

the poverty and justice bible

Contemporary English Version

Biblical research:
Sandie Butler and David Spriggs

Poverty and justice in 3-D:
Nick and Claire Page

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LORD's temple. He gave it to some of his officials and sent them to Damascus with this message for King Benhadad¹⁹ of Syria: ¹⁹ "Our fathers signed a peace treaty. Why don't we do the same thing? This silver and gold is a present for you. So, would you please break your treaty with Baasha and force him to leave my country?"²⁰

²⁰ Benhadad did what Asa asked and sent the Syrian army into Israel. They captured the towns of Ijon, Dan, and Abel-Bethmaacah, and the territories of Chinneroth and Naphtali. ²¹ When Baasha heard about it, he left Ramah and went back to Tirzah.

²² Asa ordered everyone in Judah to carry away the stones and wood Baasha had used to strengthen the town of Ramah. Then he used these same stones and wood to fortify the town of Geba in the territory of Benjamin and the town of Mizpah.

²³ Everything else Asa did while he was king, including his victories and the towns he rebuilt, is written in *The History of the Kings of Judah*. When he got older, he had a foot disease. ²⁴ Asa died and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors in Jerusalem.²⁵ His son Jehoshaphat then became king.

King Nadab of Israel

²⁵ Nadab son of Jeroboam became king of Israel in Asa's second year as king of Judah, and he ruled two years. ²⁶ Nadab disobeyed the LORD by following the evil example of his father, who had caused the Israelites to sin.

²⁷⁻²⁸ Baasha son of Ahijah was from the tribe of Issachar, and he made plans to kill Nadab. When Nadab and his army went to attack the town of Gibbethon in Philistia, Baasha killed Nadab there. So in the third year of Asa's rule, Baasha became king of Israel.

²⁹ The LORD's prophet Ahijah had earlier said, "Not one man or boy in Jeroboam's family will be left alive."⁹ And, as soon as Baasha became king, he killed everyone in Jeroboam's family,³⁰ because Jeroboam had made the LORD God of Israel angry by sinning and causing the Israelites to sin.

³¹ Everything else Nadab did while he was king is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*.

³² King Asa of Judah and King Baasha of Israel were always at war.

King Baasha of Israel

³² Baasha son of Ahijah became king of Israel in Asa's third year as king of Judah, and he ruled twenty-four years from Tirzah.

³⁴ Baasha also disobeyed the LORD by acting like Jeroboam, who had caused the Israelites to sin.

CHAPTER 16

¹ The LORD sent Jehu son of Hanani to say to Baasha:

² Nobody knew who you were until I, the LORD, chose you¹ to be the leader of my people Israel. And now you're acting exactly like Jeroboam by causing the Israelites to sin. What you've done has made me so angry³ that I will destroy you and your family, just as I did the family of Jeroboam.⁴ Dogs will eat the bodies of your relatives who die in town, and vultures will eat the bodies of those who die in the country.

⁵⁻⁷ Baasha made the LORD very angry, and that's why the LORD gave Jehu this message for Baasha and his family. Baasha constantly disobeyed the LORD by following Jeroboam's sinful example — but even worse, he killed everyone in Jeroboam's family!

Everything else Baasha did while he was king, including his brave deeds, is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*. Baasha died and was buried in Tirzah, and his son Elah became king.

King Elah of Israel

⁸ Elah son of Baasha became king of Israel after Asa had been king of Judah for twenty-five years, and he ruled from Tirzah for two years.

⁹ Zimri commanded half of Elah's chariots, and he made plans to kill Elah.

One day, Elah was in Tirzah, getting drunk at the home of Arza, his prime minister,¹⁰ when Zimri went there and killed Elah. So Zimri became king in the twenty-seventh year of Asa's rule in Judah.

¹¹ As soon as Zimri became king, he killed everyone in Baasha's family. Not one man or boy in his family was left alive — even his close friends were killed. ¹² Baasha's family was completely wiped out, just as the LORD's prophet Jehu had warned. ¹³ Baasha and Elah sinned and caused the Israelites to sin, and they made the LORD angry by worshipping idols.

¹⁴ Everything else Elah did while he was king is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*.

King Zimri of Israel

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Zimri became king of Israel in Asa's twenty-seventh year as king of Judah, but he ruled only seven days from Tirzah.

Israel's army was camped near Gibbethon in Philistia under the command of Omri. The soldiers heard that Zimri had killed Elah, and they made Omri their king that same day.

¹⁷ At once, Omri and his army marched to Tirzah and attacked. ¹⁸ When Zimri saw that the town was captured, he ran into the strongest part of the palace and killed himself by setting it on fire. ¹⁹ Zimri had disobeyed the LORD by following the evil example of Jeroboam, who had caused the Israelites to sin.

²⁰ Everything else Zimri did while he was king, including his rebellion against Elah, is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*.

King Omri of Israel

²¹ After Zimri died, some of the Israelites wanted Tibni son of Ginath to be king, but others wanted Omri. ²² Omri's followers were stronger than Tibni's, so Tibni was killed, and Omri became king of Israel ²³ in the thirty-first year of Asa's rule in Judah.

Omri ruled Israel for twelve years. The first six years he ruled from Tirzah, ²⁴ then he bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for six thousand pieces of silver. He built a town there and named it Samaria, after Shemer who had owned the hill.

²⁵ Omri did more evil things than any king before him. ²⁶ He acted just like Jeroboam and made the LORD God of Israel angry by causing the Israelites to sin and to worship idols.

²⁷ Everything else Omri did while he was king, including his brave deeds, is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*. ²⁸ Omri died and was buried in Samaria, and his son Ahab became king.

King Ahab of Israel

²⁹ Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa's rule in Judah, and he ruled twenty-two years from Samaria.

³⁰ Ahab did more things to disobey the LORD than any king before him. ³¹ He acted just like Jeroboam. Even worse, he married Jezebel the daughter of King Ethbaal of

Sidon* and started worshipping Baal. ³² Ahab built an altar and temple for Baal in Samaria ³³ and set up a sacred pole* for worshipping the goddess Asherah. Ahab did more to make the LORD God of Israel angry than any king of Israel before him.

³⁴ While Ahab was king, a man from Bethel named Hiel rebuilt the town of Jericho. But while Hiel was laying the foundation for the town wall, his eldest son Abiram died. And while he was finishing the gates, his youngest son Segub died. This happened just as the LORD had told Joshua to say many years ago.*

Elijah the prophet

CHAPTER 17

Elijah stops the rain

¹ Elijah was a prophet from Tishbe in Gilead.* One day he went to King Ahab and said, "I'm a servant of the living LORD, the God of Israel. And I swear in his name that it won't rain until I say so. There won't even be any dew on the ground."

² Later, the LORD said to Elijah, ³ "Leave and go across the River Jordan so you can hide near Cherith Brook. ⁴ You can drink water from the brook, and eat the food I've told the ravens to bring you."

⁵ Elijah obeyed the LORD and went to live near Cherith Brook. ⁶ Ravens brought him bread and meat twice a day, and he drank water from the brook. ⁷ But after a while, it dried up because there was no rain.

Elijah helps a widow in Zarephath

⁸ The LORD told Elijah, ⁹ "Go to the town of Zarephath in Sidon and live there. I've told a widow in that town to give you food."

¹⁰ When Elijah came near the town gate of Zarephath, he saw a widow gathering sticks for a fire. "Would you please bring me a cup of water?" he asked. ¹¹ As she left to get it, he asked, "Would you also please bring me a piece of bread?"

*16.31 Sidon: One of the most important cities in Phoenicia. It was on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, north of Israel, in what is today southern Lebanon.

*16.33 sacred pole: See the note at 14.15.

*16.34 a man from Bethel . . . ago: See Joshua 6.26.

See also: 16.34 Josh 6.26, 17.1; Jam 5.17.

17.9: Luke 4.25,26.

