

Beulah Baptist Church
Rev. Jerry D. Black, Pastor

Sunday School Lesson
January 16, 2022
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Lesson—The Laws of Justice and Mercy

Text: Exodus 23:1-12

I. Aim for Change/Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, we will...

1. *REMEMBER* that God expects believers to care for others;
2. *ASPIRE* to be impartial in showing justice and mercy; and
3. *PRACTICE* helping those who are in need.

Key Verse— *“You must not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you are called to testify in a dispute, do not be swayed by the crowd to twist justice. And do not slant your testimony in favor of a person just because that person is poor.” (Exodus 23:2–3, NLT)*

Lesson Song of Praise and Worship: *Don’t Hold Back* by Daryl Coley

II. People Places and Times

Perjury. The Ten Commandments clearly state God’s law against “false witness.”

Elaborating from this, the Law of Moses often reiterates how negatively God feels toward lying. A lying tongue is one of the few things God hates (*Proverbs 6:17*).

Law Codes. Today’s Scriptures focus on the arena of law called “*social justice*” legislation. The first set of judicial imperatives is addressed to witnesses in a legal proceeding. These are given as examples of the types of things that constitute injustice, which are to be avoided under penalty of judgment. Most ancient law codes, including the Law of Moses, should not be read as a full listing of society’s dos and don’ts. They are examples of wise standards of justice.

III. Background

The Covenant Code of Exodus 20:22–23:33, also known as “The Book of the Covenant,” follows and expands on the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. Because of the justice and mercy infusing God’s character and His Covenant Code, God’s anger was kindled when His people engaged in injustice and did not show mercy to others.

IV. The Lesson At-A-Glance...

1. *Five Judicial Imperatives (Exodus 23:1–3)*
2. *Two Case Studies (vv. 4–6)*
3. *Five More Judicial Imperatives (vv. 7–9)*
4. *The Sabbath Year (vv. 10–12)*

V. In Depth with More Light on the Text

1. Five Judicial Imperatives (Exodus 23:1–3) Lying is forbidden in two legal situations: in bringing a false accusation (KJV: “a false report,” v. 1) and while acting as a witness in a trial. While many Old Testament laws encourage the Israelites to show kindness to the poor, God also cautions them to not automatically show partiality for a poor person, just because he or she is poor.

2. Two Case Studies (vv. 4–6) The just person is to help a man whose donkey has strayed, even if that person is an enemy. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a perfect New Testament parallel to this Old Testament injunction. The just person must offer help in all situations, whether the person needing help is a friend or foe.

3. Five More Judicial Imperatives (vv. 7–9) A judge must never falsely charge anyone and must never put an innocent person to death. Particularly when it comes to matters of life and death, God specifically will not excuse any with innocent blood on their hands, but will Himself judge the unjust judge. Sadly, bribing judges and other officials is a sin that continues to this day. No one in a position of authority should take a bribe. Bribes blind judges to justice, when instead judges are to be blind to partiality.

4. The Sabbath Year (vv. 10–12) Finally, God institutes the practice of a Sabbath year that provides many righteous outcomes. Besides the obvious rest for the farmer, a Sabbath year also allows the animals and the land itself to rest, showing them respect. During this rest time, the farmers are compelled to rely on the grace of God to get by, which strengthens their faith.

Liberating Lesson— See Sunday School Book...

Studying the Scriptures that pertain to social justice presents a clear picture of what it means for God’s people to embody justice in society. Governments are capable of doing things that individuals cannot, as they enact sweeping laws that shape our perspectives and begin to change the way we treat each other. But according to God’s Word, individuals are always responsible for their own actions and decisions. Even governments are made up of individuals, and each will give an account of every decision, whether it was just or unjust. Ultimately, no one will be excused for inflicting or enabling injustice.

Application for Activation— See Sunday School Book...

Food for Thought and Questions for Consideration (from the Application for Activation)?

1. *What are you willing to do to insure justice in your community?*
2. *How good are you at helping those whom you know don’t like you?*
3. *What day is your sabbath and who is blessed by it?*

Vocabulary-New Words

Perjury (*noun*)— The crime of willfully and knowingly making a false statement about a material fact under oath.

Lie (*noun*) — a false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive; an intentional untruth.