

Justice in the old testament religion essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS JUSTICE

The general understanding of justice is giving a person his due. That is to say if the if someone has done more should be rewarded more. In short it is concerned with fair distribution of goods, opportunities justice demands that every individual should be rewarded according to what he or she had done, nothing more or nothing less. Now having understood the general understanding of justice, it is imperative that we look at what the bible say about justice.

JUSTICE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament talks of three dimensions of Justice. That is distributive Justice, fair dealing and secondly public justice and finally rectitude that are the integrity of a person. The Old Testament has terms which are used to describe justice, which are mishpat and tsedeq . Tsedeq refers to a person's righteousness (tsedeq). Apart from that it is used for honest scales and measurements. It can also mean good governance. Mishpat and tsedeq are interchangeable. According to DD Raphael, mishpat " Means Judgment, the discussion of Judge but with a normative connotation" (2001: 11). According to him mishpat is concerned with the judge. That is how the judge executes his legal matters. In short he is talking about the character of the judge in executing his judgment. So when mishpat is used in the Old Testament it is concerned the character of God in executing judgment up on the evil doers.

It is concerned with the character of an individual in dealing with his fellow individual. On this part we can see the difference between tsedeq and

mishpat. It is recorded that tsedeq is “ used of the character of the defendant than the conduct of the Judge” (Howard Marshall 1980: 10). In addition we can say that tsedeq does not concern the righteousness of the judge but it is concerned with the character of an individual. Further Raphael noted that “ The punishment of the crime against a person should be that a wrongdoer suffer the same harm as he has caused (Ex. 21: 23-25)” 2001: 14). According to Howard M. Justice and Judgment consist very much in bringing the oppressors of the poor and needy to naught.

THE GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Justice has generally two components which constitutes justice these are ‘ Social’ and ‘ justice’. Social is the term used to refer to how people live in the community or how people live in the society. Justice on the other hand deals with up holding what is just or treating people fairly according to honour or/ and standard. So when these terms are used together, it can be said that social justice exist when people are given what is due from their community. Social justice deals in three areas. That is economic justice, remedial and distributive justice. Economic and remedial justice ensures that every person is given equal and fair opportunities to access a society’s economic resources and its political and legal systems. Distributive justice also focuses on outcomes which are fair. It is interestingly to note that all three forms of Justice Emphasis much on the social responsibilities of human beings.

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

When Old Testament talks of Justice, it does not only mean being or acting justly but also the kind of situation that would result when Justice is executed. Apart from the Old Testament dealing with righteousness (tsedeqa) and justice or judgment (mishpat) the Old Testament also deals with helping the needy. For example Leviticus 19: 9-10, God is reminding the children of Israel not to finish the crops in their fields after the harvest but should leave some for the poor, stranger, widows, orphans etc. this is supported by Deut. 24: 19-22. In which God is commanding the Israelites not to go back and collect that which was left in the fields.

Another aspect that is found in the Old Testament scriptures for example in Proverbs 31: 8-9. Here it is said that everyone has the God given rights life and liberty that is free from all forms of oppression and injustices. Again when we look in the Pentateuch (Deut. 15: 1-11), God commands the Israelite to help the needy among them in the seventh month and also to council the debts of those who could not pay back

Raphael said “ The command in these passages do not use either of the words for justice to describe their rationale, though the idea behind them is one that was latter assigned to the concept of social justice” (2001: 15). This same emphasis is also used by the major prophet like Isaiah in which they relate the concept of knowing God to helping the needy for example Isaiah 1: 7 associate the notion of mishpat with giving help to the needy. Jeremiah also associates mishpat with tsedeqa (Jeremiah 22: 3). It has been indicated that “ when social activists talk about the poor, needy and disadvantaged, they do not only refer to victims of oppression, but also to people in

<https://assignbuster.com/justice-in-the-old-testament-religion-essay/>

prosperous countries who are less prosperous even though they have no lack of food, shelter, clothing, or government and aid agency support” (Andrew kulikovsky 2008: 11). It can further be said that social justice favours much those who are disadvantaged. There are many scriptural references both in the old and the New Testament which has come out clear on the issue of social justice. For example the prophet Zechariah 7: 9-10 talks about where God has forbade the oppression of the widow, the fatherless and strangers or the poor in general further, the prophet Amos is talking more on the oppression of the poor and the strangers. It has been said that “ Doing justice by assisting the poor and the needy is a obligation of those who have responded to the Gospel. It is not part of the gospel itself” (Andrew K. 2008: 20).

On the contrary, we can not stand on the fact the bible is entirely based on social justice there are some passages in the same bible which contradict the notion of social justice. These biblical passages prohibit favouritism and partiality in matters concerning justice for example Leviticus 19: 15 where God is saying that “ you shall not render unjust Judgment (mishpat), you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour”. Here we see the concept of justice in dealing with legal matters which is concerned with just judgment. Here the king of justice they are talking about is mishpat. Justice must be done in tsedeqa or righteousness. This is also echoed by Ex. 23: 3. Not only this but also in Ex. 30: 14-15 “ There was also no partiality when Moses took a census and God required an offering of half a shekel from every one over the age of twenty years” (Andrew K 2008: 11). The only thing that the poor needed in those

days was fair dealing with other people. According to the biblical understanding, the poor are those people who were the victims of injustice and have no one to speak for them in time of oppression. That is why the righteous have the mandate to look after the marginalized (James 1: 27) not because they are poor but that they are the victims of injustices. Some scholars such as Ross Langmead as quoted by Andrew K. states that “ When Jesus gave the manifesto of good news to the poor; he meant salvation and not any form of social justice”. So it is not easy for us to dwell of scholars who suggest that the Bible is entirely consisting of social justice. Because it also contains some references which are concerned with legal matters. Edgar wrote “ From a Christian and Biblical point of view, Justice means giving to people according to need and even giving more than they might receive according to the principle of equality” (Andrew K. 2008: 14). This is why most concern of social justice is assisting the poor and needy people in the society. This concept has been disputed by Andrew and said that it is very important to understand what it means when the Bible talks of the poor and the needy and the levels of their poverty. Langmead further argues that “ Biblical justice goes further than strict justice and is imbued with grace, mercy and forgiveness” (Andrew K 2008: 14). We can not assert on the fact that justice is not Biblical justice unless it is involved in the advocacy of the weak, the poor or the socially disadvantaged. Further Neville says “ Jesus called for social transformation as confirmed by the nature of his mission and social justice” again Andrew argues to say that “ this is what the people and the disciples expected, but that was not the gospel of God’s kingdom was about” (Andrew K 2008: 20).

CONCLUSION

To sum up all this Biblical Justice must not be thought only in social concept but must also be thought in other terms like giving people according to what is due. God prefers the poor not because they are poor but because they were the victims of injustices, but that is not the only message found in the Biblical teachings.