¹² The widow answered, "In the name of the living LORD your God, I swear that I don't have any bread. All I have is a handful of flour and a little olive oil. I'm on my way home now with these few sticks to cook what I have for my son and me. After that, we will starve to death."

¹³ Elijah said, "Everything will be fine. Do what you said. Go home and prepare something for yourself and your son. But first, please make a small piece of bread and bring it to me." ¹⁴ The LORD God of Israel has promised that your jar of flour won't run out and your bottle of oil won't dry up before he sends rain for the crops."

¹⁵ The widow went home and did exactly what Elijah had told her. She and Elijah and her family had enough food for a long time.

¹⁶ The LORD kept the promise that his prophet Elijah had made, and she did not run out of flour or oil.

Elijah brings a boy back to life

¹⁷ Several days later, the son of the woman who owned the house* got sick, and he kept getting worse, until finally he died.

¹⁸ The woman shouted at Elijah, "What have I done to you? I thought you were God's prophet. Did you come here to cause the death of my son as a reminder that I've sinned against God?"*

¹⁹ "Bring me your son," Elijah said. Then he took the boy from her arms and carried him upstairs to the room where he was staying. Elijah laid the boy on his bed ²⁰ and prayed, "LORD God, why did you do such a terrible thing to this woman? She's letting me stay here, and now you've let her son die." ²¹ Elijah stretched himself out over the boy three times, while praying, "LORD God, bring this boy back to life!"

²² The LORD answered Elijah's prayer, and the boy started breathing again. ²³ Elijah picked him up and carried him downstairs. He gave the boy to his mother and said, "Look, your son is alive."

²⁴ "You are God's prophet!" the woman replied. "Now I know that you really do speak for the LORD."

*17.17 the woman who owned the house: This may or may not be the same woman as the widow in verses 8–16.

*17.18 Did you . . . God: In ancient times people sometimes thought that if they sinned, something terrible would happen to them.

See also: 17.21; 2 King 4.34,35.

CHAPTER 18

Elijah proves he is the LORD's prophet

¹⁻² For three years no rain fell in Samaria, and there was almost nothing to eat anywhere. The LORD said to Elijah, "Go and meet with King Ahab. I will soon make it rain." So Elijah went to see Ahab.

³⁻⁴ At that time Obadiah was in charge of Ahab's palace, but he faithfully worshipped the LORD. In fact, when Jezebel was trying to kill the LORD's prophets, Obadiah hid a hundred of them in two caves and gave them food and water.

Ahab sent for Obadiah ⁵ and said, "We have to find something for our horses and mules to eat. If we don't, we will have to kill them. Let's look around every brook and spring in the country for some grass." ⁶ You go one way, and I'll go the other." Then they left in separate directions.

⁷ As Obadiah was walking along, he met Elijah. Obadiah recognized him, bowed down, and asked, "Elijah, is it really you?"

⁸ "Yes. Go and tell Ahab I'm here."

⁹ Obadiah replied:

King Ahab would kill me if I told him that. And I haven't even done anything wrong.

¹⁰ I swear to you in the name of the living LORD your God that the king has looked everywhere for you. He sent people to look in every country, and when they couldn't find you, he made the leader of each country swear that you were not in that country. ¹¹ Do you really want me to tell him you're here?

¹² What if the LORD's Spirit takes you away as soon as I leave? When Ahab comes to get you, he won't find you. Then he will surely kill me.

I have worshipped the LORD since I was a boy. ¹³ I even hid a hundred of the LORD's prophets in caves when Jezebel was trying to kill them. I also gave them food and water. ¹⁴ Do you really want me to tell Ahab you're here? He will kill me!

¹⁵ Elijah said, "I'm a servant of the living LORD All-Powerful, and I swear in his name that I will meet with Ahab today."

¹⁶ Obadiah left and told Ahab where to find Elijah.

Ahab went to meet Elijah, ¹⁷ and when he saw him, Ahab shouted, "There you are, the biggest troublemaker in Israel!"

¹⁸ Elijah answered:

You're the troublemaker – not me! You and your family have disobeyed the LORD's commands by worshipping Baal.

¹⁹ Call together everyone from Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. Be sure to bring along the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah who eat at Jezebel's table.

²⁰ Ahab got everyone together, then they went to meet Elijah on Mount Carmel. ²¹ Elijah stood in front of them and said, "How much longer will you try to have things both ways? If the LORD is God, worship him! But if Baal is God, worship him!"

The people did not say a word.

²² Then Elijah continued:

I am the LORD's only prophet, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets.

²³ Bring us two bulls. Baal's prophets can take one of them, kill it, and cut it into pieces. Then they can put the meat on the wood without lighting the fire. I will do the same thing with the other bull, and I won't light a fire under it either.

²⁴ The prophets of Baal will pray to their god, and I will pray to the LORD. The one who answers by starting the fire is God.

"That's a good idea," everyone agreed.

²⁵ Elijah said to Baal's prophets, "There are more of you, so you go first. Pick out a bull and get it ready, but don't light the fire. Then pray to your god."

²⁶ They chose their bull, then they got it ready and prayed to Baal all morning, asking him to start the fire. They danced around the altar and shouted, "Answer us, Baal!" But there was no answer.

²⁷ At midday, Elijah began making fun of them. "Pray louder!" he said. "Baal must be a god. Perhaps he's daydreaming or using the toilet or travelling somewhere. Or perhaps he's asleep, and you have to wake him up."

²⁸ The prophets kept shouting louder and louder, and they cut themselves with swords and knives until they were bleeding. This was the way they worshipped, ²⁹ and they kept it up all afternoon. But there was no answer of any kind.

³⁰ Elijah told everyone to gather around him while he repaired the LORD's altar. ³¹⁻³² Then he used twelve stones to build an altar in honour of the LORD. Each stone stood for one of the tribes of Israel, which was the name the LORD had given to their ancestor Jacob. Elijah

dug a ditch around the altar, large enough to hold almost fourteen litres. ³³ He placed the wood on the altar, then they cut the bull into pieces and laid the meat on the wood.

He told the people, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it over the meat and the wood." After they did this, ³⁴ he told them to do it two more times. They did exactly as he said ³⁵ until finally, the water ran down the altar and filled the ditch.

³⁶ When it was time for the evening sacrifice, Elijah prayed:

Our LORD, you are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Now, prove that you are the God of this nation, and that I, your servant, have done this at your command. ³⁷ Please answer me, so these people will know that you are the LORD God, and that you will turn their hearts back to you.*

³⁸ The LORD immediately sent fire, and it burnt up the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones. It scorched the ground everywhere around the altar and dried up every drop of water in the ditch. ³⁹ When the crowd saw what had happened, they all bowed down and shouted, "The LORD is God! The LORD is God!"

⁴⁰ Just then, Elijah said, "Grab the prophets of Baal! Don't let any of them get away."

So the people captured the prophets and took them to the River Kishon, where Elijah killed every one of them.

It starts to rain

⁴¹ Elijah told Ahab, "Get something to eat and drink. I hear a heavy rain coming."

⁴² Ahab left, but Elijah climbed back to the top of Mount Carmel. Then he stooped down with his face almost to the ground ⁴³ and said to his servant, "Look towards the sea."

The servant left. And when he came back, he said, "I looked, but I didn't see anything." Elijah told him to look seven more times.

⁴⁴ After the seventh time the servant replied, "I see a small cloud coming this way. But it's no bigger than a fist."

Elijah told him, "Tell Ahab to get his chariot ready and start home now. Otherwise, the rain will stop him."

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ A few minutes later, it got very cloudy and windy, and rain started pouring down. So Elijah wrapped his coat around himself, and the LORD gave him strength to run all the way to Jezebel. Ahab followed him.

CHAPTER 19

Elijah runs away
from Ahab and Jezebel

¹ Ahab told his wife Jezebel what Elijah had done and that he had killed the prophets. ² She sent a message to Elijah: "You killed my prophets. Now I'm going to kill you! I pray that the gods will punish me even more severely if I don't do it by this time tomorrow."

