

Jeremiah 22:3 NLT  
Policing: Part 1, An Old Testament View  
10.25.20

This 2 part sermon series was prompted by 2 things.

The recent events of police brutality against Black people  
And the following uprising of protests nationwide  
And a series of article in Christianity Today  
On policing from a biblical perspective.

African Americans and others in solidarity with them  
Are protesting the injustices perpetrated against them  
By America's ongoing systemic racism  
Particularly felt in our current policing system.

It is time for white people to stop, listen, learn  
And advocate for change.

And so this Sunday and the Sunday after next  
I want to look to the Bible  
The Old Testament first  
And then the New Testament

To see if we might find a biblical antidote  
That could influence a new reality of policing.

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Today, we look at the Old Testament.

Strangely, there is no mention of police in the OT.

It is only referenced a few times in the NT.

However, that's not to say there weren't methods  
To police the faith community.

Two institutions dealt with crime in Israel.

The first was called the *hue and cry*.

In the *hue and cry* process  
A witness or a victim of a crime would cry out  
And those within hearing would respond.

This practice continues in many societies even today.

This is how communities in Africa  
Protect themselves from crime.

More so particularly now  
With a police force noted for corruption and ineptness.

And I guess, in some ways  
"Neighborhood Watch" derives  
From the same principle.

One example of *hue and cry*  
Is in Deuteronomy 22:23-27.

Regarding rape, the victim was required to cry out  
Thereby alarming the community of the assault.

This passage made provisions in the event  
A rape occurred out and away from a watchful community.

In principle, the community enforced the law  
And stood watch as a policing presence.

For the most part, it was an effective means  
Of protecting communities from crime.

What it teaches us, today, is that public security  
Is everybody's business.

We are our brother's keeper.

It is not something we only defer to professional police.

It is our concern and obligation.

As a matter of fact, a professional police force  
Is a relatively new invention.

It was as late as 1829 that London, the first municipality  
Created a professional police force.

Speaking of Brits . . .

Various Americans tourists have observed  
British Bobbies don't normally carry a side arm.

It is a fact, 90% of London's police force do not carry guns.

An article from NBC explains the reason they do this.

*The Metropolitan Police . . . was founded . . . on the principle  
of "policing by consent" rather than by force.*

Another article by BBC confirms this.

*"There's a general recognition that if the police are walking around with guns it changes things," says Richard Garside, director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.*

With the increased dangers of weaponry  
Carried by both police and citizenry

We recognize the need for trained police  
To handle incidences of extreme violence.

However, we could learn from the Brits  
That it is vital that there be trust  
In the relationship between citizen and police.

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This *hue and cry* method worked reasonably well  
When an active crime was taking place.

But what happened once a crime was committed?

The second institution that is part of the OT Law  
Is what is called the *kinsman redeemer*.

A kinsman redeemer was the nearest relative male  
To the person who was in distress.

The kinsman redeemer, when called upon  
Had the obligation to intervene.

It was his responsibility to advocate for the victim.

If someone died at the hands of a criminal

The kinsman redeemer became an *avenger of blood*.

**Numbers 35:19 The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence.**

But he cannot fulfill his duties

Until judgment was issued by a panel of witnesses.

**Numbers 35:24 then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these ordinances.**

If the local residents confirmed the guilt

**Deuteronomy 19:12 then the elders of the killer's city shall send to have the culprit taken from there and handed over to the avenger of blood to be put to death.**

The kinsman redeemer served as the investigator

The arresting officer, the prosecutor

And even the executioner.

Righting the wrongs of injustice

Was the kinsman redeemer's responsibility.

In this way, the community of Israel

Sustained a community-based policing system.

I certainly don't advocate for a return to these OT practices.

I mean, can you even imagine being a kinsman redeemer  
To a murdered relative?

However, I do suggest a return  
To a more community-based system of accountability

Even to suggest we institute citizen review boards  
To review and evaluate police actions.

