

AUGSBURG ADULT BIBLE STUDIES

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# Justice, Law, History

Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy,  
2 Samuel, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Nahum

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# AUGSBURG ADULT BIBLE STUDIES

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# Justice, Law, History

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# Introduction to Justice, Law, History

The study this quarter focuses on Old Testament scriptures and the interaction between the ideal of justice, God's pursuit of justice in history, and God's gift of the law that allows humans to join in justice's pursuit. Justice flows from the heart and character of the God of Israel. The community of faith that gathers in God's name will display that very same character.

The first four sessions explore how leaders of God's people must rely on God's law as they administer justice. Deuteronomy demands that God's people be just and equitable. This call is rooted in the memory of God's deliverance of the people from slavery. In 2 Samuel, King David demonstrates justice by showing kindness to Mephibosheth, allowing his table to be set in the presence of his enemy. Isaiah describes a reign of justice and righteousness where war loses its primacy. Through the prophet Nahum, God metes out justice to Judah's enemies. Thus, justice and judgment go together in the divine plan.

The next five sessions focus on God's justice in the lives of God's people and in the gift of the law. Stories in Genesis reveal God's justice in the face of human violence and exclusion. Included are stories of Cain's murder of his brother Abel as well as Hagar and Ishmael being cast out of Abraham's household. Exodus shows the way justice

looks when the ten commandments are applied to everyday life. In Deuteronomy, judges, officials, and priests work together to administer justice for God's people. Furthermore, Deuteronomy demands justice for marginalized people.

The last four sessions deal with situations in which justice seems absent. In 2 Samuel, Nathan condemns David for his acts of injustice toward Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband. In Ezra, after years of exile in Babylon, Ezra returns to Jerusalem and determines to restore respect for God's law. The voice of a foreign king sounds in these passages. Sessions 12 and 13 explore the book of Job and the way suffering calls into question not only simplistic spirituality but even our best understandings of how God's justice and power stand in relation to real evil.

A special feature of this study is access to biblical storytellers whose craft brings out the energy and emotions in which these stories marinate. Their tone and sense of presence reveal the character of God and how the law functions as a wise invitation to a blessed way of living in the history in which God has placed us.

Through this study may we experience the depth the Old Testament provides us in shaping faithful living in the presence of the ever-faithful God.

## **Purpose of the Study**

Participants in this study will reflect on the interplay between God's vision for a just world, the law as Israel's guide in justice making, and history as the location where divine justice takes on flesh. We are invited to walk in this long tradition of justice as people of faith.

## **Our Writer**

Phil Ruge-Jones is pastor of Grace Lutheran, Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and director of the Lay School of Ministry for the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. This is his eighth contribution to the AABS series. Like the collaborators he has gathered for this study, he is a member of the Network of Biblical Storytellers, International.

# Justice and Obedience to the Law

## **Deuteronomy 5:1b-3; 10:12-13; 27:1-10**

<sup>1b</sup> Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. <sup>2</sup> The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup> Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.

### *Chapter 10*

<sup>12</sup> So now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? Only to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, <sup>13</sup> and to keep the commandments of the LORD your God and his decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.

### *Chapter 27*

<sup>1</sup> Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged all the people as follows: Keep the entire commandment that I am commanding you today. <sup>2</sup> On the day that you cross over the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and cover them with plaster. <sup>3</sup> You shall write on them all the words of this law when you have crossed over, to enter the land that the

LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your ancestors, promised you. <sup>4</sup> So when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I am commanding you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall cover them with plaster. <sup>5</sup> And you shall build an altar there to the LORD your God, an altar of stones on which you have not used an iron tool. <sup>6</sup> You must build the altar of the LORD your God of unhewn stones. Then offer up burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, <sup>7</sup> make sacrifices of well-being, and eat them there, rejoicing before the LORD your God. <sup>8</sup> You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very clearly.

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying: Keep silence and hear, O Israel! This very day you have become the people of the LORD your God. <sup>10</sup> Therefore obey the LORD your God, observing his commandments and his statutes that I am commanding you today.

*Watch the online presentation of this text at [www.youtube.com/user/augszburgfortress](http://www.youtube.com/user/augzburgfortress). Click on “Playlists” and then on “AABS Sessions Winter 2021–22.” This session’s digital storyteller is Ken Quiring.*

## **Theme Statement**

Moses addresses the people on the banks of the Jordan River before they enter into the land of promise. As he speaks to them, he exhorts them to hear what the Lord commands them and to walk in God’s ways.

