

## Unit III: Called to God's Work of Justice

# Do the Right Thing

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 72:1-17

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 22

PRINT PASSAGE: Jeremiah 22:1-10

**Key Verse**—Do not wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. (Jeremiah 22:3b, KJV)

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“Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.” (Jeremiah 22:3b, NIV)

### Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand that the covenant relationship between God and God's people requires justice.
- Repent for injustice and seek to deliver the oppressed.
- Become active agents of deliverance for the oppressed.

### \*Key Terms

**Forsaken (verse 9)**—Hebrew: *'azab* (ä·zav'): had left, refused, departed from, left behind.

**Gilead (verse 6)**—Hebrew: *Gilad* (ghil-awd'): a region east of the Jordan (in Palestine); also, the name of several Israelites.

**Judah (verse 1)**—Hebrew: *Yehudah* (yeh-hoo-daw'): a son of Jacob's; also, his descendants; the Southern Kingdom.

**Orphan (verse 3)**—Hebrew: *yathom* (yaw-thome'): someone who is without parents (or is “fatherless” [KJV/NIV]).

\*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

### Introduction

As children and youth, how did we avoid or delay disciplinary action from our parents? Primarily by being obedient—that is, by doing the right thing—we would steer clear of punishment. If you were like me, you attempted to avoid the wrath of a “Big Mama” by



### The Biblical Context

Chapter 22 continues God's warnings concerning Jerusalem's fall. Again, the royal house is addressed as it was in the preceding chapter (verses 11-14). The spiritual conditions of the city were parallel to those that Jesus observed centuries later during His earthly ministry (see Matthew 23:37-39). In chapter 21, Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah; now, God was sending Jeremiah to him, his officials, and the people who were in the palace with a message that offered a way to preserve the royal dynasty and avoid the total destruction of the palace and the city of Jerusalem.

making sure you did what you were told, when you were told, and how you were told to do it. The reward for doing the right thing in my home was the establishment of a trusting relationship between my parents and me. I was entrusted with more responsibility and received more privileges because of my choice to obey the standards set in my home. As children of God, the situation is the same. His expectation is that we do the right thing at all times. He has provided the "rule book" that governs our relationship with Him—and He expects us to follow it obediently. Deliberately refusing to do the right thing in God's family results in unpleasant discipline. A review of the historical relationship between God and Israel reveals this to be true. He chose them, gave them the requirements of family membership, and

blessed them with His presence, provision, and protection. To their detriment, they chose to do wrong rather than do right according to the standards He gave them. Like a good parent, He kept reminding them of their covenant requirements and offering the opportunity to repent and do the right thing. God used Jeremiah as Judah's last-chance messenger during the final siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian army. He offered Judah's sitting king, officials, and the people the choice of doing the right thing by acting with justice and righteousness to mitigate His wrath, preserve David's royal house, and prevent the total destruction of the city.

## ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

### The Choice Is Yours (*Jeremiah 22:1-5*)

#### KJV

**THUS SAITH the LORD; Go down to the house of the king of *Judah*, and speak there this word,**

**2 And say, Hear the word of the LORD, O king of Judah, that sittest upon the throne of David, thou, and thy servants, and thy people that enter in by these gates:**

**3 Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the *fatherless*, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place.**

**4 For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.**



**5 But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.**

## **NIV**

**THIS IS** what the LORD says: “Go down to the palace of the king of *Judah* and proclaim this message there:

**2** “Hear the word of the LORD to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates.

**3** “This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the *fatherless* or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.

**4** “For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David’s throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by their officials and their people.

**5** “But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin.”

While the Babylonians lay the final siege to Jerusalem and defeat was certain, God sent Jeremiah “down to the palace of the king of Judah” (**verse 1**, NIV). Jeremiah was instructed to address the king, officials, and people who were in the precincts of the royal palace (**verse 2**). He was to tell them what they needed to do to prevent the removal of the royal house and the total destruction of Jerusalem (**verse 3**). God demanded that they do justice and righteousness and deliver those robbed by their oppressors. Doing justice and righteousness would be further seen in their refusal to mistreat or do violence to strangers, orphans, and widows among them, and refusal to shed innocent blood. This demand specifically referenced King Jehoiakim, who was guilty of these injustices for the purpose of building a magnificent palace for himself. If these commands were obeyed, then the king could expect continued blessings, and David’s dynasty would continue as God had promised (**verse 4**; see also 2 Samuel 7). God swore by Himself in view of the stipulations of His covenant with David that refusal to obey these demands would cause the dissolution of the family of David as rulers of His people (**verse 5**).

God always provides people a choice and a chance to obey His standards based on what has been stipulated in His Word. By doing the right thing, He is obligated to bless according to what He has said He will do. By contrast, choosing to do the wrong thing would trigger His obligation to maintain His integrity to His Word by following through with the consequences He has determined for disobedience. Jeremiah’s message calling for doing justice and righteousness is relevant and timely for God’s people today. There is blatant social injustice toward those who are considered aliens in our country and toward the disenfranchised. As we identify these injustices in our communities, we are called

and challenged to address them and become agents of comfort and deliverance of the oppressed among us.

**? What Do You Think?** God commanded Jeremiah's audience to "do justice and righteousness." How can we engage in more *doing* than *talking* about the need for social justice and equity in our local communities?

## A Dire Prediction (*Jeremiah 22:6-10*)

### KJV

6 For thus saith the LORD unto the king's house of Judah; Thou art *Gilead* unto me, and the head of Lebanon: yet surely I will make thee a wilderness, and cities which are not inhabited.