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The *hue and cry* and *kinsman redeemer* practices  
Provided a police keeping presence  
In a society without professional police.

But as in all systems operated by humans it breaks down.

For instance, what if you were a widow  
An orphan, or an immigrant living in Israel  
And you had no next of kin?

You were at risk of abuse.

Or what if you were falsely accused of a crime?

The law provided for that too.

### **Exodus 22:21-24 CEV**

**<sup>21</sup> Do not mistreat or abuse foreigners who live among you. Remember, you were foreigners in Egypt.**

**<sup>22</sup> Do not mistreat widows or orphans. <sup>23</sup> If you do, they will beg for my help, and I will come to their rescue.**

In this scenario, God serves as the kinsman redeemer  
Who had no relatives.

By law, then, the whole community became responsible  
For the general welfare of marginalized people.

It they failed to care for them  
They would have to answer to God.

The community became  
The kinsman redeemer for society's vulnerable.

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And what about those who were falsely accused?  
What about them?

God's OT Law included sanctuary cities.

They were located throughout the Israel.

If a person was wrongly accused of a crime  
And pursued by the victim's kinsman redeemer  
He/she could find refuge in a sanctuary city.

There, the elders of the city  
Were responsible to protect the accused  
Until they could determine guilt.

### **Deuteronomy 19:3 NLT**

**<sup>3</sup>Survey the territory, and divide the land the Lord your God is giving you into three districts, with one of these cities in each district. Then anyone who has killed**

**someone can flee to one of the cities of refuge for safety.**

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Marginalized residents of Israel

The widow, orphan, and foreigner

And those falsely accused of wrongdoing

Had protection against abuse within the policing system.

There were safeguards in case the system failed.

The ultimate goal of Israel's policing system

Was fair and equitable justice for ALL people.

It included everyone living within the borders of the nation

It was instituted with the awareness that God

The ultimate conveyor of justice

Was watching.

And if the system doled out injustice and abuse

Contrary to God's ethical code of conduct

God would intervene with his own judgment.

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God is ever-present.

God was watching then.

God is watching now.

It is time the white American church

Hear the plight of our Black brothers and sisters.

This past year we have witnessed an outpouring  
Of grief, pain, and anger directed towards  
The injustices by our current policing system.

Their outcry has spilt into the streets of America.

We must not dismiss their cries of injustice.

Now this is not just happening in America

In Nigeria, these past weeks  
There have been protests  
Against a police group known as SARS  
Special-Anti-Robbery-Squad

People accuse them of blatant abuse and corruption.

And, get this, in response to their peaceful protests  
Police shot and killed at least 12 protesters  
In the city of Lagos Tuesday evening.

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Gleaning from the OT Law and its principles  
The ultimate purpose of policing  
Is not “law and order.”

Law and order protects the status quo.

Law and order tries to maintain a false sense of orderliness.

Law and order overlooks injustices.

This is not what we need.

We don't need law and order, we need is justice.

Police systems must affirm that its primary goal

Fair and equitable treatment

Is available to everyone living within its borders.

God's purpose for law enforcement is to ensure justice

ESPECIALLY those who are marginalized.

Justice is what the African American community seeks.

And we must stand in solidarity with them

To advocate for the necessary changes

To a system that reeks of racism.

We must hear the *hue and cry* of Black America.

Like the Israelites

Who lived under the burden of slavery in Egypt

The African American has had to live for 400 years

Under the oppression of systemic racism.

God was watching then.

### **Exodus 2:23-25 NLT**

**<sup>23</sup> . . . the Israelites continued to groan under their burden of slavery. They cried out for help, and their cry rose up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning, and he remembered his covenant promise . . . . <sup>25</sup> He looked down on the people of Israel and knew it was time to act.**

God is watching now.

If we don't take steps

To rectify and renovate systemic racism in the US

Heaven may just intervene

And we, white Americans, once again

Will be on the wrong side of history.

May it not be so!