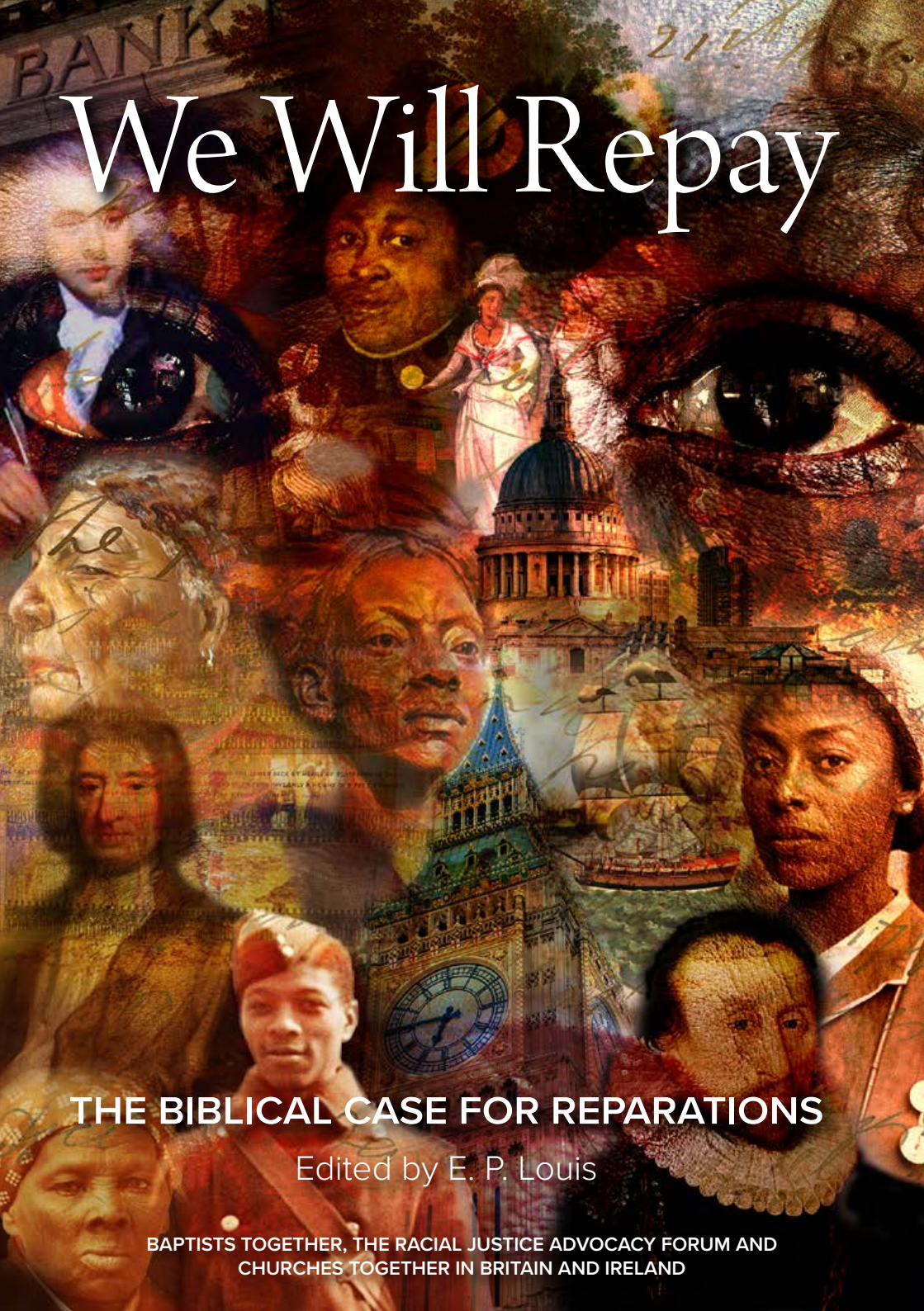




We Will Repay

THE BIBLICAL CASE FOR REPARATIONS

Edited by E. P. Louis

BAPTISTS TOGETHER, THE RACIAL JUSTICE ADVOCACY FORUM AND
CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

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“You shall furnish him liberally
out of your flock, out of your
threshing floor, and out of your
winepress. As the Lord your
God has blessed you, you shall
give to him.”

– Deuteronomy 15:14

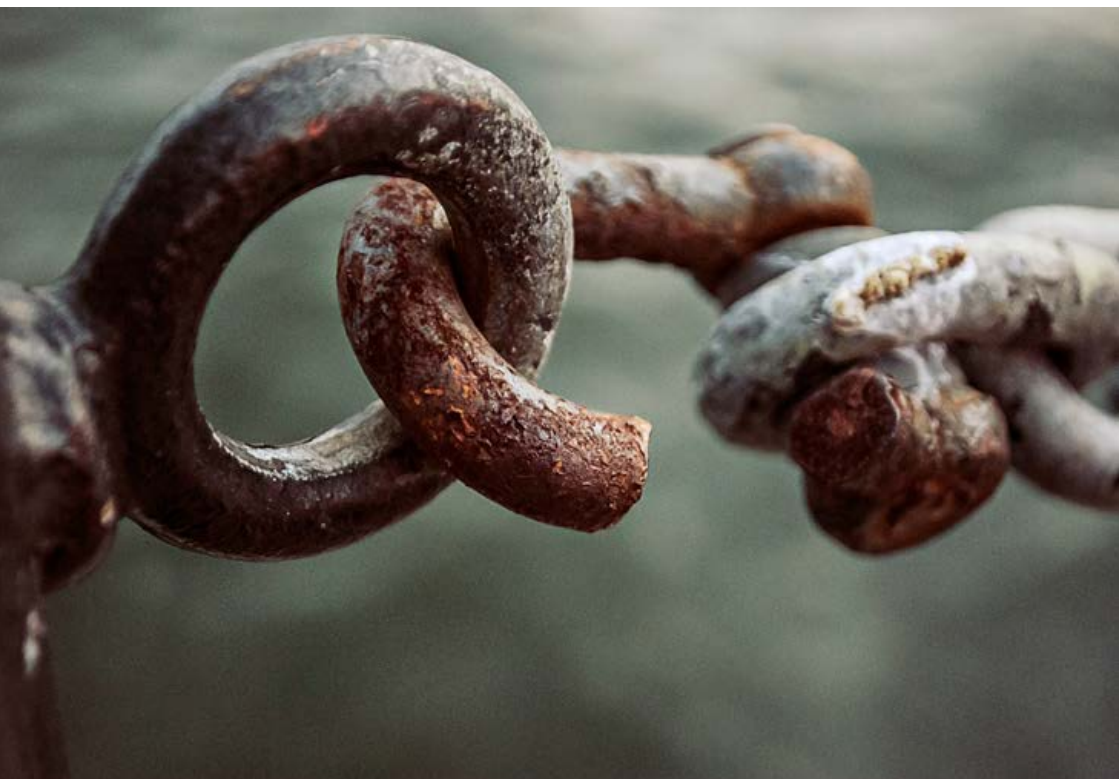
PREFACE BY DR ELESAH LOUIS

The title *We Will Repay* is inspired by a letter written by the Apostle Paul during his imprisonment. In the Book of Philemon, Paul writes a plea for Onesimus's master to accept the return of Onesimus, a slave who had fled and had become the spiritual son of Paul, serving him and growing in his faith. Slavery is an institution featured throughout the Bible, in the Old Testament and New, and Paul, who understood these cultural particularities, acknowledges the inner workings of this system and the mechanisms that God has put in place for justice. Despite Paul describing Onesimus as 'formerly ... useless', his master would have experienced a loss of earnings and, therefore, would be owed compensation or *restitution*. Entwined with the legal practices of slavery within this community is also the bigger picture of emancipation.

Philemon 1:8-20

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you – I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus – I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother – especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.



Paul is hopeful that when Onesimus returns, he will be emancipated from his social position as a slave and welcomed as a brother, ‘both in flesh and in the Lord’. This powerful account demonstrates how the Bible contends with the circumstances of our flesh and our spirit – it engages and speaks into human institutions such as slavery. At times there is reformation, the slow and gradual change; and at other times there is a radical shift that serves to reveal the fullness of the Gospel.

For many years, the enslaved and descendants of enslaved peoples, many of whom were Christians, have pursued reparative justice based on their understanding of biblical justice. However, reparations continue to be a contentious topic for many Christians today. Although we are experiencing shifts in attitudes among some of the historical British and Irish churches and educational institutions, such as with the Church

of England and Glasgow University, it is clear that among the laity, reparations are highly contested. So profoundly immersed and entangled in today's current and intensely polarised social politics, reparations for many Christians have become associated with secular ideals that challenge their core religious convictions. So can the case for reparations be made according to Scripture?

This Bible study resource is designed to help churches and Christians delve into the discussion of reparations on biblical terms. Of course, personal politics and experience will always emerge in conversation – after all, doing theology is always contextual! Acknowledging this, *We Will Repay* takes up the challenge of helping Christians discern God's heart on this matter as it is revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

For clarity, this resource concerns the responsibility of particular churches to enact reparative justice and is not a call to individual responsibility. The churches in question are those historical churches that engaged in and/or profited – or even continue to do so – from enslaving people of African descent. Complicity in this horrific historical episode includes the Christianising of African peoples to subjugate and manipulate their wills – entwined within biblical Christian mission lay a colonial and supremacist way of thinking, knowing and doing which for centuries was part of the inner workings of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

This resource is designed for Christians and active members of local churches to study, discuss and consider the biblical case for reparations. I hope churches will be empowered and inspired to lead society (so far as they will be led) to engage in reparative justice. However, despite my personal hopes, the resource has been designed so that each study group or individual can be thoroughly informed and challenged yet given the room to discern for themselves – hopefully with humility, love and spiritual conviction.

OPENING REFLECTIONS BY RICHARD REDDIE

DIRECTOR OF JUSTICE AND INCLUSION, CHURCHES
TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND

It can be argued that for many decades, ‘reparations’ remained a topic that many on these shores were unwilling to address, especially in the British and Irish churches.

The issue itself is undoubtedly contentious, and any debate, when it took place, was guaranteed to produce more heat than light. As such, Christians of all traditions preferred to sidestep the matter, even though there is a clear and cogent ‘justice’ dimension to reparations with which believers should ethically engage.



I would suggest that the brutal, police-related killing of George Floyd in May 2020 proved to be a key moment for the reparations’ movement, and for all things related to racial justice. From a church perspective, the aftermath of that US tragedy saw a flurry of reports, commissions and activities, including a new focus on reparations. There is little doubt that reparations are, to paraphrase the French writer and poet Victor Hugo, ‘an idea whose time has come’. However, it needs to be pointed out that although society in general and the church in particular are now engaged in a much-welcomed conversation about reparations, parts of the Caribbean, the USA, Africa and Black communities in Britain have been debating this matter for eons.