³ Elijah was afraid when he got her message, and he ran to the town of Beersheba in Judah. He left his servant there, ⁴ then walked another whole day into the desert. Finally, he came to a large bush and sat down in its shade. He begged the LORD, "I've had enough. Just let me die! I'm no better off than my ancestors." ⁵ Then he lay down in the shade and fell asleep.

Suddenly an angel woke him up and said, "Get up and eat." ⁶ Elijah looked around, and by his head was a jar of water and some baked bread. He sat up, ate and drank, then lay down and went back to sleep.

⁷ Soon the LORD's angel woke him again and said, "Get up and eat, or else you'll get too tired to travel." ⁸ So Elijah sat up and ate and drank.

The food and water made him strong enough to walk forty more days. At last, he reached Mount Sinai,⁹ the mountain of God, ⁹ and he spent the night there in a cave.

The LORD appears to Elijah

While Elijah was on Mount Sinai, the LORD asked, "Elijah, why are you here?"

¹⁰ He answered, "LORD God All-Powerful, I've always done my best to obey you. But your people have broken their solemn promise to you. They have torn down your altars and killed all your prophets, except me. And now they are even trying to kill me!"

¹¹ "Go out and stand on the mountain," the LORD replied. "I want you to see me when I pass by."

All at once, a strong wind shook the mountain and shattered the rocks. But the LORD was not in the wind. Next, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹² Then there was a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire.

Finally, there was a gentle breeze,¹³ and when Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his coat. He went out and stood at the entrance to the cave.

The LORD⁴ asked, "Elijah, why are you here?"

¹⁴ Elijah answered, "LORD God All-Powerful, I've always done my best to obey you. But your people have broken their solemn promise to you. They have torn down your altars and killed all your prophets, except me. And now they are even trying to kill me!"

¹⁵ The LORD said:

Elijah, you can go back to the desert near Damascus. And when you get there, appoint^{*} Hazael to be king of Syria. ¹⁶ Then appoint Jehu son of Nimshi to be king of Israel, and Elisha son of Shaphat[†] to take your place as my prophet.

¹⁷ Hazael will start killing the people who worship Baal. Jehu will kill those who escape from Hazael, and Elisha will kill those who escape from Jehu.

¹⁸ But seven thousand Israelites have refused to worship Baal, and they will live.

Elisha becomes Elijah's assistant

¹⁹ Elijah left and found Elisha ploughing a field with a pair of oxen. There were eleven other men in front of him, and each one was also ploughing with a pair of oxen. Elijah went over and put his own coat on Elisha.^{*}

²⁰ Elisha stopped ploughing and ran after him. "Let me kiss my parents goodbye, then I'll go with you," he said.

"You can go," Elijah said. "But remember what I've done for you."

²¹ Elisha left and took his oxen with him. He killed them and boiled them over a fire he had made with the wood from his plough. He gave the meat to the people who were with him, and they ate it. Then he left with Elijah and became his assistant.

*19.15 appoint: This would have included a ceremony in which olive oil would be poured on his head to show that he was now king.

†19.19 put. . . Elisha: This was a sign that Elijah wanted Elisha to follow him and become a prophet.

See also: 19.14 Rom 11.3. 19.15: 2 King 8.7-13. 19.16: 2 King 9.1-6. 19.18: Rom 11.4.

King Ahab and Queen Jezebel

CHAPTER 20

Syria attacks Israel

¹ King Benhadad of Syria* called his army together. He was joined by thirty-two other kings with their horses and chariots, and together they marched to Samaria and attacked. ² Benhadad sent a messenger to tell King Ahab of Israel, ³ "Ahab, give me your silver and gold, your wives,* and your strongest sons!"

⁴ "Your Majesty," Ahab replied, "everything I have is yours, including me."

⁵ Later, Benhadad sent another messenger to say to Ahab, "I have already told you to give me your silver and gold, your wives, and your children. ⁶ But tomorrow at this time, I will send my officials into your city to search your palace and the houses of your officials. They will take everything else that you own."

⁷ Ahab called a meeting with the leaders of Israel and said, "Benhadad is causing real trouble. He told me to give him my wives and children, as well as my silver and gold. And I agreed."

⁸ "Don't listen to him!" they answered. "You don't have to do what he says."

⁹ So Ahab sent someone to tell Benhadad, "Your Majesty, I'll give you my silver and gold, and even my wives and children. But I won't let you have anything else."

When Benhadad got his answer, ¹⁰ he replied, "I'll completely destroy Samaria! There won't even be enough of it left for my soldiers to carry back in their hands. If I don't do it, I pray that the gods will punish me terribly."

¹¹ Ahab then answered, "Benhadad, don't boast before the fighting even begins. Wait and see if you live through it."

¹² Meanwhile, Benhadad and the other kings had been drinking in their tents. But when Ahab's reply came, he ordered his soldiers to prepare to attack Samaria, and they all got ready.

¹³ At that very moment, a prophet ran up to Ahab and said, "You can see that Benhadad's army is very strong. But the LORD has

promised to help you defeat them today. Then you will know that the LORD is in control."

¹⁴ "Who will fight the battle?" Ahab asked.

The prophet answered, "The young bodyguards who serve the district officials."

"But who will lead them into battle?" Ahab asked.

"You will!" the prophet replied.

¹⁵ So Ahab called together the two hundred and thirty-two young soldiers and the seven thousand troops in Israel's army, and he got them ready to fight the Syrians.

Israel defeats the Syrians

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ At midday, King Ahab and his Israelite army marched out of Samaria, with the young soldiers in front.

King Benhadad of Syria and the thirty-two kings with him were drunk when the scouts he had sent out ran up to his tent, shouting, "We just now saw soldiers marching out of Samaria!"

¹⁸ "Take them alive!" Benhadad ordered. "I don't care if they have come out to fight or to surrender."

¹⁹ The young soldiers led Israel's troops into battle, ²⁰ and each of them attacked and killed an enemy soldier. The rest of the Syrian army turned and ran, and the Israelites went after them. Benhadad and some others escaped on horses, ²¹ but Ahab and his soldiers followed them and captured their horses and chariots.

Ahab and Israel's army crushed the Syrians.

²² Later, the prophet* went back and warned Ahab, "Benhadad will attack you again next spring. Build up your troops and make sure you have some good plans."

Syria attacks Israel again

²³ Meanwhile, Benhadad's officials went to him and explained:

Israel's gods are mountain gods. We fought Israel's army in the hills, and that's why they defeated us. But if we fight them on flat land, there's no way we can lose.

²⁴ Here's what you should do. First, get rid of those thirty-two kings and put army commanders in their places. ²⁵ Then get more soldiers, horses, and chariots, so your army will be as strong as it was before. We'll fight Israel's army on flat land and wipe them out.

Benhadad agreed and did what they suggested.

*20.1 King Benhadad of Syria: This is probably not the same Benhadad mentioned in 15.18-21.

*20.3 wives: Having more than one wife was allowed in those times.

*20.22 the prophet: See verse 13.

²⁶ In the spring, Benhadad got his army together, and they marched to the town of Aphek to attack Israel. ²⁷ The Israelites also prepared to fight. They marched out to meet the Syrians, and the two armies camped facing each other. The Syrians covered the whole area, but the Israelites looked like two little flocks of goats.

²⁸ The prophet went to Ahab and said, "The Syrians think the LORD is a god of the hills and not of the valleys. So he has promised to help you defeat their powerful army. Then you will know that the LORD is in control."

²⁹ For seven days the two armies stayed in their camps, facing each other. Then on the seventh day the fighting broke out, and before sunset the Israelites had killed one hundred thousand Syrian troops. ³⁰ The rest of the Syrian army ran back to Aphek, but the town wall fell and crushed twenty-seven thousand of them.

Benhadad also escaped to Aphek and hid in the back room of a house. ³¹ His officials said, "Your Majesty, we've heard that Israel's kings keep their agreements. We will wrap sackcloth around our waists, put ropes around our heads, and ask Ahab to let you live."

