

Some biblical perspectives on justice across time (apart from Genesis)

9TH CENTURY: EARLY MONARCHY: THE KING PROVIDES JUSTICE

Example: 2 Samuel 8.15:

So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people.

8TH CENTURY BCE: PROPHETS: THE LIFE OF THE NATIONS TURNS ON HOW IT TREATS THE MARGINALIZED

Example: Isaiah 1.17 [addressed to Sodom!]:

learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Isaiah 10.1-4a

Ah, you who make iniquitous decrees, who write oppressive statutes, to turn aside the needy from justice and to rob the poor of my people of their right, that widows may be your spoil, and that you may make the orphans your prey! What will you do on the day of punishment, in the calamity that will come from far away? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your wealth, so as not to crouch among the prisoners or fall among the slain?

Jeremiah 5.7-9

Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, they have grown fat and sleek. They know no limits in deeds of wickedness; they do not judge with justice the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. Shall I not punish them for these things? says YHWH, and shall I not bring retribution on a nation such as this?

7TH CENTURY BCE: DEUTERONOMISTIC HISTORY (FROM DEUTERONOMY-2 KINGS): DESTROY ENEMIES, INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

Example of external enemies, Deut 7.1-5:

When YHWH your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy, and he clears away many nations before you--the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations mightier and more numerous than you-- and when YHWH your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of YHWH would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly. But this is how you must deal with them: break down their altars, smash their pillars, hew down their sacred poles, and burn their idols with fire.

Example of internal enemies: 2 Kings 23.1-3, 19-21

Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. The king went up to the house of YHWH, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of YHWH. The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before YHWH, to follow YHWH, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his life, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant....

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Moreover, Josiah removed all the shrines of the high places that were in the towns of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking YHWH to anger; he did to them just as he had done at Bethel. He slaughtered on the altars all the priests of the high places who were there, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem. The king commanded all the people, "Keep the passover to YHWH your God as prescribed in this book of the covenant."

EXILE: EZEKIEL AND JEREMIAH: "NEW COVENANT" IN INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY [PREPARES FOR "WISDOM" LITERATURE'S PROVISIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL MORAL BEHAVIOR]

Example: Jeremiah 31.29-34

In those days they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge. The days are surely coming, says YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt--a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says YHWH. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says YHWH: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know YHWH," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says YHWH; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Example: Ezekiel 14.13-14

Mortal, when a land sins against me by acting faithlessly, and I stretch out my hand against it, and break its staff of bread and send famine upon it, and cut off from it human beings and animals, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job, these three, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says Lord YHWH.

EXILE/POST-EXILE: LEVITICUS: TORAH RULES ON WORSHIP AND JUSTICE ENFORCED WITH THE DEATH PENALTY, AGAINST BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND/OR THE NATION

Example of individuals: Leviticus 24.17:

Anyone who kills a human being shall be put to death.

Example of the nation: Leviticus 26. 23-25, punishment for failure to practice jubilee:

...in spite of these punishments you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. I will bring the sword against you, executing vengeance for the covenant; and if you withdraw within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into enemy hands.