Much to the chagrin of my parents, I grew up listening to the Jamaican reggae music of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, Burning Spear, Culture, among others, whose songs often spoke about ‘reparations’ in the form of ‘Rastas’ (the followers of *Jah* or God) being able to return to the ‘land of their fathers’ – Africa or Zion. At other times, those songs mentioned righting the wrongs of African enslavement via equal rights and justice. Moreover, from a UK perspective, Black Britons who were influenced by Pan-Africanist ideas, Black History Month and their ‘culture’ have for several decades led reparations-related marches in Birmingham and London on 1 August, which is Emancipation Day in the Caribbean.

I would argue that the church is now playing catch-up on reparations. What is all the more paradoxical about this tardy ‘awakening’ is the fact that the



Bible has so much to say about ‘justice’, ‘restitution’, ‘repair’, ‘restoration’ and ‘reconciliation’, all of which lie at the heart of what constitutes reparations.

As such, this ecumenical resource aims to provide Christians in British and Irish churches with the spiritual and educational tools to better understand this matter and equip them to have informed conversations on an ‘idea’ that will not go away any time soon! *We Will Repay* has been written by two gifted scholars, whose varying perspectives enable a more rounded, fulsome understanding of the topic. Moreover, the resource’s scholarly yet accessible approach will enable Christians to fully engage with the subject matter, irrespective of their theological learning. Much like the great African abolitionist Olaudah Equiano, I believe that, ‘After all, what makes any event important, unless by its observation we become better and wiser, and learn “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God”?’

OPENING REFLECTIONS BY WALE HUDSON-ROBERTS

JUSTICE ENABLER, BAPTIST UNION OF GREAT BRITAIN

For the first time ever, the Baptist Union Council was compelled to respond to slavery’s gruesomeness, its impact on Black bodies and its continuing legacy. Council came face to face with a fact: racism is not an abstract concept that simply looms large in the imaginations of Black people. It is a lived experience imposed upon us by Whiteness.



In 2007, Tony Blair expressed Britain’s profound ‘sorrow’ over the slave trade but refused to give an unreserved apology for fear it would lead to claims for reparations from descendants of Africa. It was also the 200th anniversary of the abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Enslaved Persons, and the Baptist World Alliance invited Baptist Unions to apologise for the enslavement of Black Africans in a memorial and reconciliation service at the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana. To the disappointment of many, the Baptist Union only expressed ‘sorrow’ over the slave trade. An apology was not forthcoming.

That year, the question of the apology had been firmly placed on the table by the Jamaican Baptist Union (JBU). The Revd Karl Henlin, former President of the JBU, spoke courageously to the elephant in the room during the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) and BMS World Mission 2007 Joint Assembly.

The ensuing disappointment and anger that followed the sorrowful statement at the memorial and reconciliation service, combined with the Jamaican Baptist Union’s call for an apology during the joint Baptist Assembly, created a perfect storm. And so, an apology was finally given in November 2007 at Baptist Union Council.

Upon hearing about this, the Revd Karl Johnson, a former General Secretary of the JBU, said, ‘For years, we have felt that such an action was necessary. It, therefore, goes without saying that we are grateful to God that in God’s own time and in the lifetime of some who were part of the original request in 1994, it has come to pass.’

Taking the apology to Jamaica in person ‘seemed to many people a vital step on the journey toward reconciliation’, said Jonathan Edwards, the General Secretary of the BUGB. In May 2008, a delegation, which included Jonathan Edwards; Alistair Brown of BMS World Mission; Pat White, chair of the BUGB Racial Justice Group; and me, presented the resolution curated by Council in the immediate aftermath of the apology to Jamaican Baptists.

It read:

As a Council we have listened to one another, we have heard the pain of hurting sisters and brothers and we have heard God speaking to us.

In a spirit of weakness, humility, and vulnerability, we acknowledge that we are only at the start of a journey, but we are agreed that this must not prevent us speaking and acting at a Kairos moment.

Therefore, we acknowledge our share in and benefit from our nation’s participation in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We acknowledge that we speak as those who have shared in and suffered from the legacy of slavery and its appalling consequences for God’s world.

We offer our apology to God and to our brothers and sisters for all that has created and still perpetuates the hurt which originated from the horror of slavery. We repent of the hurt we have caused, the divisions we have created, our reluctance to face up to the sin of the past, our unwillingness to listen to the pain of our Black sisters and brothers and our silence in the face of racism and injustice today.

We commit ourselves, in a true spirit of repentance, to take what we have learned from God in the Council and to share it more widely in our Baptist community and beyond, looking for Gospel ways by which we can turn the words and feelings we have expressed today into concrete actions and contribute to the prophetic work of God’s coming Kingdom.

Slavery’s impact on Jamaica was palpable. Its economic, social and educational legacy ran deep. Even if we wanted to, the four of us could not escape from colonialism’s grip on the island. It was no wonder the intersect between apology and reparations surfaced during some of our conversations.

The landscape is changing, be it incrementally. In the UK, the relationship between an apology for slavery and reparations is becoming increasingly synonymous with the racial justice agenda. Ahead, for example, of the coronation of King Charles III, indigenous and other advocacy groups from 12 British Commonwealth countries called on the new British monarch to ‘acknowledge the horrific impacts on, and legacy of, genocide and colonization of, the indigenous and enslaved peoples’.

In a letter dated 4 May 2023, representatives from organisations from Antigua, Barbuda, Australia, the Bahamas, Belize, Canada, Grenada, Jamaica, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts, Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines called on King Charles to ‘immediately commit to starting discussions about reparations’. The letter read, ‘We stand united in engaging a process to right the wrongs of the past and to continue the process of decolonization. We are united in our struggle to create a world free of the vestiges of racism and oppression’.

The murder of George Floyd, many would agree, appears to have foregrounded the reparations conversation among some institutions. Few, however, are aware of the titanic contribution of the Baptist theologian and global activist Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jr made towards galvanising the reparatory justice discourse into the twenty-first century.

In the iconic ‘I have a dream speech’¹, King’s demand for reparations was very clear. He said, ‘In a sense, we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check.’ King made the point that trillions of dollars were locked and bolted in American vaults.

1 ‘Read Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech in its entirety’, www.npr.org/2010/01/18/122701268/i-have-a-dream-speech-in-its-entirety (accessed 29 August 2023).



To compensate the millions of African Americans who had attempted to live under the curse of enslavement and whose economic opportunities had been drastically curtailed because of history's cruel past, the vault needed to be opened and the money released.

Drawing from the wellspring of Black Baptist American tradition, which largely viewed reparations as a theological necessity, King strongly repudiated the architects of the republic for defaulting on 'this promissory note insofar as the citizens of colour are concerned'. King rounded up his argument by saying, 'Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked insufficient funds.'

It has taken many years for the global Baptist family to respond to one of the world’s most respected Baptist theologians. Even if many years late, King would be content to know that the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) General Council finally adopted resolutions that denounce racism as a sin against humanity and endorse reparations.

Its resolutions on ‘Slavery Reparations’ acknowledge ‘important, local, national and global conversations about chattel slavery, its enduring generational impacts and the possibilities of reparations to repair the damage for wealth stolen from centuries of forced labor’. The BWA resolution also calls on older Baptist churches, college unions and other institutions to thoroughly study their history and publicly acknowledge institutional and leadership ties to chattel slavery. Then, to explore ways to repair the damage from previous support for and profit from slavery.

Despite the apology made in 2007 and a resolution submitted to Jamaican Baptists that spoke of concrete action, the British Baptists have still not converted their many words into reparatory justice. We have failed to respond to the invitation of one of our most respected Baptist descendants: Revd King.

Apparently, there are valid reasons why Baptists Together and other Christian bodies have yet to commit to restoration, restitution and reparations. Whatever the arguments, time is no longer on our side. Gradualism, as described by Dr King, can no longer be tolerated.

Similarly, racism with premature death as its endgame should no longer be endured. Reparations, which offer theological and moral reckoning, challenge gradualism and racism; advocating and activating repair and just living.

The Racial Justice Advocacy Forum (RJAF) is hopeful that this set of Bible studies written, edited and produced by Dr Eleasah Louis and featuring a special contribution from Revd Kumar Rajagopalan will help facilitate conversations among our churches around repentance, healing, reconciliation and, finally, sacrificial justice – reparations that, for many descendants of Africa, rightly remain a sign of repentance.

WHAT IS REPARATIVE JUSTICE?

Reparative justice or *reparation* is commonly understood as making amends, repair or payment for injury, neglect or harm caused. Another critical term linked to reparation is *restitution*, which is about compensation and restoring something to its rightful owner. Reparation is also spoken of in war-related terms; one nation (usually the losing nation) would pay another nation for the damages and loss caused by war. This aspect does not apply to this conversation, as 16th-century European colonialism, invasion and enslavement were not executed under the circumstances of war.

The etymons of reparation and restitution are recorded as being of both French and Latin origin; their historical uses outline a concept that includes several interlocking ideas: *repair*, *recompense*, *redemption*, *restoration*, *redress*, *atonement*, *indemnification* and *restitution* are but a few of these ideas. ‘Reparation’ has been used in various contexts over the centuries, in business, theology, policy and even the building trade – all referring to ‘making good’ what has been made or become bad or broken.

This resource considers reparation for victims (and their descendants) of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the perpetrators being various European nations (their monarchs and governments), institutions (such as churches) and businesses (such as banks or those who produced foods such as sugar or cotton), and the victims being people of African descent and their descendants: African, African American, African-Caribbean, Afro-Latin, Black British people and those of African descent who remained in various countries throughout Europe.

The claim for reparation is being made on account of being involuntarily enslaved, which included being tortured and brutalised, forced to labour without pay, death, severe mental trauma, the stripping of spiritual and cultural identity and the ongoing legacies of enslavement that have resulted in social disparities and discrimination in the present day. The United Nations has come to recognise this historic multifaceted genocide in terms of ‘victims of gross violations of international human rights’, and states:

The various forms of reparation and their scope and content, covering both monetary and non-monetary reparations, may be summarized as follows:

Restitution refers to measures which ‘restore the victim to the original situation before the gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law occurred’ (principle 19). Examples of restitution include: restoration of liberty, enjoyment of human rights, identity, family life and citizenship, return to one’s place of residence, restoration of employment and return of property.

Compensation ‘should be provided for any economically assessable damage, as appropriate and proportional to the gravity of the violation and the circumstances of each case’ (principle 20). The damage giving rise to compensation may result from physical or mental harm; lost opportunities, including employment, education, and social benefits; moral damage; costs required for legal or expert assistance, medicine and medical services, and psychological and social services.

Rehabilitation includes medical and psychological care, as well as legal and social services (principle 21).

Satisfaction includes a broad range of measures, from those aiming at cessation of violations to truth seeking, the search for the disappeared, the recovery and the reburial of remains, public apologies, judicial and administrative sanctions, commemoration, and human rights training (principle 22).

Guarantees of non-repetition comprise broad structural measures of a policy nature such as institutional reforms aiming at civilian control over military and security forces, strengthening judicial independence, the protection of human rights defenders, the promotion of human rights standards in public service, law enforcement, the media, industry, and psychological and social services (principle 23).²

2 ‘Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law’, Audio-Visual Library of International Law, 16 December 2005, https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/ga_60-147/ga_60-147.html (accessed 29 August 2023).