³² They dressed in sackcloth and put ropes on their heads, then they went to Ahab and said, "Your servant Benhadad asks you to let him live."

"Is he still alive?" Ahab asked. "Benhadad is like a brother to me."

³³ Benhadad's officials were trying to understand what Ahab was thinking, and when he said "brother", they quickly replied, "You're right! You and Benhadad are like brothers."

"Go and get him," Ahab said.

When Benhadad came out, Ahab asked him to climb up into his chariot.

³⁴ Benhadad said, "I'll give back the towns my father took from your father. And you can have shops in Damascus, just as my father had in Samaria."

Ahab replied, "If you do these things, I'll let you go free." Then they signed a peace treaty, and Ahab let Benhadad go.

A prophet condemns Ahab

³⁵ About this time the LORD commanded a prophet to say to a friend, "Hit me!" But the friend refused, ³⁶ and the prophet told him, "You disobeyed the LORD, and as soon as you walk away, a lion will kill you." The friend left, and suddenly a lion killed him.

³⁷ The prophet found someone else and said, "Hit me!" So this man beat him up.

³⁸ The prophet left and put a bandage over his face to disguise himself. Then he went and stood beside the road, waiting for Ahab to pass by.

³⁹ When Ahab went by, the prophet shouted, "Your Majesty, right in the heat of battle, someone brought a prisoner to me and told me to guard him. He said if the prisoner got away, I would either be killed or forced to pay three thousand pieces of silver. ⁴⁰ But I got busy doing other things, and the prisoner escaped."

Ahab answered, "You will be punished just as you have said."

⁴¹ The man quickly tore the bandage off his face, and Ahab saw that he was one of the prophets. ⁴² The prophet said, "The LORD told you to kill Benhadad, but you let him go. Now you will die in his place, and your people will die in place of his people."

⁴³ Ahab went back to Samaria, angry and depressed.

CHAPTER 21

Jezebel has Naboth killed

¹ Naboth owned a vineyard in Jezreel near King Ahab's palace.

² One day, Ahab said, "Naboth, your vineyard is near my palace. Give it to me so I can turn it into a vegetable garden. I'll give you a better vineyard or pay whatever you want for yours."

³ Naboth answered, "This vineyard has always been in my family. I won't let you have it."

⁴ So Ahab went home, angry and depressed because of what Naboth had told him. He lay on his bed, just staring at the wall and refusing to eat a thing.

⁵ Jezebel his wife came in and asked, "What's wrong? Why won't you eat?"

⁶ "I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard or to let me give him a better one," Ahab replied. "And he told me I couldn't have it."

⁷ "Aren't you the king of Israel?" Jezebel asked. "Get out of bed and eat something! Don't worry, I'll get Naboth's vineyard for you."

⁸⁻¹⁰ Jezebel wrote a letter to each of the leaders of the town where Naboth lived. In the letters she said:

Call everyone together and tell them to go without eating* today. When they come together, give Naboth a seat at the front. Get two liars to sit facing him and swear that Naboth has cursed God and the king. Then take Naboth outside and stone him to death!

She signed Ahab's name to the letters and sealed them with his seal. Then she sent them to the town leaders.

¹¹ After receiving her letters, they did exactly what she had asked. ¹² They told the people that it was a day to go without eating, and when they all came together, they seated Naboth at the front. ¹³ The two liars came in and sat facing Naboth. Then they accused him of cursing God and the king, so the people dragged Naboth outside and stoned him to death.

¹⁴ The leaders of Jezreel sent a message back to Jezebel that said, "Naboth is dead."

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel got their message, she told Ahab, "Now you can have the vineyard Naboth refused to sell. He's dead." ¹⁶ Ahab got up and went to take over the vineyard.

Elijah condemns Ahab

¹⁷ The LORD said to Elijah the prophet, ¹⁸ "King Ahab of Israel is in Naboth's vineyard right now, taking it over. ¹⁹ Go and tell him that I say, 'Ahab, you murdered Naboth and took his property. And so, in the very spot where dogs licked up Naboth's blood, they will lick up your blood.'"¹⁹

When Elijah found him, ²⁰ Ahab said, "So, my enemy, you've found me at last." Elijah answered:

Yes, I have! Ahab, you have managed to do everything the LORD hates. ²¹ Now you will be punished. You and every man and boy in your family will die, whether slave or free. ²² Your whole family will be wiped out, just like the families of King Jeroboam and King Baasha. You've made the LORD very angry by sinning and causing the Israelites to sin.

²³ And as for Jezebel, dogs will eat her body there in Jezreel. ²⁴ Dogs will also eat the bodies of your relatives who die in town, and vultures will eat the bodies of those who die in the country.

²⁵⁻²⁹ When Ahab heard this, he tore his clothes and wore sackcloth day and night. He was depressed and refused to eat.

Some time later, the LORD said, "Elijah, do you see how sorry Ahab is for what he did? I won't punish his family while he is still alive. I'll wait until his son is king."

No one was more determined than Ahab to disobey the LORD. And Jezebel encouraged him. Worst of all, he had worshipped idols, just as the Amorites* had done before the LORD forced them out of the land and gave it to Israel.

CHAPTER 22

Micaiah warns Ahab about disaster

This is also told in 2 Chronicles 18.2-27

¹ For the next three years there was peace between Israel and Syria. ² During the third year King Jehoshaphat of Judah went to visit King Ahab of Israel.

³ Ahab asked his officials, "Why haven't we tried to get Ramoth in Gilead back from the Syrians? It belongs to us." ⁴ Then he asked Jehoshaphat, "Would you go to Ramoth with me and attack the Syrians?"

"Just tell me what to do," Jehoshaphat answered. "My army and horses are at your command. ⁵ But first, let's ask the LORD."

⁶ Ahab sent for about four hundred prophets and asked, "Should I attack the Syrians at Ramoth?"

"Yes!" the prophets answered. "The LORD will help you defeat them."

⁷ But Jehoshaphat said, "Just to make sure, is there another of the LORD's prophets we can ask?"

⁸ "We could ask Micaiah son of Imlah," Ahab said. "But I hate Micaiah. He always has bad news for me."

"Don't say that!" Jehoshaphat replied. ⁹ Then Ahab sent someone to bring Micaiah as soon as possible.

¹⁰ All this time, Ahab and Jehoshaphat were dressed in their royal robes and were seated on their thrones at the threshing place near the gate of Samaria. They were listening to the prophets tell them what the LORD had said.

¹¹ Zedekiah son of Chenaanah was one of the prophets. He had made some horns out of iron and shouted, "Ahab, the LORD says

*21.8-10 to go without eating: People sometimes came together to worship and to go without eating to show that they were sorry for their sins.

See also: 21.23; 2 King 9.36.

*21.25-29 Amorites: A name sometimes used of the people who lived in Palestine before the Israelites.

you will attack the Syrians like a bull with iron horns and wipe them out!”

¹² All the prophets agreed that Ahab should attack the Syrians at Ramoth, and they promised that the LORD would help him defeat them.

¹³ Meanwhile, the messenger who went to get Micaiah whispered, “Micaiah, all the prophets have good news for Ahab. Now go and say the same thing.”

¹⁴ “I’ll say whatever the living LORD tells me to say,” Micaiah replied.

¹⁵ Then Micaiah went to Ahab, and Ahab asked, “Micaiah, should I attack the Syrians at Ramoth?”

“Yes!” Micaiah answered. “The LORD will help you defeat them.”

¹⁶ “Micaiah, I’ve told you over and over again to tell me the truth!” Ahab shouted. “What does the LORD really say?”

¹⁷ He answered, “In a vision* I saw Israelite soldiers walking around in the hills like sheep without a shepherd to guide them. The LORD said, ‘This army has no leader. They should go home and not fight.’”

¹⁸ Ahab turned to Jehoshaphat and said, “I told you he would bring bad news!”

