

Worldview: Justice

INTRODUCTION

The strength of the King loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. For I, the Lord, love justice, I hate robbery in the burnt offering; And I will faithfully give them their recompense and make an everlasting covenant with them. Now, will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them?

Psalm 99:4; Isaiah 61:8; Luke 18:7; 1 Kings 4:29-32

DEFINITION

English - Justice: "The exercise of authority in vindication of right by assigning reward or punishment;" "quality of being fair and just; moral soundness and conformity to truth,"

Theological – Justice: “The idea that people receive what they have a right to expect under the law or other agreement. If someone is guilty of a crime, justice requires they pay the penalty for the crime. If someone is wronged, justice requires the wrong to be made right in some way.” ~ Lexham

Biblical – “מִשְׁפָּט mispat” judgment, in the case of deciding a case or situation; execution of judgment. Attribute of judgment, to make right through judgment; an ordinance that promotes justice or fairness. “κρίσις krisis” legal process of judgment; of the judgment of one person upon or against another, in the nature of an evaluation; administration of what is right and fair, right in the sense of justice/righteousness.

Biblical justice isn't just a legal mechanism for punishment or dispute resolution; it's an expression of God's holiness and love, in the midst of evil and injustice.

Modern philosophical theories of justice, shaped by Enlightenment thinkers and post-modern developments, tend to be secular, rational, and pluralistic. They prioritize human autonomy, equality, and societal utility over divine mandate.

- **Distributive Justice:** Focuses on fair allocation of resources and opportunities, using a "veil of ignorance" to ensure impartial rules that benefit the least advantaged. Justice as "fairness" in social contracts and equality in outcomes.
- **Retributive and Corrective Justice:** Emphasizes punishment proportional to harm (retribution) and restoring victims through compensation (correction).
- **Utilitarian Justice:** Measures justice by maximizing overall happiness or utility, sometimes at the expense of individuals (the greatest good for the greatest number).
- **Social and Restorative Justice** (critical theory): Addresses systemic inequalities (race, gender, class) through equity rather than strict equality, emphasizing healing relationships and community reparations over mere punishment.

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Compare and Contrast:

Aspect	Biblical (<i>Mishpat & Krisis</i>)	Modern Views	Key Difference
Foundation	Grounded in God's righteous character and revelation (e.g., Torah, Christ's atonement). Justice flows from God.	Anthropocentric/Secular: Based on reason, social contracts (consensus), or utility	Biblical is absolute/divine; modern is relative/human-derived, allowing cultural variation.
Scope	Holistic: Encompasses personal morality, social ordinances, eternal judgment, and restoration (legal, ethical, communal). Applies to all creation.	Fragmented: Distributive for economics; retributive for crime. Scope varies: some limit to "closed societies"; others extend globally.	Biblical integrates mercy/forgiveness; modern can prioritize efficiency or equality over redemption.
Process	Consistent and Restitutive: Discerning judgment leading to making right; Before God, this involves sacrifice. Societally, this involves recompense	Procedural & Substantive: Emphasis on fair trials or outcomes. Behavior modification not	Biblical views judgment as justice, sin requires judgment; modern often ends at compensation or deterrence.
Goal	Ultimate Wholeness: Aligns with God's justice: Temporal or Eternal	Equity & Utility: Maximizes well-being or corrects imbalances (social justice movements focus on systemic oppression).	Biblical is immutable and objective; modern is relative and shifts with societal norms

Justice begins with offence (sin, transgression). When one sins (offends, transgresses), there are only two possible solutions: justice or injustice. Who decides on what is justice?

Isaiah 61:8 – God loves justice and has demonstrated justice from the beginning (Genesis 2:16-17, 3:19, 4:10-15, 6:5-7, 9:5-7). What changed in Genesis 9? Who is God commanding to administer justice for murder?

In the Law, we see the responsibility specifically stated.