People often talk about reparations in two phases or make two distinctions – the first being the reparations promised to the emancipated African Americans who were to receive ‘40 acres and a mule’. The package was designed and negotiated by Black people themselves, Baptist and Methodist ministers among them, such as formerly enslaved Revd Garrison Frazier, and took the form ‘Special Field Order 15’ issued by General William T. Sherman in 1865 and accepted by the then President Lincoln – only to be overturned by his successor Andrew Johnson.³ Special Field Order 15 designated off-shore islands, abandoned rice fields and some countryside for the exclusive settlement of Black people in light of the abolition.

3 See Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution 1863–1877* (New York: Harper, 2011).

In this instance, many of the descendants of those emancipated African Americans seek restitution not only for the experience of enslavement but also for the land legally set aside for their ancestors and then retracted. Many believed that Special Field Order 15 would have had a significant impact on the independence, protection and flourishing of Black people in America. They argued that dishonouring the Order caused ongoing suffering, loss and disenfranchisement.

The other distinction or phase of reparations that people consider is restitution or reparation, more generally for the wrong done against those of African descent from those who benefited (and still benefit) from their enslavement and forced labour. In consideration of the centuries of brutalisation enacted to build world-powerful societies, to resource wars, to build local communities and to secure economic success through agriculture and manufacturing, and then of the later abolishment and illegalisation of slavery and the legacies of these atrocities that emerge in present-day discrimination and disenfranchisement – people call for historical reparation.

Many Europeans were compensated for their loss of property (human beings) when slavery was abolished, a debt that in the United Kingdom has only recently been paid off in 2015 through taxes (including the taxes of Black descendants of the enslaved), another point in which people call out the double standard of compensating the perpetrator and not the victim.

This conversation concerns the latter (with the former in mind) and how we, as Christians, the Body of Christ, engage in the conversation as stewards or inheritors of these legal, social and religious institutions we often call denominations (or unions or groups).

WHY ARE SOME PEOPLE AGAINST REPARATIONS?

- Some people of European descent do not believe that they (personally) or their nation should pay for a wrong done in another century.
- Some people of European descent cannot see how they have benefited from enslaving Black people – particularly those experiencing poverty and hardships.
- Some Christians believe that Black Christians should forgive and move on rather than pursue restitution which is seen as divisive.
- Some people cannot understand how, based on the ‘40 acres and a mule’ model, a nation could calculate and afford to distribute the appropriate equivalent and how it would identify the actual descendants of those enslaved in the Americas, the Caribbean and Britain.
- Some people do not believe Black people are still experiencing the racism and disenfranchisement they claim, and that they are not victims of the legacy of slavery and colonialism.

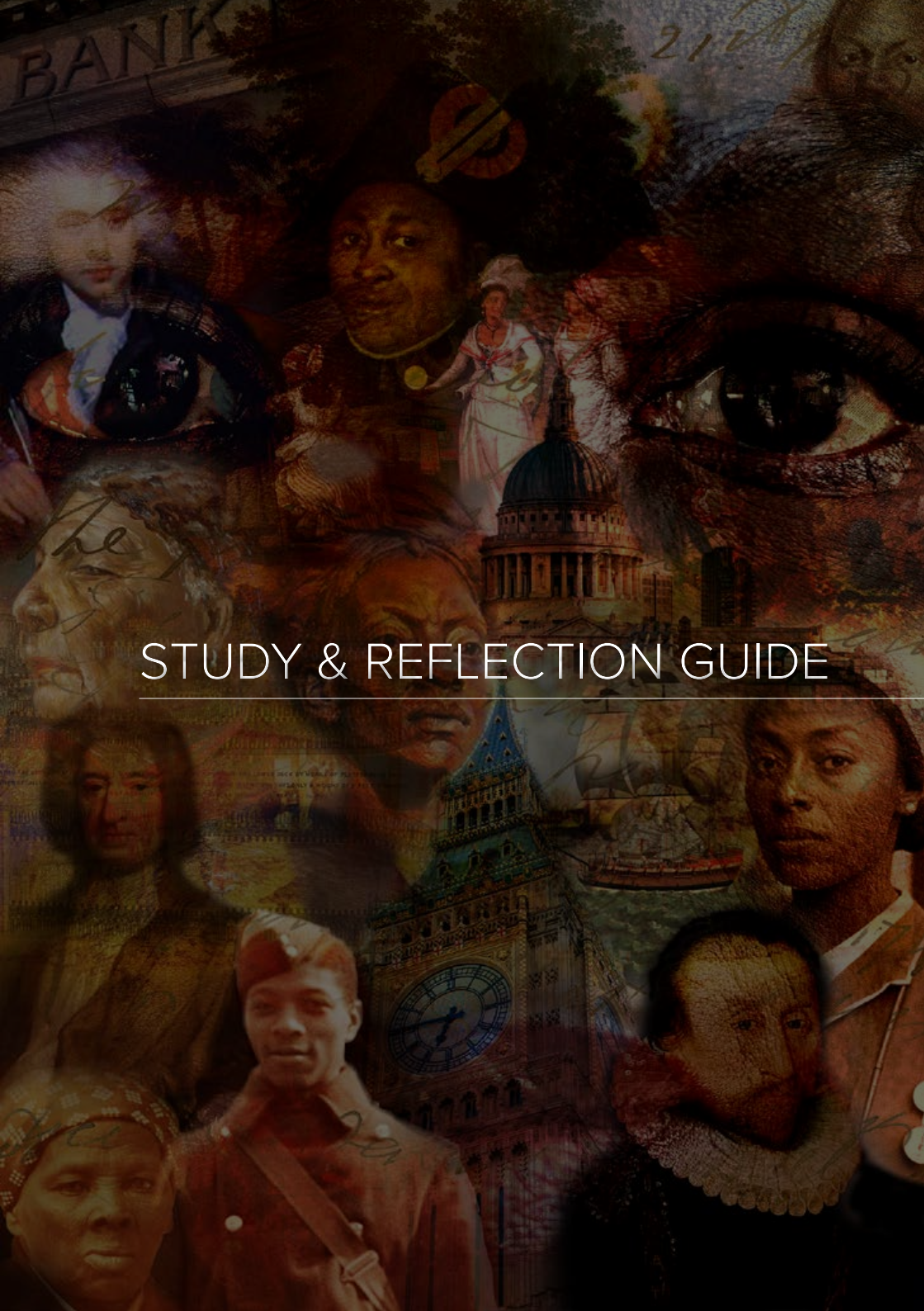
Another issue is the multiple voices calling for reparations and the varying methods: should reparations be required from individuals, monarchs, nations and businesses? Should all Europeans in some way be responsible for reparations?

This resource specifically looks at the responsibility of historical European church institutions, denominations and groups involved in trading slaves, enslaving people, mission work (Christianisation) as an arm of colonialism and those who have built wealth and still benefit from these atrocities. How do we, as stewards, hold to account these organisations to which we have affiliation and commitment?

Matthew 3:7-10 (emphasis added)

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.** And do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father”, for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.’

REPARATIONS ARE:
REPENTANCE
RESTITUTION
REHABILITATION
RECONCILIATION
RATIFICATION



STUDY & REFLECTION GUIDE

“You shall love your neighbour
as yourself. On these two
commandments depend all the
Law and the Prophets.”

– Matthew 22:37-40

INTRODUCTION

This resource can be used individually but is ideal for group study. For each session, several (optional) questions will be asked to get you thinking about your opinions, biblical knowledge, theological perspective, personal biases and the interaction of present-day issues and the Bible.

There are four sessions to work through, all following the same outline:

- Introduction to the session
- Opening questions – *to guide the study*
- Core discussion – *primary Scripture reading wrapped in commentary*
- Featured voice or perspective – *a quote, story about reparation or supporting information that feeds into the conversation about reparation. Interrogate it, discuss it, challenge it and be challenged by it*
- Summary of the study
- Questions – *for personal reflection and small group discussion*

This guide also features a special contribution from Revd Kumar Rajagopalan that briefly considers reparative justice in a connected, but different context – where he socially locates himself and his work. The book in its entirety ‘...concerns the responsibility of particular churches to enact reparative justice and is not a call to individual responsibility. The churches in question are those historical churches that engaged in and/ or profited – or even continue to do so – from enslaving people of African descent.’ (Page 4)

Kumar’s contribution is useful for thinking about how reparations (in principle) works universally as a form of justice available to all people who have been wronged and to also help groups acknowledge that people often come into this conversation with different ideas, experiences and perceptions. Kumar’s approach may help others to do the same – socially locate themselves and therefore better articulate their positions for the discussion.

READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE

These Bible studies have been written on the following premise:

- That the Bible is authoritative on Christian faith and practice. As a reference point, see the first Declaration of Principle from the Baptist Union of Great Britain: **That our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.**⁴
- The Bible is the religious and cultural asset⁵ of the Afroasiatic region. Therefore, it requires cultural and contextual sensitivities and insights generated from research about the historic communities mentioned in the biblical accounts.
- Although a collection of religious books written over centuries by various authors, the Bible contains a unified message of redemption through Christ. In this light, biblical principles and wisdom can be found and proved consistently throughout the 66 books as they exemplify Christ's redeeming work.
- Each denomination or church group and congregation may have a different premise regarding the authority of Scripture. Notice that bullet point 1 says, 'Jesus ... as revealed in the Holy Scriptures'. Do you have a different understanding? Can you articulate it?

Try to think about how this will inform the way you engage with this Bible study.

4 'Declaration of Principle', Baptist Together, www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220595/Declaration_of_Principle.aspx (accessed 29 August 2023).

5 'Cultural asset' here refers to the sacred documents we now call the Bible that have been produced by and enhanced the life of particular communities in the Afroasiatic region.

SESSION ONE:

REPARATIONS – GOD’S LAW OR PRINCIPLE? BY ELEASAH LOUIS

INTRODUCTION

As Christians – followers of Christ – we can often refer to Old Testament principles to understand the mystery of the Gospel and God’s redemption plan. Equally, we turn to the many principles to shape how we do justice in society – looking after orphans, widows and the poor – using our resources and skills to try to ease people’s suffering in our nation and around the world. Many charities and institutions, such as education and healthcare, have been inspired and undergirded by the biblical principles that teach us how to love others, care for others and bring justice for the downtrodden.

In this session, we will explore the role of restitution as a form of justice among the Hebrew people, most notably instituted in the Law of Moses. This chapter features several instances where restitution or reparation has been commanded or enacted in the Old Testament, giving us insight into how God created righteous order and justice for every matter, including national and social crises. As reparations are a contested topic among many Christians, this resource aims to consider restitution or reparative justice as simply another kind of justice, much like the other forms we so readily engage in.

Opening questions

- › How do you view the role of the Old Testament writings in the life of a Christian?
- › Do you think that justice is done differently between the two covenants, the old and the new?
- › Are you involved in any justice work? Are there any particular Scripture verses that drive you?

