



# Worship and Justice

## God's non-negotiables


A read through the Bible, especially the Histories and the Prophets in the Old Testament, shows a recurring sequence of God's people turning away from God, then coming back, only to turn away again. Throughout these centuries of a wavering relationship with God there are two major issues that are at the root of it and are deeply offensive to God whenever they occur. Those issues are the worship of other gods and a lack of justice among God's people; two issues that often seem to be closely linked together. These issues also appear to be central to the loss of prosperity and eventual exile of God's people.



Pray for clarity to see whatever God wants to reveal to you during this study



Who is more acceptable to God, the person who ignores God but who treats other people well, or the person who acknowledges God but who mistreats others?



Work as a group to make a list of the elements that you consider are necessary for a society or nation to be operating in a just way.

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### The Priority of Worship

1 Kings 8: 54 – 61      Words of Solomon to the people at the dedication of the temple.  
 2 Chronicles 7: 11 – 22      Words of the Lord to Solomon at the dedication of the temple.

From these two passages list the results of worshipping God and the consequences of turning from God.

<u>Results of Worshipping God</u>	<u>Consequences of Turning From God</u>

Read: Deuteronomy 4: 39 – 40

What do these verses say about the importance of worshipping and obeying God?

Can there be long term prosperity and stability in a society in which God is not honoured?



## The Priority of Justice

Read:

Proverbs 14: 31

Proverbs 16: 19

Isaiah 28: 17

James 1: 27

What do these passages reveal about the importance to God of justice among people?

Jeremiah 22: 13 – 17    Make a list of the elements of injustice mentioned in this passage?

What does this passage suggest that 'knowing God' involves?

Luke 3: 10 – 14

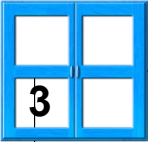
What are the just practices that John the Baptist encourages?

Luke 4: 18 – 19

How does Jesus describe his purpose and his ministry?

How can individual Christians and the Church have an influence for justice in our country?

What can individual Christians and the Church in NZ do to have an influence for justice in other parts of the world?



## Links Between Worship and Justice

Read:  
Deuteronomy 16: 18 – 22  
Hosea 12: 6

What do these passages suggest about the relative importance of worship and justice?

Read Isaiah 58: 1 – 14 and then consider the following questions:

What makes worship unacceptable to God?

What makes worship acceptable to God?

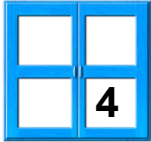
What are the economic consequences of worship together with justice?

Read Isaiah 59: 1 – 21

As we have seen above, Isaiah 58 expresses something of the ideals of genuine worship and of godly justice. In contrast what are the sad realities listed in Isaiah 59 and what are their consequences?

Note how these passages also link worship and justice together:

Amos 5: 21 – 24  
Micah 6: 8  
Zechariah 7: 4 – 10



## The Reality and Consequences of Oppression and Injustice

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Read Amos 5: 11 – 13 and Amos 8: 4 – 14

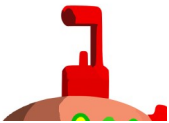
What unjust commercial and economic practices are listed here?

What consequences of unjust economic practices do these passages give warning of?

What are examples today of unjust economic practices?



What has this study revealed about the nature of God?



What new thought or understanding has come to you during this study?



What issues, questions or practical implications for your local church, your church denomination, or the wider Christian church, are raised by this study?



*(This section may be used for personal reflection alone or may be shared within the group)*

How central is worship in your life?

- How often do you attend a worship service?
- How often do you intentionally spend time in prayer?
- Do you involve the Lord in decisions in your life?
- Do you consciously seek to live in a way that honours God?
- Do you refrain from involvement in activities that are disrespectful to God?
- Do you avoid activities that include any element of worshipping other gods?
- Are there any things that have a higher priority in your life than Jesus Christ?

How important is justice to you?

- Do you maintain strict honesty in all your dealings with others?
- Does it offend you when others are mistreated?
- Do you ever stand up for people who are wronged?
- What could you do to have a greater influence for justice in the world?

Spend some time as a group praying over what you have discussed, asking God to bring into focus how you may respond to his Word in an ongoing way.



**More Bible passages and discussion questions for further study:**

Read Exodus chapters 1 to 3 as an example of economic oppression and exploitation of a people. NB Exodus 3: 19 tells us that Pharaoh would not release the Israelites unless he was compelled to. What does this suggest about how exploitation is to be confronted?

Read Exodus 32 The people worship the statue of a calf fashioned out of the gold that God had enabled them to take out of Egypt. What does this tell us about the human tendency to misuse the resources that God provides?

Ezekiel 18 Read this chapter and make two lists, one of what are described as righteous acts, and one of unrighteous acts. Note the placing together of elements of true worship and of just living.

Luke 1: 46 – 55 The Song of Mary

What does this passage tell us about God's economic principles for humanity?



**Notes on some of the passages referred to in this study:**

1 Kings 8: 54 – 61 Chapters 5 to 8 of 1 Kings are all about the building of the temple, which was overseen by King Solomon. These particular verses come after a lengthy prayer of dedication by Solomon and are his words of blessing to the people at that time.

2 Chronicles 7: 11 – 22 Chapters 3 to 7 of 2 Chronicles also recount the building of the temple. These particular verses in Chapter 7 contain words of promise that the Lord gave to Solomon after the temple was completed.

Deuteronomy 4: 39 – 40 contains words of Moses spoken at the time he gave God's Law to the people.

Jeremiah 22: 13 – 17 The original Kingdom of Israel became split into the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The Kingdom of Israel was defeated by enemies and its people taken into captivity in exile. Later the Kingdom of Judah suffered the same fate. This passage refers to the coming time of captivity of Judah.

Luke 4: 18 – 19 These words of Jesus merge quotes from passages found in Isaiah 61: 1 – 2 and Isaiah 58: 6.

Deuteronomy 16: 18 – 22 These verses are part of the detail of the Law given by Moses. The Asherah poles (v21) and sacred stones (v22) were used in pagan worship by the Canaanite people. Many times in the Old Testament we find God's people lapsing into accepting and joining in with that pagan worship.

Isaiah 58 and 59 are part of a longer section of Isaiah, from chapter 56, in which the inability of God's people to maintain righteousness and justice is much lamented.

Amos. A few passages from Amos are referred to in this study. Amos was a shepherd who became a preacher in Israel around 760BC. This was at a time when there was peace and much prosperity in Israel, but also much inequality and empty religion. Amos gave strong warnings while also speaking of the love and patience of God. It is worth reading through the whole of the short book of Amos, which is a passionate plea for true religion.

Ezekiel contains a series of prophecies and judgements against Israel and surrounding nations. Within that context Chapter 18 reveals an appreciation of the responsibility of each individual for their own behaviour.

Luke 1: 46 – 79 contains Mary's Song (aka The Magnificat), one of several songs of praise found in Luke that give praise to God and declare God's character and purpose in the sending of Jesus.