7 And I will prepare destroyers against thee, every one with his weapons: and they shall cut down thy choice cedars, and cast them into the fire.

8 And many nations shall pass by this city, and they shall say every man to his neighbour, Wherefore hath the LORD done thus unto this great city?

9 Then they shall answer, Because they have *forsaken* the covenant of the LORD their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

10 Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him: but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.

### NIV

6 For this is what the LORD says about the palace of the king of Judah: "Though you are like *Gilead* to me, like the summit of Lebanon, I will surely make you like a wasteland, like towns not inhabited.

7 "I will send destroyers against you, each man with his weapons, and they will cut up your fine cedar beams and throw them into the fire.

8 "People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this great city?'

9 "And the answer will be: 'Because they have *forsaken* the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.'

10 Do not weep for the dead king or mourn his loss; rather, weep bitterly for him who is exiled, because he will never return nor see his native land again.

The failure to receive the support of those to whom one ministers can be hurtful and, for the less spiritually mature, a reason to quit or grow slack. What can be more hurtful is not having the support of those among your most personal and intimate relationships. The nation of Israel had the privilege of being in an intimate relationship with God. They



were privileged to have access to His abiding presence, provision, protection, and power. Their continued rebellion led to a break in fellowship between them. This disappointed and grieved God. Although He loved them as His unique possession, His faithfulness to His Word required that they be severely disciplined. Jerusalem was His choice as the city for His presence to dwell among them. The palace and the Temple were beautiful to Him, yet as dear to Him as they were (**verse 6a**), He was not going to relent in bringing about their total destruction because of the sins of the people (**verse 6b**). The Babylonians, set apart by God, would destroy their palaces and great houses of fine cedar by cutting them up, throwing them into a fire, and burning them (**verse 7**). Those who observed the catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem would ask and answer their own question of why the God of Judah had orchestrated this disaster. Even they would know that it was because Judah had forsaken their covenant and committed the sin of idolatry (**verses 8-9**). God's people today must constantly be aware that a hostile world watches our every move and attitude. It is non-negotiable that if we are to be effective witnesses, then we must recognize that we are to be in the world but not of it. Our obedience becomes the source of blessing for ourselves and others. Rather than focus on building magnificent edifices of "fine cedar" that will one day perish, our focus must be on building lives of lasting integrity.

The closing verses (**verse 10** and verses 11-12) refer to Shallum (Jehoahaz), a son of Josiah who succeeded him after he was killed by Pharaoh Neco II of Egypt. Shallum's reign lasted only three months before he was deposed by Neco. "Weep not for the dead," here, refers to Josiah. Instead of continuing to mourn his death before he witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah instructs the people to mourn for his son Shallum, who had gone into captivity in Egypt because he would die there and never see his homeland again. Although Josiah's death may have appeared premature, he was spared the agony of seeing his people, their city, and the Temple destroyed by the Babylonians. Some among Jeremiah's audience would experience Shallum's fate, therefore their weeping should have been for the living who would face God's irreversible judgment. Lost humankind is more to be mourned for the fate awaiting the unrepentant than those who die in the Lord. Divine judgment is certain for all—the saved and the unsaved. All will stand before God and be righteously judged according to their deeds. The uncertainty of when this will occur should motivate God's people to strive to follow God's way and do the right thing. Equally as urgent is the need to show concern for the lost by proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to them before it is too late.

**? What Do You Think?** What specific evidence reveals that God's people have not forsaken their covenant responsibilities?

## A Closing Thought


God is still calling His people to do the right thing and act with justice and righteousness because these qualities are attributes of His divine character. There are hurting people all around us who need to see these aspects of His character demonstrated in our daily lives and contacts with them.

## Your Life

Doing the right thing from God's perspective is not limited to certain areas of our lives. This week, identify an area of your daily walk in which you need to be more consistently obedient. Acknowledge your failure or laxity in this area and commit to become obedient in following God's standard for it.

## Your World!

There are ample opportunities to do the right thing in our spheres of influence and in the world, especially in terms of aiding those oppressed by injustice. Identify a specific way that your congregation can become active agents of deliverance for victims of oppression and inequitable practices.

 **Closing Prayer** Dear God, thank You for the opportunity to serve You by doing what is right. Forgive us when we fail, and help us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow in our obedience to You. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Conclusion

### (Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

The final lesson for this quarter will help us identify the godly virtues that honor God and lead to the appropriate kind of prosperity. Read Hosea 11–12 to prepare for this study.

### Home Daily Bible Readings

<b>MONDAY</b> , May 25	"Receiving a New Vision of God"	(Genesis 28:10-17)
<b>TUESDAY</b> , May 26	"Justice for Gentile Believers"	(Acts 15:10-17)
<b>WEDNESDAY</b> , May 27	"The Up or Down Choice"	(Deuteronomy 28:1-6, 15-19)
<b>THURSDAY</b> , May 28	"Jesus, a Migrant from Egypt"	(Matthew 2:13-15)
<b>FRIDAY</b> , May 29	"Ephraim Spurns God's Love and Suffers"	(Hosea 11:3-6)
<b>SATURDAY</b> , May 30	"Once a Slave; Now a Brother"	(Philemon 8-21)
<b>SUNDAY</b> , May 31	"Respond with Love and Justice Daily"	(Hosea 11:1-2, 7-10; 12:1-2, 6-14)



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