you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord [YHWH] your God.”

Leviticus 19:33-34, trans. R. Alter

Leviticus 19

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord [YHWH] your God am holy. Every man shall revere his mother and his father, and My Sabbaths you shall keep. I am the Lord [YHWH] your God.”

Leviticus 19:2-3, trans. R. Alter

Leviticus 19

“And when you reap your land’s harvest, you shall not finish off the edge of your field, nor pick up the gleanings of your harvest...For the poor and for the sojourner you shall leave them. I am the Lord [YHWH] your God.”

Leviticus 19:9-10, trans. R. Alter

Leviticus 19

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely reprove your fellow and not bear guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance, and you shall not harbor a grudge against the members of your people. And you shall love your fellow man as yourself. I am the Lord [YHWH] your God.”

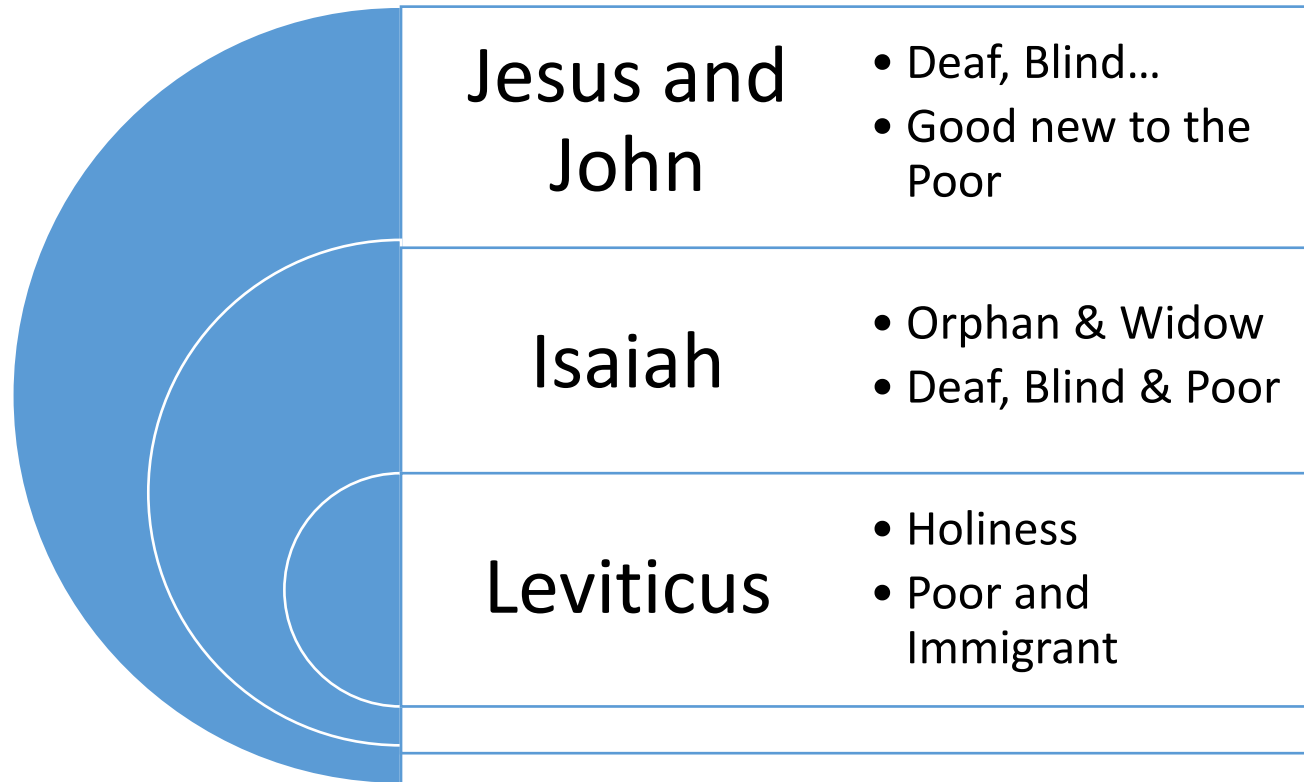
Leviticus 19:17-19, trans. R. Alter

Correlation of Ideas

Jesus and John understand the restorative justice that the kingdom of God promotes

Jesus relies on several passages from Isaiah

Isaiah is linked to Leviticus in seeing the correlation between the holiness of God and Israel in restorative justice



Israel Knohl

“The most important link between Isaiah and [Leviticus] lies in the nature and characteristics of the concept of holiness. We have demonstrated that one of the unique features of [Leviticus] is that it infuses the concept of holiness with moral content...Isaiah sees social-moral injustice as blasphemy against the Holy One of Israel and his word (Isa 1:4; 5:23-24) and expects that God will judge the wicked among the nation and save the poor and oppressed (Isa 3:14; 5:17). The prophet states that by judging the wicked and restoring social justice, God is exalted and sanctified: “ The Lord of Hosts is exalted by judgment, the Holy God proved holy by justice” (Isa 5:16). Isaiah and [Leviticus] share the view that sanctity is expressed through the performance of righteousness and justice”

1995, p. 213-214

Social Justice in the Beatitudes

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [justice], for they shall be satisfied”

Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

Matthew 5:10

Social Justice elsewhere in the NT

“If anyone says he loves God yet hates his brother, he is a liar. If one hates his brother whom he sees not, he is not able to love God whom he does not see.”

1 John 4:20

“He who loves his neighbor has satisfied every claim of the law. For the commandments, ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet,’ and any other commandment there may be, are all summed up in the one rule, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love cannot wrong a neighbor; there the whole law is summed up in love.”

Romans 13:9

Conclusion

1. Jesus answers John by pointing out the evidence of the Kingdom in restorative justice of His action
2. Jesus relies on the restorative justice in the prophet Isaiah
3. Isaiah is very much related to the idea of the Holy in Leviticus
4. New Testament writers broadly agree that social justice is evidence of love of and faith in God

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