God's laws and God's principles

It is important for Christians to consider the difference between the laws that God put in place for the Hebrew people (the Israelites) and the principles they represent that influence how we, as new covenant, New Testament Christians, live today.

Many Protestant Christians consider the importance of the two laws that Christ spoke of: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Matthew 22:37), and to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’ (verse 39). Following this, Christ says, ‘On these two commandments depend on all the Law and the Prophets’ (verse 40).

Later in the New Testament we witness the Apostle Paul’s teaching to the Romans, that Christ has fulfilled the law, his sacrifice satisfied the law’s requirements, that we who have the spirit of Christ are free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-4). The Law that we see instituted by God for his people in the Torah is a part of God’s redemption plan for all people (who choose it), pointing to the death and resurrection of Christ who satisfies the impossible, making good for our sins and clothing us in righteousness.

The Spirit of Christ that lives in a believer drives us to live righteously, so how do we understand righteousness? We learn about God’s righteousness and holiness by meditating on the good news and by reading the Bible, both Old Testament and New, not to enslave ourselves to the letter of the law, but in obedience to the spirit of the law – the principles that shaped the laws God gave to Moses – which includes the law of restitution. Principles engage us in the moral of a matter, not merely the religious requirements.

Hebrews 11 tells us that it is through faith that people are commended as righteous, and the examples given are of those who listened to the voice of God and participated in significant parts of the redemption plan we have seen fulfilled through Christ.

To the Israelites, God said,

Exodus 19:5-6: ‘Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

To Christians, the Apostle Peter contextualises:

1 Peter 2:9: ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’

Both the Israelites and Christians are anointed as a holy and chosen people whom God will use to bring light to the world. They were called to obey, to keep the covenant and to proclaim the excellencies of Christ.

CORE DISCUSSION

Job was a wealthy and important man from the land of Uz, primarily associated with Edom (now southwest Jordan). The book’s author is anonymous, making it difficult for anyone to date or contextualise, and Job appears in no biblical genealogies. Some scholars contend that the Book of Job was among one of the earliest accounts in the Bible (before Moses). Several observations inform this perspective:

- Job performed his own sacrifices, and there did not seem to be a priest or a temple instituted (Job 1:5).
- His age – perhaps living for nearly 200 years when considering his youth, his first family life, his period of disaster and the 140 years he lived after that with the new blessings. This longevity was typical in the earlier biblical accounts (Job 42:16).
- He distributed his inheritance equally among his sons and daughters – Mosaic Law required that inheritance be given to sons only (Job 42:15).
- His wealth was measured in livestock and not gold (Job 42:12).



Byblos
Beirut
Sidon
Tyre

Acre

Sea of
Galilee

DAMASCUS
KINGDOM
OF ARAM
DAMASCUS

Ashtaroth

KINGDOM
OF ISRAEL

SAMARIA
Shechem

KINGDOM
OF AMMON

Jerash

PHILISTINE
CITY
STATES

Jaffa

Beit El

Jericho

RABBATH-
AMMON

Ashdod

Lachish

JERUSALEM

ARAMEAN
TRIBES

Ashkelon

Hebron

DIBON
KINGDOM
OF MOAB

Gaza

KINGDOM
OF JUDAH

Beersheba

Dead
Sea

ARABU
TRIBES

KINGDOM
OF EDM

NABATU
TRIBES

Job is a complex text to read as we see how a challenge from Satan results in God allowing a faithful servant to suffer significant loss, sickness and torment. We often ask ourselves why God would allow this and what this account reveals about the character of God. This is a book not only about suffering in general but particularly about undeserved suffering, and reading the book in this light could help with the conversation about reparations for enslaved African peoples and their descendants.

In Job 42:10-11, the author describes Job's 'happy ending' as a form of restitution:

And the LORD restored the fortunes of Job, when he had prayed for his friends. And the LORD gave Job twice as much as he had before. Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him. And each of them gave him a piece of money and a ring of gold.

Here we see that God is credited as the one who brought evil or disaster to Job and then restored to him twice as much as he had before. We see a similar pattern in Exodus 22:4, which we will explore further in the next session.

When transcribing the Hebrew words from Job 42:10 into English, it reads, '*And the LORD turned the captivity of Job ...*'

Outside, if not before, the Mosaic Law, the Book of Job witnesses the principle of restitution being played out in the life of Job and his family. Restitution takes centre stage in the end when Job's underserved suffering is made good and he receives justice. This consideration helps readers begin to see how deeply restitution is rooted in the framework of God's redemption plan.

Map of the region showing the location of Edom; and (inset) 'Job and His Friends' by Ilya Repin (1869)

THE MOSAIC LAWS

The following Scripture excerpts are sections from the Law of God given to Moses to govern the newly emancipated nation of God, the Israelites. Although an ethnic and social community that had existed for centuries as descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Israel), 400 years of slavery seem to necessitate a regrouping, particularly as now God was actioning his promise – giving the Israelites a land of their own, where they would be a political entity among the other nations, kingdoms and tribes in the region.

The Mosaic Laws found in Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy cover not only sin and righteousness but also all areas of day-to-day living, from trade, marriage, parenting and burying the dead to eating and dressing, all in relation to the Israelites’ religious practice and how they were to engage with God and remain in right standing through offerings and sacrifices. Here, we see that God establishes 1) leaders among the tribes, and 2) processes for judging and resolving conflict among the people – including a guide for restitution processes.

Leviticus 6:1-5

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely – in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby – if he has sinned and has realized his guilt and will restore what he took by robbery or what he got by oppression or the deposit that was committed to him or the lost thing that he found or anything about which he has sworn falsely, he shall restore it in full and shall add a fifth to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs on the day he realizes his guilt.’

We see that God takes sins committed by human beings against one another seriously and requires an acknowledgement of guilt, restoration and a type of interest – restoring more to the victim than was taken, lost or damaged. It is also interesting to see how immediately this payment is required: ‘on the day he realizes his guilt’. In this reading, we get a sense of urgency and the impression that it should be a priority to deal with this arrangement swiftly rather than allow it to be forgotten or neglected.

Numbers 5:5-8

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to the people of Israel, When a man or woman commits any of the sins that people commit by breaking faith with the LORD, and that person realizes his guilt, he shall confess his sin that he has committed. And he shall make full restitution for his wrong, adding a fifth to it and giving it to him to whom he did the wrong. But if the man has no next of kin to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for wrong shall go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which atonement is made for him.’

In this verse, we see a slight expansion on Leviticus 6:1-5, whereby if the man who has been wronged is dead, restitution could be made to their next of kin – a relative. The reparative payment would go to the priest if there is no next of kin. Restitution or reparation is closely tied to a person’s purity and the community’s peace, the central or golden thread of the biblical narrative. In keeping the peace between themselves and righting all wrongs, the Israelites would demonstrate to the surrounding nations the unique ways in which they were in a relationship with God and could partake in holiness and righteousness.

This said, it is interesting to see that the payment for sin is *more* than the wrong done – repairing the damage is not about being even but about the sacrificial atonement of the one in sin. In the Gospels, we witness Jesus forfeit his innocence, giving even what he did not owe, taking on humanity’s debt. We shall explore this more in session 4.

Deuteronomy 15:12-15

If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you for six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your wine press. As the LORD your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.



The great multitude walked out of Egypt

We return to the institution of slavery that existed among many communities in the world, including among the Israelites (see the following chapter, which explores distinctions between the slavery practised by Israelites and European chattel slavery). Based on the understanding that God spoke into the existing system (rather than establishing it), setting safeguarding measures for those slaves to ensure (for most) eventual freedom and provision, this Scripture is one example of the provision that must be made to the emancipated citizens, so they may flourish independently and also in religious reverence for what God did for the Israelites in Egypt.

The Old Testament laws acknowledge the cycle of poverty, independence and flourishing that many people in a community experience, and it seems God designed his laws and seasonal observations (such as the year of Jubilee) so that all people would have equal access to independence and flourishing and that no one would be stuck in perpetual poverty.

Deuteronomy 15:14

You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him.

LAW AND PRINCIPLE IN ACTION

The Book of Ezra is a fundamental scriptural reference point for seeing restitution put into action generations after the offence had occurred. The offence in question was not dissimilar to that of Job, where God brought disaster or calamity on his people. However, this time, unlike Job, it was a judgement for their unfaithfulness. While driven to wrath, God's redemption plan meant that his people would again experience *restitution*, being built and up and restored after a period of suffering. This restitution was inspired by God and put into action by the leaders of both the oppressors and the oppressed.

In the earliest manuscripts, this account was found in a unified book, 'Esdras B', which is the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. These accounts are about Israel's return to Jerusalem and the rebuilding of the Temple after exile in Babylon (modern-day Iraq). God stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia (Babylon was by that time under Persian control) (Ezra 1:1) to initiate and resource the rebuilding of the Lord's house and empower Israel to be the builders of their sacred space. During the rebuilding process, the returnees experienced various delays, including opposition (Ezra 4:4) from the surrounding neighbours and those who had populated the region during their exile. In chapter 4, we see that King Artaxerxes stopped the building indefinitely owing to influence from other nations who considered those of Judah and Jerusalem 'rebellious and wicked' (Ezra 4:11-12). Later, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah inspired the people to start again, once again coming under scrutiny from officials. Darius the then reigning King of Persia searched for the documents recording King Cyrus' orders for to *initiate* and *resource* the rebuild:

Ezra 6:1-5

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in Babylonia, in the house of the archives where the documents were stored. And in Ecbatana, the capital that is in the province of Media, a scroll was found on which this was written: 'A record. In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king issued a decree: Concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be rebuilt, the place where sacrifices were offered, and let its foundations be retained. Its height

shall be sixty cubits and its breadth sixty cubits, with three layers of great stones and one layer of timber. Let the cost be paid from the royal treasury. And also let the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that is in Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored and brought back to the temple that is in Jerusalem, each to its place. You shall put them in the house of God.’

The rebuilding of the Temple was by no means an easy build. Ezra–Nehemiah documents the ongoing trials, obstructions, frustrations, economic hardships (in-house greed and exploitation, which led to heavy taxation by the king; see Nehemiah 5) and opposition the people of God faced, all while still under the rule of the Persian Empire and the watchful eye of the neighbouring nations.

The Africa Bible Commentary mentions a theology of reconstruction which considers the Ezra–Nehemiah blueprint for nations that are struggling to realise true independence after years of destruction, colonisation, etc.,⁶ particularly the need for divine and human intervention. Holding on to the belief that God is at work in a divine way, it is evident that God uses people, as we see with Haggai and Zechariah, to lead the people to rebuild.

The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah also present the interaction of divine and human activity in the process of reconstruction. This equilibrium is often skewed, forgotten or even denied in Christian preaching in Africa. While it is true that God is at work, he also needs men and women resolutely working with him to accomplish his purposes. In our day, we have a tendency to passively wait for God to intervene miraculously. But the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah mention no miracles. God moved the heart of Cyrus (1:1) and he prompted King Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:27-28; Nehemiah 2:4-6), but these were still ordinary humans whom God used to accomplish the great task of rebuilding his people.

6 ¹ *Africa Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010).