¹⁹ Micaiah replied:

Listen to this! I also saw the LORD seated on his throne with every creature in heaven gathered around him. ²⁰ The LORD asked, “Who can trick Ahab and make him go to Ramoth where he will be killed?”

They talked about it for a while, ²¹ then finally a spirit came forward and said to the LORD, “I can trick Ahab.”

“How?” the LORD asked.

²² “I’ll make Ahab’s prophets lie to him.”

“Good!” the LORD replied. “Now go and do it.”

²³ This is exactly what has happened, Ahab. The LORD made all your prophets lie to you, and he knows you will soon be destroyed.

²⁴ Zedekiah walked up to Micaiah and slapped him on the face. Then he asked, “Do you really think the LORD would speak to you and not to me?”

²⁵ Micaiah answered, “You’ll find out on the day you have to hide in the back room of some house.”

²⁶ Ahab shouted, “Arrest Micaiah! Take him to Prince Joash and Governor Amon of Samaria. ²⁷ Tell them to put him in prison and to give him nothing but bread and water until I come back safely.”

²⁸ Micaiah said, “If you do come back, I was wrong about what the LORD wanted me to say.” Then he told the crowd, “Don’t forget what I said!”

Ahab dies at Ramoth

This is also told in 2 Chronicles 18:28–34

²⁹ Ahab and Jehoshaphat led their armies to Ramoth in Gilead. ³⁰ Before they went into battle, Ahab said, “Jehoshaphat, I’ll disguise myself, but you wear your royal robe.” Then Ahab disguised himself and went into battle.

³¹ The king of Syria had ordered his thirty-two chariot commanders to attack only Ahab. ³² So when they saw Jehoshaphat in his robe, they thought he was Ahab and started to attack him. But when Jehoshaphat shouted out to them, ³³ they realized he wasn’t Ahab, and they left him alone.

³⁴ However, during the fighting a soldier shot an arrow without even aiming, and it hit Ahab where two pieces of his armour joined. He shouted to his chariot driver, “I’ve been hit! Get me out of here!”

³⁵ The fighting lasted all day, with Ahab propped up in his chariot so he could see the Syrian troops. He bled so much that the bottom of the chariot was covered with blood, and by evening he was dead.

³⁶ As the sun was going down, someone in Israel’s army shouted to the others, “Retreat! Go back home!”

³⁷ Ahab’s body was taken to Samaria and buried there. ³⁸ Some workers washed his chariot near a spring in Samaria, and prostitutes washed themselves in his blood. Dogs licked Ahab’s blood off the ground, just as the LORD had warned.

³⁹ Everything else Ahab did while he was king, including the towns he strengthened and the palace he built and furnished with ivory, is written in *The History of the Kings of Israel*. ⁴⁰ Ahab died, and his son Ahaziah became king.

*22.17 vision: In ancient times, prophets often told about future events from what they had seen in visions or dreams.

See also: 22.17: Num. 27.17; Matt. 9.36; Mark. 6.34.
22.19: Job 1.6; Isa. 6.1.

Poverty and justice in 3-D

3D in detail

Nearly 50 different topics. Loads to discover, dream and do.

Equality to education; farming to fair trade; trees, tools and even toilets – they're all there in the Bible. So this is a chance to explore specific issues and see what the Bible has to say about them.

And as we do that, we'll see how issues of poverty and justice are woven into the fabric of the Bible, and how concern for the poor and the oppressed forms part of the DNA of our faith. Put the details together and you can begin to see the bigger picture: a picture of a God of compassion and love, a God who cares about the details of our lives and longs to see justice in action throughout his creation.

Some of these topics lead us down well-worn paths; others take us into the byways of the Bible, the bits we don't visit much. How often you do these is up to you. You can do them once a week, or all in one go. It doesn't matter. The important thing is to follow the trail and see where it leads...

Discover

Find out about the issue. Dig into the Scriptures. Read, react, agree or disagree. But don't let it stop there. Do your own exploration and discover things for yourself.

Dream

Time to think. Reflect on the issues and dream some dreams. Put your imagination to work, to see what kind of a world it could be.

Do

Take action. Create something; help out; make a noise. Do a bit of research, create a bit of a stir or make yourself useful. Get your hands dirty and get involved! And, of course, pray.

Help yourself

There is more to discover.

Naturally you can't cover everything in under 50 short columns. The highlighted verses in *The Poverty and Justice Bible* are just some of the verses that address these issues. (In fact, as you work through the 3D sections you'll find that we refer to verses that aren't highlighted at all. Why? Often it's because many of these verses don't refer just to the poor, but they do have an even bigger impact if you happen to be there at the bottom of the pile.)

So if you can't find your particular concern in the 3D section, then do your own research. Some tools will be helpful. Get hold of a decent guide to the Bible or a Bible commentary. Check the internet. Find

out what other Christians are saying about the issue. And check out "Taking it further" at the end of this section.

So dive into Scripture and see what else you can find. And if you find verses which you think are crucial to the issue, but which haven't been marked, well, all you have to do is get yourself a highlighter pen...

PEOPLE

Discover: Genesis 1:26–27

Many have argued over what it really means to be "made in God's image", but at the very least it indicates something profoundly significant about humans. To mistreat people is to forget this crucial fact: they are made in the image of God. This affects not only who we are, but how we behave.

Ancient civilisations, such as Egypt and Assyria, often described their kings as the "image" or representative of their god. Statues of gods or kings were viewed in the same way. These words in Genesis have, as one commentary puts it, "democratised this old idea". Every man and woman bears God's stamp; everyone is God's representative on earth.

When we live this out, we are being true to our nature. We walk around this world, reminding people of our Father.

Instead of oppressing others, we empower

them; instead of standing idle, we get involved. We stand up for justice, speak out for the powerless and love the unlovely.

Why? Because we're taking after our Dad.

Dream

What if you were to wear a badge all the time that said "God's rep"?

Do


Build up a picture of what God is like. Every time you read the Bible, write down what it tells you about God, perhaps in a journal.

Lord, I look at the stars at night, and I wonder why you care about us.

I look at the earth, and I wonder why you've given us such immense responsibility.

You are the ruler and yet you trust us to rule. You are amazing!

BOOK

 **Discover:** Luke 10.25–28
 “What is written in the Scriptures? How do you understand them?” asks Jesus (10.26). Or in other versions, “How do you read it?” Of course, to read the Scriptures right, to read *anything* right, first you have to be able to read.


Poverty and lack of literacy go hand in hand. The poor, the homeless, the refugees have difficulty accessing education. Not being able to read, write or count means more than missing out on the latest blockbuster. It means that you cannot get a decent job. It means that you are vulnerable to being cheated. It means that you cannot easily claim things to which you have a right.

Don't just think “overseas” either. Illiteracy is rife in our own countries, particularly in prisons where there is a huge link between criminal behaviour and lack of literacy skills.

God wrote down his commandments for Moses. Jesus read and quoted the Scriptures. No one needs to be able to read to meet

Jesus, but think what they miss! Don't you think Jesus would like people to be able to read about him?

How do you read it?

 **Dream**

Remember your own experience of learning to read.

Imagine every child in the world being able to read and write in his or her own language.

 **Do**


You're reading this, so perhaps you could help someone else to read: at college, at home, or at church.

How many different ways can you find to give away books?

Give some money away for books, pencils, a desk, a teacher, school uniform.

Lord, turn me into a lifelong student of your words.


POWER

 **Discover:** Psalm 72.1–7
 As someone once said to Spiderman, “With great power comes great responsibility.” We are forcefully reminded of this in the psalmist's beautiful prayer for the king. In a world where so many leaders prefer the wealthy and powerful, the king is to be honest and fair – particularly to the poor and homeless. He is to punish their oppressors. His leadership is to be like falling rain which makes the grass grow.

Leadership in government and business today is often equated with the creation of wealth and prosperity, increasing the price of shares, growing the economy. But this psalm calls for the creation of justice.