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At its core, Mosaic Law was given to administer Justice. Civil and judicial authority flowed from God and His revelation in the Law, not from human reason or majority rule. At Sinai, God delivered laws encompassing moral, civil, and ceremonial domains, creating a comprehensive legal code. Moses initially served as the chief judge but, upon Jethro's advice, appointed subordinate judges "capable men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain"—to handle minor disputes (Exodus 18:21–22).

Principles of Justice

Mosaic justice rested on the principles of retribution/recompense: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life" (Exodus 21:23–25). This was not meant to endorse vengeance but to ensure proportionality—punishment fitting the crime, never exceeding it. For example:

- A thief made restitution by repaying the stolen goods plus compensation (Leviticus 6:4-5).
- Negligence (such as leaving a pit uncovered) required compensating the damaged party (Exodus 21:33-34).
- False witnesses received the penalty of the accusation (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

Unlike other ancient codes that imposed arbitrary or class-based penalties, Mosaic Law demanded equal treatment under God's standard of justice. The Code of Hammurabi is the most famous example of such inequality.

- If a noble put out another noble's eye, his own eye would be put out.
- If he put out the eye of a **commoner**, he paid one mina of silver instead.
- If he destroyed the eye of a **slave**, he only paid half the slave's value.

Here is another example.

- If a woman neglected her husband, she could be drowned; but a husband who neglected his wife faced no penalty—she was merely permitted to leave him.
- Adultery and desertion by women were often punished with death or impalement, while men's offenses drew minor fines or no punishment.

Unlike these class-based systems, the Mosaic Law applied consistent principles irrespective of status: "You shall have the same law for the stranger and for the native" (Leviticus 24:22).

Whereas Hammurabi's laws preserved elite privilege and hierarchy, Mosaic justice regarded all humans as bearing God's image—an ethical departure rooted in holiness rather than social order.

Judicial Structure and Process

The Mosaic judicial system emphasized procedural fairness. A conviction required at least two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15; Numbers 35:30). Bribery, partiality, and perversion of justice were explicitly forbidden (Exodus 23:6–8). Judges were to uphold the cause of the poor and vulnerable, reflecting God's own concern for justice "at the gate" where decisions were rendered (Amos 5:14-15).

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Aim of Justice: Victim Recompense and Deterrence

The Law sought to restore social and spiritual equality, punishment was recompense, and debt was to be paid to the one harmed, not to society. This not only served as the perfect justice as God revealed, but a deterrent.

Biblical Worldview of Justice in an Unjust World

In the face of injustice, believers are observed to lament injustice. Psalm 94 models this, crying out, “O Lord, God of vengeance, shine forth!” 1 Peter 2:20-23 – if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. Revelation 6:9-10 – “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Yet biblical lament is not despair; it trusts that God’s retribution is righteous and inevitable (Romans 12:17-21). True biblical justice involves both righteous action and compassionate mercy. It means defending the oppressed, advocating for the vulnerable, and confronting sin without resorting to vengeance or violence. Scripture calls believers to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy” (Proverbs 31:8-9).

Guarding Against False Justice

Believers must also discern between Biblical justice and secular ideologies that use the same language but reject God’s moral authority. Many modern “social justice” movements redefine justice without reference to sin, grace, or divine morality, often replacing making right with power transference.

A demand for justice is not stealing others’ injustice to profit. A demand for justice is for the perpetrator and the victim. This is why our current judicial system is unfair. Fines and retribution go to the state, not the victim.

Living Hope Amid Injustice

Ultimately, the Believer’s hope is not in perfect earthly systems but in Christ, the righteous Judge who “will not rest until He has established justice in the earth” (Isaiah 42:4). Until that day, believers are to act as examples of ones who entrust ourselves to God, while patiently enduring injustice, and when an opportunity arises, we pray for and advocate for victims, lamenting evil, practicing mercy, and proclaiming God’s righteousness as the foundation of all true justice, leading them to redemption in Jesus Christ