Champions of emancipation: Harriet Tubman (born Araminta Ross, (1822 – 1913) was an American abolitionist and social activist. After escaping slavery, Tubman made some 13 missions to rescue approximately 70 enslaved people, including her family and friends, using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known collectively as the Underground Railroad. In her later years, Tubman was an activist in the movement for women's suffrage.

Undeniably, this example of making good and restitution, honouring an age-old legal decree, is a blueprint for reparative injustice that spans beyond the initial participating generation. In this case, what was restored was the central religious identity marker, the glue of the Israelite community – the Temple where God resided and around which their community was structured and operated. Rebuilding the Temple effectively rebuilt the nation. Though not politically independent (yet), this portion of the Israelite/ Hebrew society (ten tribes of Israel had already been scattered) had been reinstated, returned and resourced for flourishing.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have surveyed a few Scripture verses that help us see how restitution is both a principle and a law for people who have a relationship with and reverence for God. We see how God himself enacts restitution, how he uses others to enact restitution and that he requires restitution be practised among his people as a way of doing justice, leading to peace in the community. Repayment of a debt seems to be taken very seriously, and these few examples among many demonstrate how much suffering is experienced when people are denied what is owed to them. The suffering of the victim and the guilt of the oppressor span years and generations in some instances, which causes us to consider our social, political, legal and moral responsibility as those who call themselves Christians to enact justice through reparations.

Personal reflection & small group discussion

- Do you consider reparations as a form of justice equal to other types, such as feeding the poor, sheltering the homeless and advocacy?
- Is restitution a more significant part of the redemption plan than we give it credit for?
- How readily do you consider the examples above to be transferable to the current conversation about restitution/reparative justice?
- The section on Law and principles talks about the spirit of the law; how do you understand this concerning the law of restitution?
- What laws, or principles behind a law, do you feel may not apply to us as Christians? Why not? What was the purpose of those laws?

SESSION TWO:

REPARATIONS – OUT OF EGYPT? BY ELESAH LOUIS

INTRODUCTION

While many people tend to see parallels between the experience of the Israelites in Egypt and the experience of Africans in the West, this study considers how we can discern the right and righteous course of action as British and Irish people, and that of the African diaspora in Britain (Black British people) in light of the historical enslavement of African Americans by Europeans for 400 years. Simply put – can we get direction from the Bible on the issue of reparations?

In this session, we will be considering whether there is a biblical premise for reparations/reparative justice based on what we see in Exodus: the Israelite experience of enslavement in and emancipation from Egypt, the institution of Passover and the prophecy Abraham received from God about this very experience.

Opening questions

- › Are there any characters, people groups, events or places in the Bible that you feel especially connected to? If so, why?
- › Do you feel that the nation or community you live in or have come from has anything in common with a community in the Bible?
- › Does the nation or community you live in or have come from have an experience of enslavement in its history?

SLAVERY IN THE BIBLE

Acknowledging that slavery took place among God’s people is never an easy discussion, particularly in light of the ongoing slavery that continues in the world today, both domestic and commercial.

When considering the role of slavery in the Bible it is important to acknowledge that while any type of slavery is devastating, there are differences and various models. In Scripture we see different types of enslavement and God speaking into these human institutions. It must be stated from the outset that nowhere in Scripture do we see God implement, inspire or construct the system of slavery, the buying and selling of people as integral to building a healthy society. What we do see is that he created legal and moral boundaries, rules, caveats and guidelines between slaves and their masters.

Unlike chattel slavery, such as was employed for the subjugation of African people in the 16th century, in the Hebrew community people would often become slaves because they had become so poor and destitute, they could no longer live independently. In this dire situation people would become slaves for a set period, during which they would serve another person and be provided with shelter, food and other necessities for seven years. Looking at this system broadly, we see a redemptive cycle in which, ideally, people would then be reinstated into society to live independently once more.

Of course, what we also see in the instructions given to Moses by God are various nuances that beg more difficult questions, for example for daughters who are sold by fathers (Exodus 21:7) and the expectations women are expected to meet during their enslavement (Exodus 21:7-11).

Another reason a person might find themselves enslaved was to serve as punishment for theft for which the person could not make restitution(!). Below (in brief) is a diagram that gives an idea of the shape of the system, highlighting some major differences between the system that God spoke into and chattel slavery.

CORE DISCUSSION

Before jumping straight into the key verse, reminding ourselves of the broader story of the Israelites (the Hebrews), in Genesis provides an opportunity to understand God's response to their enslavement in Egypt more deeply. Who are the Hebrews, and how did they get to Egypt in the first place?

In Genesis 14, we see the first mention of the term 'Hebrew' (*ivri*); scholars are divided on its initial meaning. There are two main conjectures: *ivri* means something like 'beyond', as in Abram came from beyond the Euphrates; and the second idea is that it refers to his ancestor Eber. Whatever the origin, in the culmination of the Old Testament writings, the Hebrews, the people of Abraham (as Abram was renamed by God), became an ethnic marker/title (with geographic and genealogical significance) for the nation that God set aside for his redemptive purposes. It was the nation through which the Messiah would come.

Genesis 10 and 11 tell us that Abraham was a descendant of Shem, who was a son of Noah. A genealogy focusing on the first-born sons in chapter 11:10-26 positions him as the living first-born heir of Shem, Noah's eldest son. Genealogies can help us understand people, places and events in the Bible. For example, earlier in chapter 11 we see how humans, unified by language, were scattered and confused as a form of judgement and were therefore unable to build the city and tower that, in its intent, offended the Lord. Among these peoples (all the peoples of the earth, 'the whole earth', 11:1) are Shem's descendants, and among Shem's descendants was Abram from Ur, married to Sarai, who was barren (11:29-30). The Bible tells us that the Lord called Abram to leave his country and his father's house to inhabit a land God had designated for his descendants:

Genesis 12:1-3

Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'

Here, we see God’s intent to birth a nation, a political and social entity like Egypt, and many describe this intent as part of God’s overall plan for the redemption of humanity. Throughout the Old Testament, we see the shaping, growth, judgement, reform and rescue of this nation, but as things unfold in the beginning, Abram’s concerns are quite earthly – he needs an heir. Reading on shows us that God intervened in the life and the bodies of Abram and Sarai (later Abraham and Sarah; chapter 17), opening her womb and giving them a son – the true heir he had promised them.

In chapter 15, God spoke to Abraham about the events to come in the future of his children’s children’s children, and this series of events led to an interesting exchange of goods that is the focus of this session.

Genesis 15:12-16

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgement on the nation that they serve, and afterwards they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’

It is widely accepted that this is a prophecy (foretelling) of the enslavement of the Hebrews in Egypt, that Abraham’s people would suffer and endure oppression and then God would rescue them and judge their oppressors, and the Hebrews would ‘come out with great possessions’. These great possessions seem to be positioned as a result of the judgement on Egypt for wrongdoing as well as a way of restoring independence to the Hebrews by providing resources upon their departure: *restitution*.

FREE

**PROVIDED FOR
UPON RELEASE**
DEUTERONOMY 15:14

**RELEASED AFTER
SEVEN YEARS**
EXODUS 21:2

**REFUGE FOR
RUNAWAY SLAVES**
DEUTERONOMY 23:16

ANTI-KIDNAPPING
EXODUS 21:16

ANTI BRUTALITY
EXODUS 21:2

**LEVITICUS
25:35**
(REDEMPTION FOR
THE POOR AND
ENSLAVED)

EXODUS 21
(LAWS ABOUT
SLAVES)

GLEANING
LEVITICUS 23:22

**LOANS WITH
NO INTEREST**
EXODUS 22:5

**LESS EXPENSIVE
SACRIFICE**
LEVITICUS 5:7

**CANCELLED
DEBTS**
DEUTERONOMY 15

**PUNISHMENT FOR
STEALING AND
BEING ABLE TO
REPAY**
EXODUS 22:3

SLAVE

Task: Chart, in brief, using Scripture references, key character names and events, what happened between Abraham and Moses that led the Hebrews to Egypt and into enslavement.

ABRAHAM

MOSES

THE HEBREWS ENSLAVED

Genesis tells us how the descendants of Abraham continued to flourish and multiply through his descendants, Isaac and Jacob, and came to live in Egypt under Jacob's son Joseph, a Hebrew who endured a time of enslavement, servanthood and imprisonment and then became a ruler in Egypt. As time passed, the Hebrew community continued to flourish under new rulers who did not know Joseph nor how God had used Joseph for the Egyptians' benefit (Genesis 41):

Exodus 1:8-14

Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.' Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Ramses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

Egypt employed a system of slavery that was undergirded by fear of being overcome and betrayed by the Hebrew community in Egypt. The Hebrews were brutalised and abused, forced to work and build and expand Egypt and were subject to infanticide (Exodus 1:15-22), which came full circle through God's judgement in Exodus 12. This episode in Hebrew history brought immense suffering for both the Hebrews and Egyptians; the everyday person became subject to the atrocities of oppression and the resulting judgement, which would have long-term implications for both communities.

Task: Reflecting on the oppression of the Hebrews and the judgement on the Egyptians, consider how this would have impacted the society in the long term.



2
**From Haran
to Canaan**
Genesis 12:1-7

3
**Travel
to Egypt**
Genesis 12:8-13:4



Abraham's Journey to Canaan

According to Genesis

○ City (uncertain location)

● City

← Traditional route

← - Alternative route

0 (km) 200
0 (mi) 150

Exodus 12:29-32, The Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn

At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he and all his servants and all the Egyptians. And there was a great cry in Egypt, for there was not a house where someone was not dead. Then he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, ‘Up, go out from among my people, both you and the people of Israel; and go, serve the LORD, as you have said. Take your flocks and your herds, as you have said, and be gone, and bless me also!’

JUDGEMENT ON ALL OF EGYPT

Given that the Scriptures identified Pharaoh as the decision maker and the one who had hardened his heart against God (Exodus 8:15), seeing the entire nation suffer God’s wrath and judgement inspires several questions: What was being judged? The institution of slavery? Pharaoh’s disobedience? Why does it seem like the entire nation was held responsible for the decisions of one person?

One could take the position that God considered that the Egyptians were complicit in the suffering of the Israelites: the taskmasters, the traders, the everyday people maintaining the status quo: ‘And Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel’ (Exodus 1:12).

Each plague that God inflicted on Egypt, the Egyptians and their property would have been destabilising for the nation, hitting all the most essential resources and needs, from food and light to family members. God displayed his sovereignty and displeasure concerning the treatment of the Hebrews, and although God hardened Pharaoh’s heart, Pharaoh was forced to yield and release the Hebrew slaves. When the judgement of God could no longer be cushioned by position, power and resources – for nothing can cushion the loss of a child – Pharaoh relented.

MARKING THE MOMENT FOREVER

Exodus 12:14-17

This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute for ever, you shall keep it as a feast. For seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute for ever.

