



ABUNDANT  
HARVEST CHURCH  
SUNDAY SCHOOL

TEACHER – EVANGELIST  
MONIQUE R FOSTER

Lesson 12 – May 17, 2020

# PRACTICE JUSTICE

BIBLE BASIS: Jeremiah 21:8-14

BIBLE TRUTH: God judges His people for their continued disobedience and refusal to practice justice.

MEMORY VERSE: “O house of David, thus saith the LORD; Execute judgment in the morning, and deliver him that is spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor” (Jeremiah 21:12, KJV)



# PRACTICE JUSTICE

LESSON AIM: By the end of the lesson, we will: DISCOVER divine justice described by Jeremiah; EXPRESS gratitude that God is a God of justice; and ENDEAVOR to be just and advocate for justice.

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON: Evil is pervasive throughout human society. God silence is not consent. Mankind cannot continue to do evil without consequence. Jeremiah tells us that God is a God of justice and will recompense evil.

# LESSON OVERVIEW

**BIBLE LEARNING:** God values justice.

**BIBLE APPLICATION:** Christians will value justice as one of the key attributes of God.

**STUDENTS' RESPONSES:** Believers will commit to advocating for the poor and oppressed in society.

# KEY TERMS TO RECOGNIZE

- Justice – Just behavior or treatment. The quality of being fair and reasonable.
- Divine Justice – The limitations of human justice are within the scope of all religions there is a higher justice. It's a belief based on faith and consists of the belief that a God, a Supreme institution or own order of nature imposes somehow true justice, without possible error and giving each one what it deserves.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

Jeremiah 21:8-14

# LIGHT ON THE WORD – JERUSALEM

- Jerusalem During the Time of the Prophets (750-586 BC).
- Jerusalem was a walled city during the time of the prophets.
- Located between the Hinnom and Kidron Valley's, Jerusalem was surrounded by the Mount of Olives.
- Refugees arrived in Jerusalem about the time of the fall of the Northern Kingdom (722 BC).
- Settlement spread to the western hill, and a new wall was added for protection.
- Hezekiah carved an underground aqueduct out of solid rock to bring an ample water supply inside the city walls, enabling Jerusalem to survive the siege of Sennacherib in 701 BC.

# MORE LIGHT ON THE WORD - JEREMIAH

- Jeremiah is one of the giants of Old Testament prophecy.
- The son of a priest, he was born in Anathoth, a village three miles northeast of Jerusalem.
- Jeremiah received his calling as a prophet in 626 BC, during the thirteenth year of King Josiah's reign.
- The book of Jeremiah reveals a lot about the inner turmoil and conflict out of which Jeremiah delivered his prophetic burden.
- Jeremiah's life demonstrates the hardships that sometimes accompany the task of bringing God's Word to His people.
- Perhaps anticipating the difficulties of being a prophet, Jeremiah resisted his call to prophetic ministry, citing his youth as an obstacle (Jeremiah 1:6-9).
- But God's will cannot be resisted.

# MORE ON JEREMIAH

- Jeremiah followed his calling faithfully, but the road was hard.
- He was rejected by his people (Jer 15:10)
- He was frustrated by their hardheartedness (Jer 5:3)
- He was cut off from the normal joys and pleasures of life (Jer 16:9)
- In spite of all of the difficulties that Jeremiah experienced, he found that he could not resist God's call to prophesy.
- He had to declare the Word of the Lord as the Lord had directed him.
- It was a compulsion.
- It was dynamic, powerful inner motivation that made him prophesy. "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."

# LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

- **AIM:** Students will examine the complexity of God's relationship to His people.

# INTRODUCTION – THE MINISTRY OF JEREMIAH

- Jeremiah first began to prophesy under King Josiah (639-609 BC)
- Jeremiah witnessed a great spiritual revival and awakening in Jerusalem that took place when Josiah was in office.
- Then Josiah was killed attempting to stop an Egyptian Pharaoh from marching through Judah.
- For a brief period, Judah was under the control of Egypt.
- This event marked the beginning of a terrible for Judah.
- Eventually, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took control of countries north of Judah, leaving them sandwiched in between these two powerful nations.
- At various times both threatened to wipe out God's chosen nation. God spoke through Jeremiah during these alarming, turbulent times.
- He attempted to persuade them to repentance and faithfulness to God and laid before them the consequences of their rebellion against Yahweh.

# INTRODUCTION - JEREMIAH

- Unfortunately, the people chose to listen to false prophets who spoke comfort and peace to them in the midst of their unfaithfulness.
- Jeremiah to them was a nuisance.
- They rejected the Word of the Lord from the mouth of Jeremiah.
- It is a stern cautionary tale to people who claim to be in relationship with the just God but prioritize oppression and self-centeredness.
- God does not prioritize oppressors, even if they consider themselves to be His chosen people.
- God's chosen people are the weak and the vulnerable.
- This could seem contradictory since the Babylonians are a more corrupt people; however, the prophet frames the Babylonian's destruction of Jerusalem as a prime example of God's zero tolerance for exploitation.
- In the same way that Judah receives punishment, the Babylonians' turn is coming too.
- Jeremiah calls us to remember that we must consistently consider whose side we are on **because God will not stand by us if we are wrong and wronging others.**

# I. THE PARADOX OF THE MALPRACTICE OF JUSTICE

(JEREMIAH 21:8-10)

- Because the people of Judah had practiced evil, they were given only two bleak options.
  1. Submit to Babylonia domination
  2. Fight unsuccessfully.
- Neither of the options was desirable, but their lack of options is directly correlated to their not providing options to the most vulnerable. (Jeremiah frames their dire condition as a result of their own lack of concern for the lowly.)
  1. The people of Judah that would be taken away as captives would have been the elite who had benefited from exploiting others.
  2. The land that would be burned with fire would be the land that had produced an abundance, but the fruit of the land had been marked up, overpriced, and placed outside of the reach of the poor who worked the land so that the wealthy could live even more luxuriously.
  3. Although they look like they have no options, they do. They had chosen the wrong ones, which led to their current collision with Babylonia.

# SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

## QUESTION 1

Why do you think God lays only two paths before the Israelites?

## QUESTION 2

It is important to consider whose oppression we benefit from. Whose exploitation, low wages, or immigration status secures us a more stable life?

# LIGHT ON THE WORD

## TWO OPTIONS

The Lord lays a choice before the Israelites. They can either retreat into the walls of Jerusalem or they can “goeth out” (v9)

1. The first option will most certainly lead to their death, as the Chaldeans (Babylonians) would lay waste to the city.
  2. The second option, falling to the Chaldeans, would be a challenge for the Israelites, but their only chance at life.
- These options serve as a useful analogy for the Christian life. If we are to retreat into our comfort zones, spiritually, we demonstrate a lack of faith which would displease God. But if we step out of our comfort zones in faith, God will equip us and help us follow Him as we step out.
    1. One promises our comfort
    2. The other out
  - In our day and age, which one is easier to choose? Which one pleases God?

# II. THE PRIORITY OF THE PRACTICE OF JUSTICE

(JEREMIAH 21:11-12)

- God's command is for Justice to be the priority that is taken up as the first order of business. It cannot be secondary or ignored.
- God cares about the lived experiences of people who are trapped by hands that steal from them, devalue them, and benefit from their powerlessness.
- Since these are God's priorities, they should also be the priorities of His people, especially leaders. That is why Jeremiah directs his prophecy to the house of David.
- The work of leaders demands a commitment to equity. Equity is not the same as equality.
- The passage does not only express that leaders should treat everyone the same, which is equality.
- It compels them to right the wrongs and do more for those who have been mistreated.
- That is equity.
- Making this type of justice a priority aligns with God's values and prevents His wrath from breaking out on behalf of the marginalized.

# SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

## Question 3

What does the Lord's emphasis on practicing justice teach us about God's character?

## Question 4

How can we prioritize justice? Why is it important to distinguish between equity and equality?

# LIGHT ON THE WORD – JUST LEADERSHIP

- God exhorts the kings of Judah to administer justice and protect the poor and helpless.
- Interestingly, this the first command that God lays before the leaders of Israel.
- If the leaders of Israel practice justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed, God will not make His fury known.
- Here, again, we see the two paths that themselves to justice and equity, or they can continue oppressing the poor.
- In God’s eyes, the command to practice justice is not simply a “good thing” that His people can do.
- We don’t have the option to ignore the cause of the oppressed.
- As the people of God, we commanded to care for the marginalized.
- If we ignore their plight, we run the risk of incurring God’s wrath upon ourselves.

# SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

## Question 5

What is the significance of fire imagery in this passage?

## Question 6

What does God's anger about injustice communicate to us about how we should view oppression?

# LIGHT ON THE WORD – Don't Get Too Comfortable!

- The people of God had grown comfortable in their status before God.
- As the children of God, they relaxed from doing their duty to seek justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed.
- Yet, God was about to use the Babylonians to execute justice on this humble little nation.
- Surely God would not inflict judgment on this people, right? Absolutely wrong.
- As we can see, God's anger against His people is made manifest in this passage, and He will not hesitate to pour out judgment on His people.
- While we can rest in our status before God, we are nonetheless called to follow the commands of God, to love Him and our neighbor as ourselves.
- Growing comfortable in our status before God can be a wonderful thing, as long as we do not become complacent, prideful or boastful.
- This causes us to deter practicing righteousness, and instead of justice on behalf of the poor. Oppression and neglect become the alternative.
- This displeases God, as He takes His commitment to the poor and oppressed seriously. So should we.

# BIBLE APPLICATION

**AIM:** Students will be conscious of who benefits from situations that hurt and oppress people.

- This lesson compels us to take stock of the ways in which we have been an active or complicit participant in the oppression of others. It is important that we regularly examine how the corporate elite benefit from low wages to workers and the suppression of unions.
- As believers, we should never forget how the global economic system unjustly exploits the resources of weaker nations, outsourcing jobs and increasing profits by exploiting the labor of the poor. These conditions help to provide us with cheap goods and technological advancements.
- Our military presence around the globe helps to maintain these unfair conditions. As believers, we must repent for the sins of our nation and find ways to align ourselves with the needs of the oppressed of our community.

# STUDENTS' RESPONSES

**AIM:** Students will stand on the side of the oppressed in society.

- Whose pain do you feel the most? Is it children, the elderly, the homeless, immigrants, the poor, victims of racial discrimination, the falsely incarcerated, the over-policed, those affected directly by climate change?
- Find one way to stand on their side, which is to stand on God's side. Perhaps it can be through donating to an organization that deals with those issues. Perhaps it is to protest a store that uses problematic images in its marketing materials. Take an issue that is close to you and pray about it. Ask God to direct you as you choose to stand with those people and God's Word.

# NEXT WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

**LESSON TOPIC:** REPENT OF INJUSTICE

**BIBLE BASIS:** JEREMIAH 22:1-10

**TEACHER:** Evangelist MARY E FOSTER