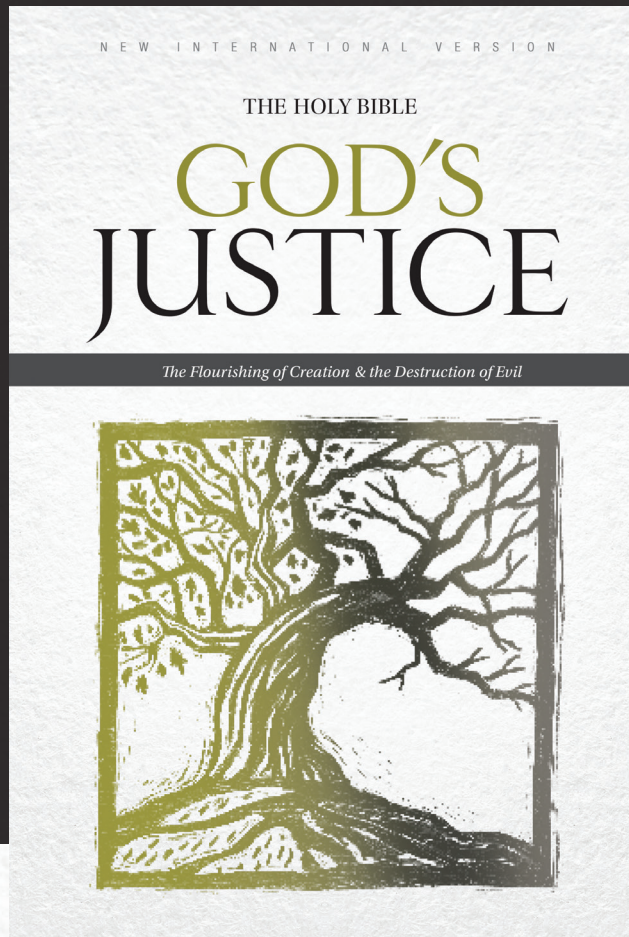


GOD'S JUSTICE

6-Day Devotional



GOD'S JUSTICE BIBLE

6-Day Devotional

Day 1 SCRIPTURE



PSALM 10

Why, LORD, do you stand far off?

Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,
who are caught in the schemes he devises.

He boasts about the cravings of his heart;

he blesses the greedy and reviles the LORD.

In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;

in all his thoughts there is no room for God.

His ways are always prosperous;

your laws are rejected by him;

he sneers at all his enemies.

He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me."

He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."

His mouth is full of lies and threats;

trouble and evil are under his tongue.

He lies in wait near the villages;

from ambush he murders the innocent.

His eyes watch in secret for his victims;

like a lion in cover he lies in wait.

He lies in wait to catch the helpless

he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.

His victims are crushed, they collapse;

they fall under his strength.

He says to himself, "God will never notice;

he covers his face and never sees."

Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God.

Do not forget the helpless.

Why does the wicked man revile God?

Why does he say to himself,

"He won't call me to account"?

But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;

you consider their grief and take it in hand.

The victims commit themselves to you;

you are the helper of the fatherless.

Break the arm of the wicked man;

call the evildoer to account for his wickedness

that would not otherwise be found out.

The LORD is King for ever and ever;

the nations will perish from his land.

You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted;

you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

defending the fatherless and the oppressed,

so that mere earthly mortals

will never again strike terror.

Day 1 JUSTICE IN THE PSALMS

The Psalms are songs to God. They were collected over many years and became Israel's hymnbook. They bring life into the presence of God—all of life, not just the spiritual parts. All the circumstances of life, and all the emotions—delight, thankfulness, horror, fury—are brought to worship.

These deeply emotional poems have a theme: the struggle to set the world right. The psalmists praise God for his mighty works of justice, and they plead with God: Save me from evil. Come and judge the world. Set things right. The Psalms teach us how to pray about everything. Most of all, they teach us how to pray about justice.

Because of God's concern for justice, many psalms speak of guarding the rights of the poor, defending the vulnerable and protecting them from violence (which almost by definition is the strong bashing the weak). Troublemakers, liars and cheaters are called to accounts. For the psalm writers, judgment is not something to dread; rather, it is something to pray for and dream of—because God judges with justice.

The Psalms are the emotional and spiritual diary of God's people struggling against evil enemies. Dramatic highs and lows fly off almost every page. Sometimes within a single poem, the psalmist goes from serenity to extreme anxiety and back again. He longs for a refuge, a "stronghold."

God's justice extends beyond the psalmist's troubles, beyond the life of Israel, to a great future for the whole world. "All nations" are meant to sing God's praise; "all nations" will someday be counted as God's people. This, too, is justice: the blessings that God promised to Abraham for the whole world.

They do understand, however, that God is at work to set a violent and unjust world right. The Psalms wake us up and enlarge our minds and feelings. They teach us how to pray for the weak and the vulnerable. They teach us how to pray as the weak and the vulnerable. We, too, can sing the songs of justice.