In Israel, each new king was expected to write out a copy of God's law. Why? The message was clear: to remind him to rule the kingdom in God's way (Deuteronomy 17.18–20).

God's job is to provide the grass; the king's job is to help it grow.

 **Dream**

What if you were to write out the entire Bible? How would that help you to remember what God wants you to do?

Imagine one of your leaders rolling up his or her sleeves and getting stuck in, building a house for a person with no home.


 **Do**

Try to sum up God's law from this psalm. Write it out so that it fits on one side of paper. Keep it near you.

Vote! Politics matters too much to be ignored. Find out who your MP is and contact him or her on matters of poverty and justice about which you feel passionate.

Please help our leaders to be honest and fair just like you, our God. Especially towards the poor.

BODY

 **Discover:** 1 Corinthians 12.19–26
 The Corinthian church was riven with envy, factionalism and sinful behaviour. But one of its main problems was the belief that certain parts of the church were not very important; that certain parts could be ignored or discarded.

Paul pictures the church as a body, made of many parts, yet functioning as a unit. It is based on varieties of skills and gifts and mutual interdependence. Even the inconspicuous parts of the body are important and deserve respect.

The Bible describes people honestly. Paul himself was not an impressive speaker (2 Corinthians 10.10–11). He seems to have had a disability or a recurring illness, but that didn't stop him (2 Corinthians 12.7–10; Galatians 4.13–14). In the Old Testament, Moses had a speech problem (Exodus 4.10).

It's not about ability or disability, but about the gifting given to you by God. Sometimes people with disabilities are barred from

participation, hidden away, or even discarded, but God says everyone can play a part in the body of Christ.

 **Dream**

Each time you meet someone, try to imagine what he or she could be one day, complete in Christ.

 **Do**

Develop an appreciation of people who are very different from yourself.

Do you know people with disabilities in your church or in your community? Talk to them. Find out about their lives. How can you help them? And, just as importantly, how can they help you?

Learn deaf signing language.

Lord, sometimes I feel like a superhero; sometimes I feel like a worm. I'm going to keep my eyes on you, for you make me shine like the sun; I need never blush with shame.


GRAPES

 **Discover:** Leviticus 19.9–10
 It's one of those parental clichés: “Eat up your dinner; people are starving in India/Africa/Milton Keynes/some other place.” But like most clichés, it contains a spoonful of truth. In the UK we throw away 7 million tons of food every year – a third of all the food we buy. Think of it. A third of the food in our shopping trolley will never see the inside of our stomachs. It will be scraped into bins or will just sit in a dark corner of the fridge until, decades past its sell-by date, it starts to evolve into an entirely new life form...

Leviticus shows us a different way to leave food. It was not to be wasted, but put to good use. Jesus collected up leftovers, too – presumably so they could be given away (Mark 6.34–44).

Our parents were right. People are starving around the world.

So eat your greens.

 **Dream**

What is God asking you to leave behind for the poor? Some of your salary? Your food? Your time?


 **Do**

Finish your greens. Take out all the contents of your fridge. Work out how you're going to use it. Find out what it costs to feed a family for a week in another part of the world. Send them the money.

Rain on the hills, grass for cattle, plants for our food, grain for our health, oil for our skin, and wine to cheer us up. All this comes from you, Lord God, for all of us to share.

DISCOVER THE

BRIBES

 **Discover:** Proverbs 17.23–26
The writer of Proverbs depicts a strikingly modern society where bribes are commonplace, fines are imposed on innocent parties and corruption is in control... It's not hard to see how corruption spreads. If you are paid a pittance (or not getting paid at all), then the temptation to look for bribes and backhanders is immense.

But corruption taints everything, infecting every area of society. Got a competitor? A political opponent? Slap a fine on him. Don't worry about the charge; the judge will find something. Corruption even taints how we view that society: "Why give money to them? The whole system is corrupt."

And corruption destroys hope. New governments arrive with the promise of cleanliness and honour, but they soon have their snouts in the trough just the same.

Proverbs calls it what it is: wickedness. Whether in the boardrooms of Britain, or the border stations of the developing world, or

even when we are trying to avoid paying our full tax, corruption has to be brought to light. To paraphrase a famous slogan, we should fight not only corruption, but also the *causes* of corruption.

Dream

Think of a world leader. Imagine that person being brave enough to fight corruption and changing the face of his or her nation.

Do

Pray for world leaders, as if they were sitting next to you.

Put your money into a bank whose ethical code you support.

Search your own heart and actions for any hints of corruption.

Lord, let me stand near you. Help me to live with integrity, consistently obedient to you, whoever I'm with.

TREE

 **Discover:** Deuteronomy 20.19–20
Here, tucked away in a chapter of military rules for the Israelites, is an intriguing piece of ecological planning. "Cut down trees to make siege weapons," says God, "but not the fruit trees."

In other words, don't destroy something you're going to need. Trees take a long time to grow, but a short time to fell. Short-term thinking has long-term consequences.

Trees feature heavily in the Bible. As well as providing food (Deuteronomy 24.20–21), they serve as memorials (Genesis 21.33), building materials (1 Chronicles 14.1), shade (Zechariah 3.10; John 1.48), and even landmarks (Genesis 12.6). There are rules about planting and cultivation (Leviticus 19.23–25).

In the arid Palestinian world, trees were valued. Trees mattered.

Now we're learning the same lesson. Thoughtless, greedy logging has led to devastating results. Poverty is exacerbated by a lack of firewood. Animals which provided

food now die through lack of habitat. Where there are no tree roots to hold the rainwater, land collapses, rivers flood and communities are washed away.

The roots of trees go deep. Wield the axe wisely. One day you might need that tree.

Dream

Picture a map showing the wooded areas of your country. Imagine the green bits spreading.

Look at trees around you now. Imagine them in 200 years.

Do


Plant a tree.

I will put down my roots in your house, Lord God.

Make me flourish like a palm tree; strong like a cedar of Lebanon.

Keep my spirit fresh and healthy, fruitful in old age.

CHILD

 **Discover:** Matthew 19.13–15
It was common for parents in Jesus' day to bring their children to teachers and elders to be blessed. But the disciples view this as a distraction: "We're on a mission here. People to see, places to go. Can't be distracted by kids."

Jesus, however, rebukes them. He says these children are models for the citizens of the Kingdom and he welcomes them. For welcoming them is like welcoming Jesus himself (Matthew 18.1–5). He also gives stern warnings about anyone who causes them to fall into sin (18.6).

The crushing of a child, the abuse of children, their oppression, does exactly that: it trips them up and snares them in sin. We are commanded not to cause children to sin; therefore we should rescue them from bitterness, hurt, despair, rage – all the emotions connected with oppression and abuse.

It's a rescue mission: go find them, save them from the hands of their oppressors, give

them what they need to flourish and, most of all, bring them into the presence of Jesus.

Dream

Every time you see an adult, try to imagine him or her as a child. Every time you see a child, imagine that child as an adult, the best he or she can be.

Do

When you see children you know, pay them some attention – look into their eyes and use their name. Make them feel like they matter.

Pray for the children you see, for their future, for them to grow up healthy, happy and hopeful.

Sponsor a child through a development agency; consider him or her part of your family.

Thank you, Lord, for the blessing of children: their noisy singing, their loud laughter, their enthusiasm and energy, their loyalty and love. They are gifts from you, of strength and joy.

TOILET

 **Discover:** Deuteronomy 23.12–14
Don't tell me the Bible's not about real life.

Out in the desert, God gives clear, exact commands about cleanliness. "Make your toilet outside your camp. And always carry a small shovel." Not a bad rule for life, if you ask me.

Why did this matter? Partly it's to do with holiness and purity; in the culture of the time, the person approaching God has to be clean. But also it's common sense: keeping your refuse away from you means keeping clear of disease.

This passage also shows that God cares about all aspects of human life; he knows us and he knows how we function – in every sense of that word. He is not coy or embarrassed; he who created us knows all about sanitation.