Just before he delivered the Hebrews, God designated a season that would be a permanent reminder of what he was about to do and who he was to the Hebrews. God established a new observance, ‘the beginning of months’ (Exodus 12:2), and so the Hebrew nation’s new beginning was tied to their deliverance from slavery – an undeniable identity marker. While many Christians do not consider it a salvific, spiritual or religious necessity to continue the observances of the Hebrews, it is still of great interest that God set a religious observance such as this as a statute *for ever*. We are forced to ask ourselves what was happening here that we should remember and reverence and could perhaps inform how Christians, who are grafted into God’s family, bless the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

With input from the New Testament, we realise how symbolic and prophetic the Passover is regarding the ultimate sacrifice of Yeshua, or Jesus, the Christ for all. In the final chapter, we will explore how restitution features in God’s redemption plan through Christ, helping us further understand the biblical premise for reparation.

Questions

- › How do significant events shape our communal identity?
- › Can you think of any other examples in history (yours or others) where significant historical events have been identity markers for those peoples?



Champions of emancipation: Toussaint Louverture (1743 – 1803), known as the “Father of Haiti”, was a Haitian general and the most prominent leader of the Haitian Revolution. Louverture fought and allied with Spanish forces against St. Dominican Royalists, then joined with Republican France, becoming Governor-General-for-life of Saint-Domingue, and lastly fought against Napoleon Bonaparte’s Empire. Louverture displayed military and political acumen that helped transform the fledgling slave rebellion into a revolutionary movement.

REPARATION?

Thus, we come to the crux of this session, where many consider restitution takes place:

Exodus 12:33-36, The Exodus

The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, ‘We shall all be dead.’ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewellery and for clothing. And the LORD had given the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

In desperation, after experiencing judgement for enslaving, brutalising and murdering Israelites, the Egyptians readily responded to the Hebrews’ request for resources, just as God had told Abraham centuries before. Gold, silver and clothing, exchangeable goods in any nation, would be foundational to helping them stand in independence. When we think of what comes later, we know that these precious metals could be used to build the Tabernacle and possibly given to Aaron later for the golden calf.⁷

Can we consider this exchange of goods a form of restitution, thinking again of how God presented these events to Abraham in Genesis 15? Does this exchange repair or make good 400 years of bondage? The text describes the exchange as God giving the Hebrews favour in the eyes of the Egyptians, the Egyptians once again filled with dread and urgency after suffering the wrath of God and the people of Israel *plundering* them.

Tertullian, an early church father from North Africa, does not shy away from the plundering and speaks against another contemporary, Marcion, who considers events such as this an example of immoral stories found within Scripture. Tertullian defends the acquisition of gold, silver and

⁷ Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Baker Publishing Group, 2011).

clothes on account of their suffering – while also acknowledging that it could not be considered a reasonable compensation for what they had endured:

So then, if the Hebrews have a good case, the case, which means the commandment of the Creator is equally good: he made the Egyptians favourable, though they were unaware of it, and at the time of their exodus he provisioned his own people with some slight indemnification, a payment of damages not described as such. And clearly he told them to exact too little: the Egyptians ought to have given back to the Hebrews their male children as well.⁸

The word the ESVUK has translated as ‘plundered’ is *nāṣal* a primitive root word for the following verbs: ‘to snatch away, deliver, rescue, save, strip and plunder’, and can be found in 234 places throughout the Old Testament, such as Genesis 31:9, Exodus 33:6 and Deuteronomy 23:14. Seeing the expansion of the word ‘plunder’ as the author of Exodus used it gives an interesting perspective on restitution. Upon their leaving slavery, involuntary servitude and *centuries* of oppression, God caused the Israelites to receive goods from the Egyptians. In what comes across as a forceful manner, the sense of urgency and danger (not so much repentance!) gives rise to questions about the acquisition of reparations to those who consider themselves due and from those who owe a debt to recover, repair and make good.

Thinking about the earlier section of this session, ‘Slavery in the Bible’, where we see how slaves would be restored to independence, it is perhaps worth considering how God, before instituting laws around the existing slavery systems, intervened in what had become unlawful enslavement (involuntary and brutal) and brought about the independence of the Hebrews, *restoring and repairing* the community. Delivering this nation brought about economic, social and political agency and provision for trade, agriculture and, ultimately, the ability to flourish in the wider international society.

8 Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem, Book II*, www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_marc/evans_marc_06book2_eng.htm (accessed 29 August 2023).

SUMMARY

In this session, we have considered the account of the Hebrews' emancipation from Egypt. In Exodus 12, the author records an exchange of goods from the Egyptians to the Hebrews. What is interesting in this account is that, when looking back to Genesis, we can strongly argue that God had told Abraham, the Hebrew patriarch, about their forthcoming suffering and also about the great possessions they would receive upon their freedom. In this reading, we can establish a few key moments:

- God saw the Hebrews' circumstances.
- He appointed leaders.
- He identified himself as supreme.
- He delivered justice (judgement).
- He established liberation.
- He provided resources.
- Reconciliation occurred between the liberated Hebrews and some Egyptians.

What is also necessary to note is that Pharaoh, or Egypt, did not officially repent, but reparations were still performed through divine intervention. The Egyptian people 'let them have what they asked' (Exodus 12:36), seemingly without permission or agreement from their leader, but by God's influence. Their complicity and resulting judgement caused the everyday Egyptians to recompense the Hebrews.

Questions

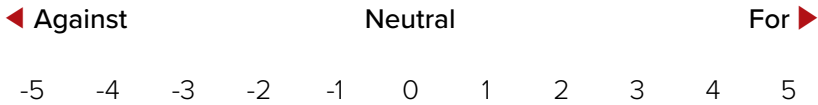
- Consider the various voices in this text: the Hebrews', the Egyptians' and God's voice. What are they saying, and how do they interact with one another?
- What would the relationship between the Egyptians and the Hebrews have been like at the point of emancipation?
- What was God's role in exchanging goods between the Egyptians and the Hebrews upon their deliverance?
- What are your thoughts about the system of slavery that remained among the Hebrews (acknowledged by God) even upon their emancipation?
- What is your take on the judgement that befell the Egyptians because of the hard heart of their Pharaoh?
- What is the implication of being a part of an unrepentant institution?
- Popular Bible studies on the Exodus create strong links between the deliverance of the Hebrews and the redemption of all (who choose) through the sacrifice of Christ. Do you think God's great redemption plan provides guidance and principles for everyday living and doing?

SESSION THREE:

REPARATIONS – ENCOUNTERING CHRIST BY KUMAR RAJAGOPALAN

INTRODUCTION

From your studies to date, please indicate where you stand regarding reparations using the scale below?



In Christ, we encounter a radical revolutionary who said that he had come ‘that [we] may have life and have it abundantly’ (John 10:10). At the synagogue in Nazareth, the Lord declared his manifesto by reading from Isaiah 61:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.
(Luke 4:18-19)

What did that abundant life look like for those he engaged with during his earthly ministry? How do we see his manifesto commitment being worked out in the lives of those he taught and related to? For example, how are the Lord’s pronouncements worked out in his encounter with Zacchaeus, and what could it teach us about reparations?

Of all the epistles, the Book of James is the best embodiment of the Lord’s teaching: ‘There is no better example in the New Testament of a church leader taking the Lord’s teaching and applying it to church problems. The letter of James, then, becomes a model for the modern church on how to apply the teachings of Jesus.’⁹

In particular, how does the denunciation of the rich in James 5:1-6 speak to the issue of reparations?

In the Gospels, while the Lord addressed the crowds and spoke to the religious leaders, his most meaningful encounters often occurred with individuals. Therefore, our response to reparation as individuals and local churches can influence how the historic churches we belong to respond, which in turn can seek to influence both our nation’s response and international response. Therefore, each of us has a vital role to play.

Personally, as an Indian from a Hindu Brahmin caste background who rejected Hinduism because of caste prejudice and discrimination in my journey to Christ, this issue impinges on me as follows:

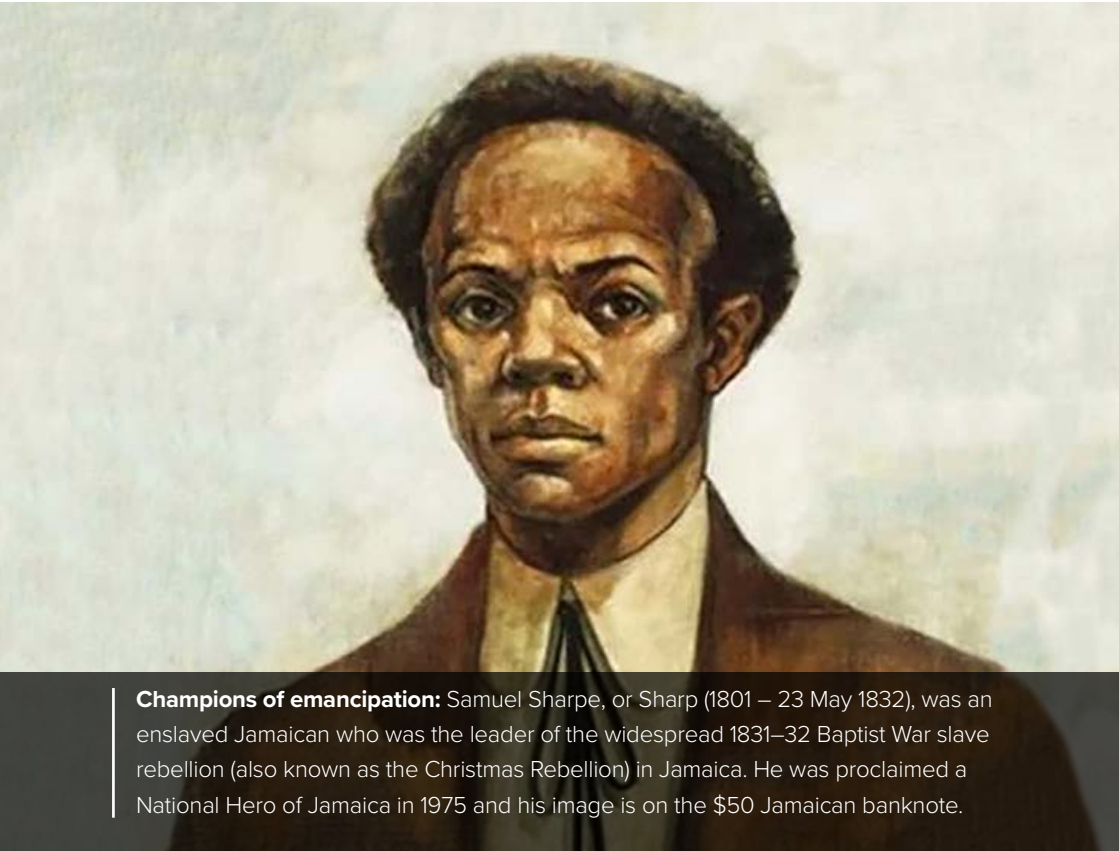
- Those of other castes, particularly the Dalits and tribals, could demand that I and my community pay reparations for the millennia of prejudice and discrimination that they have suffered and are suffering, and for the continuing effects on them of past and present injustices.
- I could ask the British to pay reparations for their colonisation of India and its continuing legacy in India and on me in Britain.
- Sections of my family and former Brahmin community are scathing towards the post-independence Indian government’s efforts to repair the effects of caste prejudice through quotas for non-Brahmins at universities and in government jobs. They regard reparations as having led to injustice for them.

