

# BETWEEN THE LINES

## *A Deeper Look...*

### #915- BIBLE JUSTICE: Lessons in Mercy

A brief look at Biblical justice only opens up the reality that this is a very broad, all-encompassing topic. Since the topic is so large let's limit our study to issues of the first statements of Bible justice as rendered through Moses "the Lawgiver".

Maybe we would appreciate Biblical justice more if we compared and contrasted it to what was available in the contemporary world of Moses' day. Archeology and scholarship have taught us that the nations that surrounded Israel had some of the following principles as concepts of "justice"...

- Kings and judges ruled by divine right so they could make any pronouncement that served their purpose regardless of "fairness".
- Judgments were usually based on tradition or whim.
- Verdicts were usually stated as, "Thus shall ye do..." and the warning of curse or penalty for violation was very clearly tied to the statement.
- Judgments were based solely on authority and not relationship.
- Legal pronouncements implied universal application and not short term necessity.
- Laws often only met the political needs of the authority and nothing more.
- Even a king was bound by his own word. (See Esther 8 and Daniel 6)
- The animal of a noble was of more value than the life of a commoner.
- A guilty man's family could be held culpable even if they were absolutely innocent.]
- The "law" only needed to be in the head of the King therefore you could break a "law" that had never been pronounced. You were responsible for the king's intent.
- There were very clear levels of justice based on societal class.
- People had very clearly defined levels of value for expected compensations.
- Men of all classes had more "value" than women or children of those classes.
- Slaves were "non-persons".
- Social distinctions were compounded and solidified by subsequent decisions.
- An authority had no need to justify his verdicts or pronouncements.
- Rarely was there any form of appeal.

**Conclusions:** Even though there can be seen many similarities in the Torah to various codes of law in the nations surrounding Israel there are decided differences...

- What Moses codified from the word of the Lord was a system primarily based on relationship.
- The Lord based his statements upon more than His authority. He claimed the right for two reasons... He'd earned it by His actions on behalf of Israel and they had given Him the right by agreeing to a covenant relationship.
- If there was any distinction of social status at all more was required of those at the "upper end" of the scale (i.e. priests, leaders) and less was demanded of those who were poor, handicapped, or otherwise disadvantaged.
- "To him who knows to do right and doeth it not, to him it is sin." A person was not held accountable for acts of ignorance.
- The law was codified and periodically read so that people would not fall into ignorance regarding the covenant demands.
- Only the guilty were held culpable. (See Jeremiah 31)
- Applications of mercy were predominant themes in the law.

**The Three Aspects of God's Justice System:** The Lord established His justice system with Israel focusing on three main themes...

- The Covenant Agreement Standards (Divine Contractual Obligations)
- The Holiness Code (Issues Of Fit Worship)
- The Deuteronomic Code (Laws of Society)

Let's note again that the justice system that God established was based upon a premise with three foundations... 1) God is God and He has the authority to make any pronouncement He chooses. But even at that He could created standards of living with Israel because He had, 2) earned the right because of His actions on Israel's behalf and they had, 3) agreed that He would be *their* God in the covenant agreement. This relationship granted Him authority by election and not solely by dictatorship or "divine right".

**Search the Word...** The Lord touched on all aspects of living in His code... "Thy commandment is exceeding broad." (Psalm 119:96) Let's look at the broad aspects of His justice system and cite a few references for further study of each.

- Laws of fit worship. Exodus 24-40, Leviticus 1-7,23-35, Numbers 20-29, Deuteronomy 12-16, 22-25
- Laws of personal behavior.
  - Dietary-Exodus 29, Leviticus 7&11, Deuteronomy 12&14
  - Quarantine- Leviticus 12, 14, 15
  - Dedication- Exodus 23, Leviticus 23&27, Numbers 3&8, Deuteronomy 12-14
  - Religious symbols- Exodus 13, Numbers 15, Deuteronomy 6, 11, 22
- Civil laws.
  - Civil authority- Deuteronomy 17
  - Warfare and Military- Numbers 1-2, Deuteronomy 2, 3, 17, 20-21, 23
  - Judicial System- Exodus 23, Deuteronomy 1, 17, 19
- Criminal laws.
  - Religious infractions- Deuteronomy 13
  - Societal infractions- Exodus 21, 23, Deuteronomy 19
  - Property crimes- Exodus 22&23, Leviticus 6, 10, 19, Deuteronomy 22, 25
  - Laws of morality- Leviticus 20, Deuteronomy 23
  - Personal crimes- Exodus 21&22, Leviticus 19, Deuteronomy 22, 24&25, 27
  - Personal and family relationships- Exodus 12, 21, Leviticus 25, Numbers 27, 36, Deuteronomy 12, 16, 21, 25
  - Requirements of mercy- Exodus 21&22, Leviticus 19, 22, 24&25, Deuteronomy 22-25

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**Later Extrapolations of the Law in Judaism:** *The Mishnah* eventually codified much of the commentary and definition of the statements of law within the Torah. A brief look at the division (book) headings shows the continued focus of Israel to have the law touch all aspects of life...

- *Zeraim* (seeds)- Agricultural rules.
- *Moed* (appointed feasts)- Laws for time and observance.
- *Nashim* (women)- Privileges and responsibilities of women.
- *Nezikin* (damages)- Civil and societal responsibilities.
- *Kodashim* (sacred objects)- Regarding sacrifice and worship acts.
- *Tohoroth* (cleanses)- Determinations of that which is *kosher*/fit.

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