Sadly, many people in the world cannot obey this simple instruction. Living in slums

with open sewers, they have, literally, nowhere else to go. And so disease, infection and death spread.

God knows that people need simple things like proper toilets. Or at least shovels.

Dream

What would your world be like if all the sewers stopped working? Imagine every home in the world had a clean toilet, just like yours...

Do

Have a look down a drain. Then imagine sleeping next to it.

Every time you use the loo, pay a toilet toll. Add it up once a month and send it off to a charity that builds toilets for people who need them.

Deep in my heart, you know me Lord. Nothing is hidden from you!

OBEEDIENCE

Discover: Acts 5:29–42

It's interesting to notice how often the Christians of the early Church were in prison. Although Paul advised that Christians should "obey the rulers and authorities and not ... be rebellious" (Titus 3:1), he spent many years in jail for refusing to behave himself! Faced with unjust, ungodly laws, Christians have chosen the path of civil disobedience. Jesus went ballistic in the temple. The prophets staged protests. The early Church refused to worship Caesar.

Here, Peter and the apostles lay down the ground rules: we must obey God rather than people. When the two come into conflict, God wins.

In recent years, the Church has played a prominent role in civil disobedience. Christians helped with the Underground Railroad that saved the lives of thousands of escaping slaves in America. In World War II, Christians organised shelter for Jews escaping the Nazis. Christians have been prominent campaigners

against apartheid, discrimination and war.

There are higher laws. There are the demands of God to be faced before the demands of people. The apostles were tried, abused, beaten. Why? Because they were divinely disobedient.

Dream

What would cause you to protest against a human law? What steps should you take first?

Do

Go on, stick your neck out. Support a group with whose action or campaign you can wholeheartedly agree.

Lord, sometimes people need to have courage to be obedient: those with power, and those without.

I, too, need courage. You are an awesome God. Protect me and my desire to honour you with my life.

STONE

Discover: Proverbs 23:10–11

In many parts of the world, land is desirable. Good locations, fertile land, mining rights – whatever the attraction, people will do what they can to get hold of it. Governments and powerful cartels think nothing of driving people from their land, bulldozing houses, redrawing boundaries, building walls. Slums are bulldozed to make shopping malls; villages are flooded by enormous dams; traditional lands are taken from their ancient owners.

So often the victims are the poor who have to watch the little they have being taken away from them as they are unable to afford the legal fees to fight their case.

Who will defend their rights? Here we see that such people have a defender in God. Proverbs warns against moving the stones that mark the boundaries of people's land. In the original Hebrew, God is portrayed as the next of kin, the redeemer. Part of the

redeemer's role was to buy back family land that had been lost. God will take that part. He will fight on behalf of his family.

Who will fight for these people? Who will be their kinsfolk? God will. And, perhaps, we will too.

Dream

Imagine a world where no one fights over land. Everyone is content with their own territory. Everyone shares resources fairly. Everyone respects others' needs.

Do

Get to know which peoples are dispossessed. Where in the world are they? How do they live and survive?

Our Lord, I know that you defend the homeless and see that the poor are given justice. May I be someone you can rely on to help.

WEEPING

Discover: Matthew 2:16–18

Voices crying. Women weeping. An army sweeps through a small town in Israel, carrying out orders. Bethlehem was small; the victims might not have numbered more than about a dozen. But surely every victim had a mother, and, just as surely, every mother cried.

This scene has been replicated throughout history. In the 1970s and 1980s, dictatorships in Argentina and Chile "disappeared" thousands of their citizens. In Chile, mothers of the disappeared protested by dancing alone, without partners, to symbolise their missing sons. In Argentina, mothers of the missing marched around the Plaza de Mayo in Buenos Aires wearing photographs of those who had gone.

From the massacre of a village to the murder of a nation, many dictators have done exactly the same. Each of their victims has someone who grieves. They have children who mourn and mothers who weep. And they have a Father in heaven who demands justice.

Deep grief will be assuaged. Justice will be done. In the meantime, we need to speak up for the victims.

Shall we dance?

Dream

You've just heard of the Bethlehem massacre in the news. What do you do? Imagine families being reunited with lost relatives. Imagine people dancing together joyfully once more.

Do

Dispense with the stiff upper lip. Let the plight of others move you to tears. Celebrate the fact that you are free and can take action without being overcome by despair. Write, ring, give money, pray. Matthew quotes from Jeremiah 31:15. Read on a bit. Does it give you hope?

Lord, when I'm brought low with despair, help me to praise you again.

TORTURE

Discover: Luke 21:10–19

The path of following Jesus often leads to persecution. For those of us in the West, with its culture of freedom and choice, it is easy to forget that in other parts of the world certain decisions mean oppression, exclusion, persecution and even death.

Jesus makes plain the consequences of such a choice. His followers will be persecuted both by the religious and by the secular authorities. Their own families will turn against them. They will be hated because of him. And this is indeed what happened to Peter, Paul, John and James, not to mention many other lesser-known names, down the years.

In the West, we may be scorned or ridiculed, but we are not arrested for our faith. In many countries throughout the world, however, thousands of Christians share exactly this fate.

Jesus predicted that his followers would be persecuted; but just because it's expected doesn't mean it's acceptable.

Dream

Imagine yourself sending a card to a Christian in prison. Picture the expression on their face as they hold it in their hands. Imagine them being released and reunited with their family. It can happen!

Do


Read about those who suffer persecution. Don't let their stories – and lives – disappear without a trace.

Put up pictures of persecuted Christian brothers and sisters on your wall.

Request an email prayer alert from an organisation that works to help persecuted Christians.

Have mercy, Lord, on those who are mistreated. Keep them strong and rescue them from death.

TOOLS

 **Discover:** 1 Samuel 13:19–21
If someone shows disdain for art or culture, we call them an “ignorant Philistine”. This is deeply Philistine-ist. Philistines were cultivated people, especially good at metalwork, which was how they oppressed the Israelites for so long.

Iron was used for its strength and hardness; for objects such as axes, chisels, hoes, ploughs – and weapons. The Philistines kept the iron-working technology to themselves and therefore Israel was dependent upon the Philistines for repairing their agricultural tools. The Israelites had no choice but to pay exorbitant prices.

Obviously, withholding technology as a means of controlling other nations goes back a long way. In our day, the West still has the best technology. More computers, better science, internet access, telephony, electricity – “It’s all ours and we’ll allow you some of it, but only if you can pay.”

People can be starved of technology, just as

they can be starved of food. They can be denied the opportunity to develop the tools they need to develop. “That way we can keep you poor, and charge you high prices at the same time.”

 **Dream**


What would the world be like if everybody had the same equipment at their fingertips as you have – at work and in your home?

 **Do**

Look through the pages of an alternative gift catalogue. Find a picture of something you have in your home: pens and paper, nails and screws, a radio. Send money so that others can have something you can’t do without.

God, you are on the side of every good person and you protect the poor. Use me to further their plans, not to spoil them. Make me like you, Lord.

SCROLL

 **Discover:** Luke 4:16–21
Imagine the scene. Jesus back in his home town, where he grew up as a boy and learnt the builder’s trade. And someone says to him, “So, what are you doing with yourself these days?”

Here, in the synagogue, he answers the question. He unrolls the scroll and reads from Isaiah 61:1–2. This, says Jesus, is the Jubilee, the year of the Lord’s favour, the year of forgiveness, the expression of God’s love for the poor. It is Jesus’ manifesto, his job description, his statement of intent. He has come to be good news; good news for the poor, the imprisoned, the blind – all who suffer. He sets the pattern and calls people to the banquet with God.

But Jesus brings more to the party. Good news for the poor is not just someone to tell them they are forgiven – it is also someone to lift them out of poverty. Good news for

the homeless is the love of God – and a roof over their heads. As followers of Jesus, this is our mission. We tell people about the saving love of Jesus, and we show them what he is like.

 **Dream**

Try to sum up your own mission or manifesto. Has anyone noticed what it is?