As a disciple of Christ, how should I respond to these different perspectives?

9 D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer and G. J. Wenham (eds), *James in New Bible Commentary 21st Century Edition* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), p 1354.

I am drawn to two portions of Scripture. First, in the Sermon on the Mount, while teaching on our need to pray by asking God, seeking from God and knocking at his door, the Lord shared what is commonly called the Golden Rule: 'So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets' (Matthew 7:12). Second, when the Pharisee asked the Lord about the greatest commandment, he replied:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)



Champions of emancipation: Samuel Sharpe, or Sharp (1801 – 23 May 1832), was an enslaved Jamaican who was the leader of the widespread 1831–32 Baptist War slave rebellion (also known as the Christmas Rebellion) in Jamaica. He was proclaimed a National Hero of Jamaica in 1975 and his image is on the \$50 Jamaican banknote.

These two Scriptures provide the framework that informs and shapes my grappling with reparations. Since there are fellow believers, sections of society, family and community who oppose reparations, I have also engaged with such texts and opinions. One such text is Ezekiel 18, where the Lord corrects those in exile who accuse him of punishing them for the sins of their fathers. Therefore, the Lord said to them:

The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them.
(Ezekiel 18:20, NIVUK)

Since there is no intergenerational culpability for past sins, how can reparations be claimed for past actions? A perspective that is often aired is that the passage of time makes it virtually impossible to calculate and pay reparations in any meaningful way.¹⁰

My ongoing consideration of such texts and views helps me to continually refine my understanding and practical outworking of reparations.

Opening questions

- › If you have always been favourably disposed to reparations or warmed to it through this study, which portions of Scripture have helped you reach that position?
- › If you are either ambivalent or opposed to the idea of reparations, which portions of Scripture do you look to support your stance?
- › How do you understand and answer texts and opinions that refute your stance for either position?
- › What are your first responses to the story of Zacchaeus and to James' denouncement of the rich concerning reparations?

¹⁰ Kevin DeYoung, 'Reparations: A Critical Theological Review', TGC, 22 April 2021, www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/reparations-a-critical-theological-review (accessed 29 August 2023).

CORE DISCUSSION

On the Lord's journey to Jerusalem, he encountered Zacchaeus as he passed through Jericho.

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.' And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'

Zacchaeus: geography, genealogy and global impact

Zacchaeus was a Jew, a son of Abraham, but he served the Roman Empire by collecting taxes for them. As a chief tax collector, he had worked his way up the ranks, showing himself adept at his task. Also, his position allowed him to take 'a cut of the commission from those who collected taxes for him'.¹¹

Being a supervisor of others collaborating with the Roman system would have made him even more reviled by his Jewish community.

Why did he take up such an ignominious role? Within the Roman Empire, as with the British Empire, individuals from the enslaved, occupied and oppressed population worked for the oppressor for a myriad of reasons, both willingly and through coercion.

¹¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: The NIV Application Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), p 478.

Throughout the British Empire, they practised divide and rule, a tactic first employed by some Roman conquerors.¹²

These conflicted histories make these matters much more complex, necessitating gracious and open listening to understand each other and respond well.

Commentary on texts

While Zacchaeus climbed the tree to see Jesus, ‘the decisive action, contrary to all that would be expected at the time, stemmed from Jesus’.¹³

By visiting and eating with Zacchaeus, the crowd regarded the Lord’s action as ‘tantamount to sharing in his sin’.¹⁴

Zacchaeus’s response to the Lord went well beyond what was required by the Law, which stipulated, ‘They must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day they present their guilt offering’ (Leviticus 6:5b NIVUK¹⁵).

By paying four times the amount, ‘He penalises himself with the standard required of rustlers’, as per Exodus 22:1: ‘If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it or sells it, he shall repay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.’¹⁶

However, no Old Testament Law requires him to give half of his goods to the poor. What prompted such an incredibly generous act? In *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair*, Kwon and Thompson cite Zacchaeus as a model for reparations, and in the notes make the following important observation:

12 Shashi Tharoor, *Inglorious Empire: What the British Did to India* (London: Penguin Random House UK, 2017), p 101.

13 Howard I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Exeter and Grand Rapids: The Paternoster Press and Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p 694.

14 Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p 697.

15 The NIVUK translation makes it clear that as one comes to be reconciled to God, one must take the necessary steps to repay the person one has sinned against.

16 Bock, *Luke*, p 479.

The predatory nature of the Roman Empire's system of taxation is well documented. Taxes in Judea where Zacchaeus lived and worked were a crippling economic burden for the overwhelming majority of the Judean population, most of whom lived on close to minimum subsistence. The total annual tax liability for small farmers (who had the double burden of Roman and Jewish taxes) has been estimated at half or more of all their wages. When overwhelmed by unpayable taxes and left unable to repay their creditors, these peasants would often lose not only their land but also their freedom; oftentimes they would be cast in the debtors' prisons or sold into slavery as a form of debt repayment.¹⁷

Perhaps it was Zacchaeus's knowledge of how he himself had enforced such penalties on his poor fellow Jews, thereby rendering their families landless and destitute with no one to provide for them, that prompted his generosity. The Lord commended his commitment because it was 'an indication that his heart recognised that a wrong needed acknowledging and fixing'.¹⁸

Through Jesus' extraordinary kindness to him, Zacchaeus received salvation from the Lord, which is evidenced by how he practically loved others, particularly those he had wronged. In Zacchaeus, we see the 'Golden Rule ... lived in conjunction with the greatest commandment', which is the 'liberating basis for personal and community life'.¹⁹

Before considering how to follow Zacchaeus' example to make reparations for the Transatlantic Slave Trade, it is helpful to consider some objections.

¹⁷ Duke L. Kwon and Gregory Thompson, *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Repair* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2021), p 233, note 10.

¹⁸ Bock, *Luke*, p 483.

¹⁹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), p 315.

OBJECTIONS TO ZACCHAEUS AS A ROLE MODEL FOR REPARATIONS

The passage of time makes reparations meaningless

Zacchaeus took *personal* responsibility to make reparation to those he had defrauded. However, if Zacchaeus had failed to pay reparations, should the third- or fourth-generation descendants of those he had defrauded demand reparation from contemporaneous descendants of Zacchaeus? In *Reparations*, Kwon and Thompson refer to John Hepburn, who made his case for reparation by referring to two sermons by John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691 to 1694, called ‘The Nature and Necessity of Restitution’ based on Luke 19:8-9. In these, Tillotson ‘define[d] *restitution* as “making Reparations or Satisfaction to another, for the Injuries we have done him,” and restoring “a Man to the good Condition, from which, contrary to Right and our Duty, we have removed from him”’.²⁰ However, Kevin DeYoung, in his review of *Reparations*, draws attention to Kwon and Thompson’s omission of the following comment by Tillotson:

One case very proper to be considered ... relates to this circumstance of time ... When the injury is too old that the right which the injured person had to reparation is reasonably presumed to be quitted and forsaken, then the obligation to satisfaction ceaseth and expires.²¹

Additionally, Tillotson states that to redress ancient wrongs could do more harm than good. Tillotson raises a practical objection on which DeYoung relies to largely downplay the need for reparations, but there is insufficient scriptural reflection on the matter.

Therefore, first, let us consider James 5:1-6:

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the labourers who mowed your

²⁰ Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, p 135.

²¹ DeYoung, ‘*Reparations: A Critical Theological Review*’, TGC, 22 April 2021.

fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

In James 5:1-3, we encounter the following stark statements:

The rich are not called to repentance but simply told to lament for God's unavoidable judgement that is coming upon them.²²

The wealth that they have accumulated and stored away will be destroyed and its destruction will speak against them. When wealth is hoarded rather than used for the welfare of others, that certainly invites God's judgement.²³

In James 5:4, we learn the key reason for such strong condemnation. Old Testament Law required that wages should be paid at the end of a day's work (Leviticus 19:13; Deuteronomy 24:14-15). The wealthy had fraudulently and deceitfully failed to pay those who had worked for them in their fields, which in Jewish literature amounted to murder.²⁴ Just as Abel's blood cried out to the Lord (Genesis 4:10), so the worker's unpaid wages cry out against the rich, as do the harvesters, and both these cries reach the Lord's ears.²⁵ Calling God 'the Lord of hosts' 'reminds the readers that the rich who trample them do not have all the power; the **Lord of hosts** is sovereign'.²⁶

Further condemnation follows regarding their luxurious self-indulgent lifestyle, such that 'the hardship they have inflicted on others is sharply contrasted with the softness of their own living', and 'they have abused their power in the perversion of justice' by condemning the righteous.²⁷

22 'Calvin's Commentaries: James 5', <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/calvin/james/5.htm> (accessed 29 August 2023).

23 'Calvin's Commentaries: James 5'; Harold S. Songer, 'Commentary on James', in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12 (London, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1973), p 132.

24 Songer, 'Commentary on James', p 132.

25 Songer, 'Commentary on James', p 132.

26 Songer, 'Commentary on James', p 132.

27 Sophie Laws, *The Epistle of James, Black's New Testament Commentaries* (London: A. and C. Black, 1980), pp 203-204.

Second, in the context of teaching about respect and imitation of human leaders, we read Hebrews 13:8: ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.’ The Lord is our true leader, who, unlike human leaders, is immutable in his nature and his ways.²⁸

Third, Isaiah 61:8a reads, ‘For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong;’ Psalm 33:5a reads, ‘He loves righteousness and justice,’ and Psalm 37:28a reads, ‘For the LORD loves justice.’

Justice and righteousness are integral to the nature and ways of God, and these texts reveal that he loves these qualities and hates wrongdoing. The cries of unpaid wages and harvesters, which reached the ears of the Lord throughout chattel slavery and subsequent years of injustice during Caribbean and African colonisation, do not and cannot ever cease nor expire in the Lord’s ears.²⁹

Since scripturally God’s desire for justice is eternal, practical difficulties in calculating and paying reparations can never negate its need. Additionally, in the eternal timeframe, the justice of God will unfold completely, and everyone, particularly recipients of unjustly acquired wealth, privilege and power, have to take the necessary steps to do justice by paying reparations.³⁰

Lack of intergenerational culpability makes reparations unjust

The second objection to consider arises from Ezekiel 18:20 (NIVUK): ‘The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent.’ Since there is an absence of intergenerational culpability for past sins, the call for reparations is in itself unjust. This and similar texts must be set alongside texts such as Exodus 20:5: ‘You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.’

28 Bruce B. Barton, Dave Veerman and Lina K. Taylor, *Life Application Bible Commentary: Hebrews* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1997), pp 135-136.

29 See page 43, footnote 20 - ‘*Reparations: A Critical Theological Review*’, TGC, 22 April 2021.

30 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p 289, with reference to C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) pp 144-154.