— Tim Stafford, United States
(excerpted from the book introduction to Psalms)



Day 2 SCRIPTURE



COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of[a] your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

COLOSSIANS 2:8-10

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces[a] of this world rather than on Christ.

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Day 2 JUSTICE IN COLOSSIANS

Justice in African cosmology is associated with truth telling, fairness, equity, doing what is right, giving right judgment, being impartial and being straightforward. Biblical justice has these elements too. Upholding what is true and fair is central to the idea of justice.

At the heart of Paul's letter to the Colossians is this idea: that simple truth should be the basis of life. And so, justice underlies everything.

We treat people unjustly and unfairly when we deny them the rightful place and honor due to them. The heretics treat Jesus Christ unjustly by denying him his rightful position as the Creator, Savior and Lord of the universe. By denying Jesus' ability to save completely, the Christians in Colossae undermine his power and Colossians is relevant for our faith today, for it addresses the challenges we are facing with false teachings in the church. Many cults today claim to be Christian, yet they deny the deity of Jesus Christ. Their false claims have the appearance of wisdom, but they end up cutting people off from the source of life and the possibility of living the rich, full and just life God intends.

He gives us a portrait of Christ as God's Son, the object of the Christian faith, the Redeemer, the image of God, Lord of creation, head of the church, and the reconciler of the universe. In addition,

Christ embodies the fullness of the Godhead, and all authority in the universe is under him and subjected to him. God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him. He is the standard by which all religious teachings are measured, and he conquered the mystic powers of evil by his cross. Paul, therefore, affirms the lordship of Jesus Christ over life and over the cosmic powers.

For Paul, Jesus Christ is simply the truth. The Colossians are dabbling in "hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ." To live lives of justice, as they were created to do, they must clear away all competing ideas and focus on Jesus. In him, "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness" (2:8-10).

— James Nkansah-Obrempong Ghana, Kenya
(Excerpted from the book introduction to Colossians)



Day 3 SCRIPTURE



TITUS 1:5-16

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.

TITUS 2:1-13

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine. Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance.

Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and

children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.

Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive.

TITUS 3:1-8

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward everyone.

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Day 3 JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF TITUS

The text of Titus is short; it is only forty-six verses. Nonetheless, the brevity of the text contrasts with the content's depth, in particular from the perspective of what it teaches about God's justice. In this epistle, justice is not a theoretical discourse to fire up heated philosophical and theological debates. On the contrary, justice is a value to be expressed practically in the life of the Christian community (1:5–16), in the personal behavior of family members (2:1–10) and in their behavior as citizens (3:1–8).

In his letter to Titus, Paul begins with instructions about the way the Christian community in Crete should be governed, establishing ministerial ranks and making sure that every position is filled with people of Christian character. He also indicates how to deal with people who, teaching erroneous ideas, cause divisions and disrupt harmony in the Christian community and even whole families. Such persons not only lead people astray with their doctrines, but also commercialize the gospel for their own benefit (1:10–11). Then comes the apostle's central teaching: the opposite of false doctrines are not the correct theological declarations but rather unity and concrete social practices that promote (and are in themselves) God's justice (2:11–13).

At the time Titus was written, Crete was apparently a prosperous island. Nonetheless, the Christian community included people

who were left on the sidelines of that prosperity. Slaves, for example, who (amazingly enough), are now worshiping alongside their masters. This unprecedented breakdown of class distinctions could be the reason why the author insists on the need to do good works and to give testimony of God's justice in concrete ways.

The major concern expressed in the letter is not combating the false doctrines that abounded in Crete. Nor is it the lack of orderly and respectable church leaders. The deepest concern Paul and Titus have is to challenge the Cretan church to give, through service, true testimony of its faith. For them, doing what is good is the crucial expression of the salvation found in Christ (3:7–8). When believers act with solidarity together, they are expressing their faith in a just God who has acted with love and mercy for everyone.

— **Harold Segura Columbia, Costa Rica**
(Excerpted from the book introduction to Titus)



Day 4 SCRIPTURE



JAMES 1:9-11

Believers in humble circumstances ought to take pride in their high position. But the rich should take pride in their humiliation—since they will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.

JAMES 2:5-13

Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

JAMES 5:1-6

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workers who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the innocent one, who was not opposing you.

Day 4 JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF JAMES

Since James has been primarily read from the point of view of the “faith and works dichotomy,” many readers fail to pay attention to a very important concern of the epistle—the relationship between the rich and the poor, and the book’s denunciation of the abuses of the economically powerful against the poor and powerless. In many ways, the book’s teaching concerning the preferential option for the poor (e.g., 1:9–11; 2:5), solidarity with the weak and the oppressed (1:27; 2:1–26) and condemnation of the luxurious life of rich oppressors (5:1–6) is silenced by a kind of reading that is not attentive to issues of justice.