 **Do**

Write out your mission or manifesto – then put it into action for 21 days. By that time it should become second nature to you.

God our Father, thank you for Jesus who has given us a window onto your ways. Thank you for your love. You give a helping hand to everyone who falls.

BUBBLES

 **Discover:** Proverbs 23:29–35
Another unexpected discovery in the Bible: an ancient account of a hangover. It’s a vivid depiction of the effects of drinking – the fighting, the hallucinations, the loss of memory, the strange craving to do it all again.

Today this ancient addiction has been joined by others, such as cigarettes and drugs – both of which destroy lives as surely as drink.

Addiction is born of unhappiness. People on the street drink to dull the pain. Drugs take people away from life, if only for a little while. Cigarettes kill, but the nicotine hit might seem a small moment of pleasure in a stressful life.

But the descent can be traumatic. Addiction leads to violence, poverty, sickness and isolation. It breaks up families.

What can we do? Control ourselves: “Don’t even look at it,” says Proverbs. We can also protest at the cynical exploitation of the world’s poor by the cigarette and alcohol companies. Finally, we should do all we can to

change the root causes: poverty, oppression, loneliness, feelings of insignificance, all those factors that cause people to seek destructive, addictive forms of escape.

 **Dream**

If people were signed-up members of God’s Kingdom and loved by his family, they’d feel valued, they’d be usefully employed, and even the leisure parts of their lives would have purpose and joy. Isn’t that a reason to invite them into the family?

 **Do**

Make a list of all the benefits of being a follower of Jesus and part of his family. Look for ways of sharing this with others; through your words or your life. How can they resist?

Lord, when I am lonely and troubled, have pity on me. When my awful worries keep growing, rescue me from sadness.

BIBLE

 **Discover:** Matthew 4:2–4
Jesus, fasting for 40 days in the desert, is tempted by the devil to turn stones into bread. He counters the temptation with a quotation from Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3).

There are, you see, other kinds of hunger. Humans need more than the physical; they need love and respect, they need to hear from God.

Throughout the world there are people who are hungry for the Word of God, either because they have no Scriptures in their language, or because the Bible is banned in their country. People in such places treasure each scrap of the Bible they can get their hands on. They memorise verses and treat one page like gold leaf. They are hungry to hear; thirsty to think about God; desperate for the divine.

Meanwhile, in our society, just as we are awash with food, we are replete with Bibles. No problem getting a Bible. But do we value it the same?

One of the services we can give people is to feed them with the Word of God; to provide them with the spiritual nourishment they need. People need bread *and* Bibles.

 **Dream**

What would happen if all the dormant Bibles of the world were dusted off and regularly consulted?

 **Do**

Choose a psalm and start memorising one verse a day.

Take part in “No Bible” Sunday and see if it makes you appreciate what it’s like to be without a Bible.

Give money to an organisation that buys Bibles for those who need them.

Lord, I enjoy pleasing you. Your law is in my heart. I am willing to listen and obey.

WATER

 **Discover:** *Isaiah 41.17–20*
Planet Earth should be renamed Planet Water. Although 75% of the world is water, ironically, water is precious, for only 1% is drinkable. Nations battle to keep this resource to themselves, building huge reservoirs and constructing dams to stop the water flowing downstream into someone else's country. Even at home, what we once took for granted is now the subject of drought orders and hosepipe bans. We all have to think carefully about our use of this precious substance.

In this passage from Isaiah, God promises water: the barren desert will burst forth with growth. His words show the importance of water – and the difference it can make to people's lives.

Many people in the world simply have no water. Lack of water – or being forced to drink unhealthy water – is the biggest single cause of disease and death in the world today. Giving people water allows them to flourish. Crops can be grown, communities

can be developed, families can be kept clean, children – who otherwise would spend all day finding water – have a chance to get an education.

Water can bring life to barren lives and can bring the desert to bloom.

Dream

All over the world, dry land becomes lush and green; everyone is clean and healthy; every child is in school. How did that happen?


Do

Find out how you can save water in your household.

Wash. Flush. Drink. Give thanks.

You, Lord, can turn deserts into lakes and scorched land into flowing streams. Help us work with you to channel water towards people who desperately need it.

GREEK

 **Discover:** *Galatians 3.23–29*
Paul lived in a rigidly structured society. Your birth defined everything: your status, your family network, often your job. Whilst there was some movement (for example among slaves who could become free), most of your life was set; little could be changed.

Then along comes Christ with a new set of clothes, a new family to which to belong. The early Church did not do away with identity – Jews were still Jews, slaves still in slavery, women still women – but it did do away with discrimination.

According to Paul, the gulf between Jew and Gentile (the “Greeks”) has been bridged by Christ. Even gender is no barrier, for Paul declares that there is neither “male nor female”.

So we see the radical nature of Christianity: no room for racism, social status, or sexism. There is only the family; different in function, each with their own identity, but all wearing the same clothes.

Dream

Galatians 3.27 might indicate that early Christians symbolically took off old clothes before their baptism and put on a new set afterwards. What “clothes” are you going to change into, as a Christian?

If your church were truly representative of the people living nearby, how would it look different?


Do

Find ways of reaching out to those unrepresented in your church. Where is the bridge-building going to start?

Pray for those who experience discrimination, inside or outside the church.

Lord, you don't want anyone left out of your family. Keep us united so that the world will turn and worship you.

BANDAGES

 **Discover:** *Luke 10.29–37*
Jesus had already spoken about loving our enemies (Luke 6.27, 35); here he raises the possibility that our enemies might even be capable of love themselves.

The hatred between Jews and Samaritans had deep roots. It was not just that the Samaritans had a different religion, it was also that they were a reminder of failure. When the Babylonians took the Israelites into exile, the Samaritans moved onto the land. So they were a constant reminder of the Israelites' most humiliating hour. They had capitalised on Israel's failure. Yes, it was 500 years ago, but some people have long memories.

In this story it is the Samaritan, the hated enemy, who is the hero. He makes costly sacrifices. He provides bandages, probably by tearing his own clothing. He uses his own wine as an antiseptic and his own oil as a soothing lotion. It is his donkey who

transports the wounded man to the inn and his money which pays for the room.

It is easy to love those whom we like. It is easy to show compassion for our compatriots. But God's kind of love demands more. And it might demand that we sacrifice our own clothes to heal others. We might be called to sacrifice not just oil, wine and money, but our prejudices as well.

Dream


Imagine your worst enemy becoming your best friend! How could that happen?

Do

Next time someone cries for help, respond straight away, and see where it leads you.

Lord, I celebrate and shout because you are kind. When you see me suffering, you care for me. You rescue me and put me back together again.

WAGES

 **Discover:** *Leviticus 19.13*
There are many ways to steal from people. This verse starts with the general and moves to the sneaky. “Do not steal, do not cheat,” it begins. OK, no problem there. But it goes on, “Pay your workers each day.” Many hired hands, from Old Testament times to Jesus' day, were paid by the day (Matthew 20.1–8). Such people needed a daily amount. Hold the payment back and the worker is pushed into debt. They cannot purchase food for their family; they either starve or borrow money (Deuteronomy 24.14–15; Jeremiah 22.13).

Here, in a passage written maybe 3,000 years ago, we have practices that sound very contemporary; just hold the wages back a bit, delay paying that invoice until you absolutely have to. But the Bible is against any kind of sharp accounting. “Workers are worth what they earn,” says Jesus. And what they earn should not be held back from them.

The principle? Don't steal; don't cheat; pay the right amount, right on time.

Dream

Isn't it great when you're paid promptly? What if we all did this for one another!

Hold your latest payslip. Think where the money will be going. Give thanks.

Do

Put all requests for payment together in one place. Deal with them by the end of the day.

Having trouble with money? Ask God for advice. Share the issue with other people as well.

Every bone in my body shouts, “No one is like you, Lord. You protect the helpless from those in power; you save the poor and needy from those who hurt them.”