## Exploring the Word

*Deuteronomy is the final book of the Pentateuch (Jewish people call this the Torah), the first five books of the Bible. Deuteronomy means “the second law” or “the repeated law.” In the flow of the*



*Pentateuch narrative, Moses is repeating the law received from God at Mount Horeb (Sinai) for the generation born after the law was given. Perched on the threshold of the promised land, Moses invites this second generation to enter into the covenant God has extended to the people of Israel as they finally are able to settle in the long-awaited land.*

### **Deuteronomy 5:1b-3 The covenant with us**

When Moses addresses the people in this sermon, he invokes all of Israel. Those who are about to cross through the Jordan River into the land of promise are not the same individuals who came out of Egypt through the waters. Those people—with only a handful of exceptions—perished in the wilderness. Their children and grandchildren listen to Moses. Yet Moses speaks to them as though they were there when the commandments were first given on Mount Horeb. Moses invites the present listeners to claim the event as their own, as if they had stood among the ancestors who preceded them.

### **Deuteronomy 10:12-13 What the covenant requires of us**

The Lord gives the gift of land, but the covenant also comes with responsibilities on the part of the people. The verbs carry the weight of what is expected of them: *fear, walk, love, serve, and keep* God's commands. In walking in the way the Lord requires of them, they will find fulfillment. God is not capricious, making demands that are impulsive and self-serving. The Creator of this people has provided guidance that will keep them well. The commandment to serve God also serves the people's well-being.

### **Deuteronomy 27:1-10 Crossing the line**

As Deuteronomy nears its end, the people prepare to cross over into the promised land. They have listened to God's word as Moses reviewed their past. Now Moses gives them

a ritual to mark their passage into newness. When they cross the Jordan River, they are to set up stones to remind them of God's commands. The previous generation received stones from God's hands that contained the ten commandments; now the people are to set up stones covered in plaster and repeat the laws that God has given them, writing them this time by their own hands. These rocks are not to have had contact with iron tools. The word used for "tool" also means "sword." The commandments of the Lord are not shaped by military might.

## The Word Today

Hattie and June sat in the kitchen sipping tea as they had done so many times.

"What's up, Hattie?" June asked her best friend. "You seem down."

Hattie replied, "Nothing new. I am worrying again about my children and even more about my grandchildren. Allen and I brought our kids to church every Sunday, and every Wednesday night they hung out with the youth. But now when I ask them if they have found a church home, they shrug and say they just can't find the right place. Why, Danny is almost two years old, and they still haven't baptized him!"

June said, "You are not the only one who struggles with that. Look around our congregation. We have a lot of gray hair gracing our heads. But when I think of my children and grandchildren, I see fruits of the seeds we sowed, even if they are not rooted in a congregation as I'd like. They say their prayers at meals and bedtime; most nights they read the children's Bible I gave the girls last Christmas. The last time I read to them the story of Jesus' baptism, they were finishing my sentences because they'd heard the

story so often. They are involved in making other people's lives better in a way that I never was. Sometimes I think they don't go to church because they noticed how often our talk and our walk contradict each other. All this makes me sad too, but God is up to something in their lives, even if it looks different than when I was their age."

Hattie repeated, "But still, it bothers me."

June responded, "Let's imagine I'm Alice. We both know that if you had a favorite—which, of course, you don't—it would be her. Say to me what you'd like to say to her."

Hattie took a deep breath, "Alice, I am so proud of you and your family. I was just telling June that the other day. But sometimes I worry. God has been so central in my life; I would not have survived your dad's death without our church. I worry that you may not have that support in your life. Tell me of your faith; encourage me. I know you will meet God in the way best for you. Could you tell me how you see God active in your life?"

## Questions for Discussion

### **Beginnings**

1. When have you had a major change approaching you in your life that required you to be as clear as possible about how to conduct yourself?
2. What are some of the reasons rules are important to order our life together?

### **Exploring the Word**

1. What are the different words Moses uses in these passages to describe the people of Israel's role in their covenant with God?

2. What difference do the following events from Moses' life make in understanding his words here?
  - a. Moses saw what God did at the Red Sea.
  - b. Moses met the Lord God face to face.
  - c. Moses saw the people betray God in the wilderness.
  - d. Moses knows he won't go with them across the Jordan.
  
3. How does this moment at the Jordan inform our understanding of what John the Baptist says to those who gathered at this river centuries later? See Matthew 3:11-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22.

## **The Word Today**

1. What place do role models, rules, and rituals play in your spiritual life?

## **Closing Prayer**

*Lord, you guide our journey through life. May we hear what you command for our own well-being. May our lives unfold in the land of your promise. In the name of Jesus, your obedient servant and incarnate promise. Amen.*

## **Further Study**

Luke 3:1-23

## **Daily Readings**

M. Deuteronomy 5:6-21

T. Deuteronomy 5:23-33

W. Romans 12:1-2, 9-21

T. Deuteronomy 10:1-11

F. Matthew 5:17-20

S. Deuteronomy 27:14-26

S. Deuteronomy 5:1-3;

10:12-13; 27:1-10