James, regarded as a leader in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15), addresses the epistle to the “twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” This refers to the early Jewish believers pushed out of Judea because of persecution (cf. Acts 8). As scattered migrants or refugees their life was difficult. They were marginalized and hence could easily be subjected to many forms of discrimination by the economically and politically powerful. In a way, this epistle is like a letter of a Filipino pastor to Overseas Filipino Workers scattered around the globe and exposed to many forms of abuse. Judging from chapter 2, this discrimination was also happening inside the community of faith. Even in church services the wealthy are given preference over the poor, even though the rich are the ones persecuting the community.

James offers the message that God has taken the side of the poor, choosing them to be his heirs. He says that God has already begun to judge their oppressors. Because of this, the poor are encouraged to be proud of their new status before God (1:9–11), to be actively patient in facing their trials and to be confident of the future (chap. 5). At the same time, the rich people are reminded to be humble (1:10–11), to apply the message of the word (2:8–9) to their lives, to avoid trusting in their riches and to be just in their treatment of their laborers (5:1–6).

James calls the believers toward a life of social justice, a radical life that is shaped not by the utilitarian and oppressing powers of the world but by the liberating gospel of Christ.

— Noli Mendoza, *Philippines*
(Excerpted from the book introduction to James)



Day 5 SCRIPTURE



1 PETER 4:17-18

For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

1 PETER 5:6-10

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Day 5 JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

First Peter offers hope that by living reverent and quiet lives, members of the new Christian community can avoid suffering. Clearly, though, Peter's greatest hope is that by imitating Christ, who also suffered and did not pursue retaliation, Christians can be redeemed by God. He will set all things right (4:17–18). He will lift you up (5:6). He will make you strong (5:10).

An insight gained from 1 Peter and the life of Nelson Mandela: it is possible that the (unjust) suffering of an individual can mean the freedom of an entire people. More importantly, if an individual sacrifices his or her freedom for the sake of the freedom of the entire community, it is now up to the community to provide a space where all will enjoy being safe, free and blessed. That was so of Nelson Mandela; it is even more deeply and eternally true of Jesus.

What Mandela suffered on behalf of justice has created a new country, where justice should be the norm. And yet it is not. Many years after Nelson Mandela became the first democratic president of South Africa, unemployment ranks among the highest in the world, as do intimate partner violence and sexual violence. The rape and murder of women and children are a common occurrence; “corrective rape” of lesbians and homophobic attacks are on the increase; the HIV infection rate is among the world's

highest; and foreigners from neighboring African countries suffer xenophobic attacks. In short, Mandela's suffering served for the liberation of a nation, but that liberation is far from complete.

And Jesus' suffering served for the liberation of the whole world, but that liberation—of body, mind and spirit—is very far from perfected, even in the lives of those whom he has chosen. The church, of all places, should be where liberation is seen.

The first readers of 1 Peter were called to act justly by conforming to submissive behavior and suffering for a little while (3:6; 5:10). This was deemed righteous because such suffering was for the well-being and survival of the family of believers as they waited on the return of Christ. We too are called to act justly in our contexts of suffering—mindful that, as a family of believers, we may face different challenges than did the churches Peter first addressed.

— **Miranda Pillay, South Africa**
(Excerpted from the book
introduction to 1 Peter)



Day 6 SCRIPTURE



JUDE 1:32-23

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand, and the very things they do understand by instinct—as irrational animals do—will destroy them.

Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

Be merciful to those who doubt; save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.

Day 6 JUSTICE IN THE BOOK OF JUDE

Is there justice in the church? Is it necessary to confront evil right inside the family of believers? Jude says he was eager to write positively about salvation. Instead, he veers onto much less attractive subject matter. Jude feels compelled to urge his readers to struggle for the faith against certain individuals within the church who are leading people astray.

Writing in the first century when the church was still young, the author urges the believers to contend for their faith. The book of Jude further rehearses Israel's history to communicate to the believers that God is in charge—that he can and will punish the unjust, as he always has.

The troubles Jude sees may not be exactly the same as what Christians face today, but the fact of sinful behavior within the church has not changed. In certain parts of the world, for example, some groups of people do not accept others as equal members of God's family. They prize the status that comes with their family background and consider themselves as first among equals; they are boastful! Some of them would not give their daughters and sons to marry outside their group, for doing so would include the "other" as one of their family members. Instead of honoring and celebrating unity in Christ, they prefer to maintain the racial, tribal or denominational divide.

Have you been a victim of unjust treatment within the church? Have you seen corrupt and immoral leaders? Do you feel that the world is pressing its ideas and beliefs hard on you from within the church? If you find yourself in such a situation, you are not the first one; long before you, Christians faced similar situations and felt as you do.

— Jeremiah Duomai, India
(Excerpted from the book introduction to Jude)