Champions of emancipation: Queen Nanny, Granny Nanny, or Nanny of the Maroons (c. 1686 – c. 1760), was an 18th-century leader of the Jamaican Maroons. She led a community of formerly enslaved Africans called the Windward Maroons. In the early 18th century, under the leadership of Nanny, the Windward Maroons fought a guerrilla war over many years against British authorities in the Colony of Jamaica in what became known as the First Maroon War.

Pastor John Piper helpfully illustrates that it is not a case of God's nature evolving from earlier to later parts of the Old Testament but that both perspectives are found within the canon of the Old Testament, as evident in Deuteronomy.³¹ Deuteronomy 5:9 repeats Exodus 20:5: 'I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,' and Deuteronomy 24:16 precedes Ezekiel 18:20, 'Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.'³²

³¹ John Piper, 'Does God "Visit the Sins of the Fathers on the Children"?', *Desiring God*, www.desiringgod.org/articles/does-god-visit-the-sins-of-the-fathers-on-the-children (accessed 29 August 2023).

³² Piper, 'Does God "Visit the Sins of the Fathers on the Children"?'

The key words in Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9 are that future generations of children who incur punishment for their father's sins are 'those who hate God', and Piper states that though Scripture does not tell us the mechanism, yet 'the fathers' sins become the children's sins'.³³

Many White British Christians will rebut this point by stating that they are neither slave traders nor slaveholders, and that their forebears, like William Wilberforce (Anglican) and William Knibb (Baptist) were instrumental in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery. However, Erickson's comment on Exodus 20:5 brings a helpful perspective to such a rebuttal. He states that God visiting 'the sins of parents on children ... should be taken as a declaration that sinful patterns of action and their consequences are transmitted from one generation to the next. Counsellors tell us that countless patterns of behaviour are repeated generation after generation.'³⁴

This repeating pattern is pertinent to the sin of racism for its perpetrators and victims. In *The Curse of Ham*, Goldenberg explores the role that race played in slavery in early Judaism, Christianity and Islam. He states that 'color did not matter' in the Bible and that in biblical and postbiblical sources, 'race did not matter'.³⁵ However, he also states that a 'Black slave trade' led to an 'association of Black with slave' and a subsequent change in the exegesis of Scripture through an erroneous 'etymology of Ham as "dark, brown, black",' and these factors contributed to 'the gradual introduction of blackness into the retelling of the biblical story, which was originally colorless'.³⁶ Goldenberg cites Kim Hall who 'showed how the colors black and white "become ... the conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of "self" and "other"'.³⁷ Furthermore, he cites Smedley who draws attention to how in the English language the word race itself 'was transformed ... from a mere classificatory term ... into a folk idea'.³⁸

33 Piper, 'Does God "Visit the Sins of the Fathers on the Children"?

34 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, p 654

35 Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2005), p 196.

36 Goldenberg, *The Curse*, pp 196-197.

37 Goldenberg, *The Curse*, p 199, citing Kim Hall, *Things of Darkness* (New York: Cornell University, 1995), p 4.

38 Goldenberg, *The Curse*, p 199, citing Audrey Smedley, *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview* (New York: Avalon Publishing, 2012), pp 6-7.

Therefore, White Western theology, sadly still considered to be normative and universal by Westerners and the Majority World³⁹, made a monumental exegetical error, which has inculcated our minds and continues to have sinful consequences with respect to ‘race’ within the Body of Christ and wider society.⁴⁰

The sin of racism, which either preceded or developed alongside slavery, has been cascading down the generations for more than 500 years, with the Western church playing a pivotal role. Current generations are as culpable as the past of racism, as evidenced by innumerable reports in the news media virtually daily.⁴¹ This sin significantly contributed to the industrialisation of Britain. While economic historians always dispute the amounts involved, Morgan concludes that ‘slave trade and slavery were central ... to the production of staple crops for European consumption’, that the labour was ‘enforced bondage based on racial discrimination’ which ‘produced profits for investors tied to the mother country’. ‘A great deal of wealth was generated’, which was ‘funnelled back to Britain’.⁴²

Therefore, Britain and other Western nations are culpable for perpetuating their forebears’ sin of racism, which led to significant levels of ill-gotten wealth, power and privilege, through which benefits still accrue today.

39 Those who are often referred to as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) are referred to as the Majority World.

40 This section citing the work of David Goldenberg and matters relating to mindset below are edited versions from an essay by Sivakumar Rajagopalan, ‘Standpoint Theory as a Tool to Understand Baptist Resistance to Owning the Apology and as a Tool to Own and En-Flesh the Apology’, in Anthony G. Reddie, Wale Hudson-Roberts and Gale Richard (eds), *Journeying to Justice: Contributions to the Baptist Tradition across the Atlantic* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2017), pp 110-123.

41 While I was writing this study, on 15 August 2023 it was reported that retired Metropolitan police officers shared appalling racist comments via WhatsApp.

42 Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery, Atlantic Trade and the British Economy 1600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp 94-95.

The relevance of the legacy of racism for reparations

In addition to the sinful accrual of economic benefits, there is an even more sinister accrual. Neill notes that by 1600, ‘Europeans are beginning to think that their civilization is the only civilization in the world that is worthy of the name, and to develop the strange complex of the superior people.’⁴³ The critical nature of mindset can never be overstated. Racism’s effect on White people ‘is what ... Harvard psychologist Maureen Walker has termed “internalized dominance” – the inbred assumption among whites that superiority over people of color is our birthright.’⁴⁴ Drawing on the work of Larkin and Walker, Katz explains, ‘This attitude infects all interactions with people of color and influences our immediate reaction to their competence, talents and achievements.’⁴⁵

It follows that the mindset of those subjected to more than 500 years of racist subjugation, oppression, murder and categorisation as either subhuman or inferior can be ‘internalised inferiority’ for many. We see this in Scripture. In Numbers 13, we read of 12 Israelite men being sent to explore the land of Canaan. Though Caleb reported that they could take possession of it, ten said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are ... And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them’ (Numbers 13:31, 33). While this text is used to teach about Israel’s disobedience to God, despite God’s goodness to them, it is also important to note their mindset and self-perception: to themselves and others, they seemed like grasshoppers.

Therefore, before people can willingly follow Zacchaeus’ example of monetary reparations, there first needs to be a change in mindset, and Zacchaeus offers a helpful way to do so.

43 Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions, 2nd edition* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p 150.

44 Judith H.Katz, *White Awareness: Handbook for Anti-Racism Training* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 2003), p 11.

45 Katz, *White Awareness*, p 11, citing W. Larkin and M. Walker, *Internalized Dominance and Workplace Dynamics* [Workshop handout] (Washington DC: National Multicultural Institute).

Zacchaeus' change of heart and mind

While materially wealthy, Zacchaeus recognised his spiritual poverty. The Lord said he came to 'seek and save the lost' (Luke 19:10), but we see Zacchaeus seeking the Lord. He took steps to properly see the Lord, unencumbered by the jostling crowd, to satisfy his spiritual hunger and thirst. We do not naturally think of Zacchaeus as being "*anawim*", the pious poor', yet that is what he was, and, 'To such spiritually open folks, Jesus proclaims release, recovery of sight and freedom from oppression.'⁴⁶ When Zacchaeus physically and spiritually received the Lord into his home and heart, he experienced the year of the Lord's favour with 'the recognition that he supplies what we really need to release us from perspectives in life that chain us down and cause us to mistreat others'.⁴⁷

The Lord spoke of salvation coming to Zacchaeus's house, which may 'be linked with the salvation of households in Acts'.⁴⁸ We can surmise that while his family would have encountered a financial diminution in their standard of living, they would no longer be reviled as relatives of a traitor and collaborator. Similarly, many of the poor and those he had defrauded would have welcomed his reparation payment, but for those who had lost relatives either directly or indirectly through Zacchaeus's sins, it would have been a bittersweet experience. Yet Zacchaeus, his household, his victims and the poor experienced a greater measure of the Lord's life in all its fullness.

⁴⁶ Bock, *Luke*, p 136.

⁴⁷ Bock, *Luke*, p 136.

⁴⁸ Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, p 698.

FEATURED VOICES

JOURDAN ANDERSON

‘On August 7, 1865, former slave Jourdan Anderson ... dictated a letter to his former owner, Colonel Patrick Anderson’, setting out the terms on which he would return, as per Colonel Anderson’s request, to work on the farm.⁴⁹ (The letter is available online.)⁵⁰

The letter is amusing, extremely sad and filled with justice. Jourdan Anderson worked for Colonel Anderson for 32 years, and his wife worked for 20 years. Based on this, he makes an audacious request that they be paid \$11,800, plus interest minus certain expenses Colonel Anderson had incurred on their behalf. On this basis, he is willing to ‘forget and forgive old scores’.⁵¹ He states, ‘We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense.’⁵²

Very sadly, he asks if his now grown-up younger daughters would be safe, given the sexual violence that his older daughters had faced at the hands of Colonel Anderson’s sons, which was a common occurrence on plantations.

49 Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, p 11.

50 ‘Letter from Jourdan Anderson: A Freedman Writes His Former Master’, Facing History and Ourselves, www.facinghistory.org/resource-library/letter-jourdon-anderson-freedman-writes-his-former-master (accessed 29 August 2023).

51 Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, p 13.

52 Kwon and Thompson, *Reparations*, p 13.

Questions

- › Today, should Colonel Anderson's living descendants, who are not slaveholders, pay reparations to Jourdan Anderson's living descendants, who are not slaves? Is Jourdan Anderson's request to be paid for his work still ringing in the ears of the Lord Almighty, and are the wages that Colonel Anderson did not pay crying out against his descendants?
- › From your faith perspective, how do you feel reading this letter? Are there any aspects of Jourdan Anderson's spirituality to which you are drawn? Please share your reasons.
- › Colonel Anderson's ancestors emigrated to America, probably of their own volition, from a White Christian European nation, while Jourdan Anderson's ancestors were forcibly transported there, with their original African name and culture permanently erased. In this shared history, who is living by the Golden Rule and greatest commandments? How do you think this has come about?
- › Having tracked some of the Colonel's relatives, historian Raymond Winbush shared this at a reparations conference held in 2006: 'What's amazing is that the current relatives of Colonel Anderson are still angry at Jourdan for not coming back.'⁵³
- › What is your response to this? How may Erickson's comment on Exodus 20:5 help?

⁵³ 'Colonel Patrick Henry Anderson', Our Family History and Ancestry, Bernethy-Eby-Scribner-Hord www.bernethy-eby-scribner.com/getperson.php?personID=I272008486865&tree=Eby (accessed 29 August 2023)

LAURA TREVELYAN

Ms Trevelyan is a former BBC journalist whose family has apologised for their ownership of 1,000 involuntarily enslaved Africans. In February 2023, her family travelled to Grenada to apologise, and she announced £100,000 in reparations. She will be campaigning for reparative justice and is seeking to work with other families whose ancestors owned enslaved people in the Caribbean and want to make reparations. (Further details can be found online.)



Champions of emancipation: Harriet Elisabeth Beecher Stowe (1811 – 1896) was an American author and abolitionist. She came from the religious Beecher family and wrote the popular novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Depicting the harsh conditions experienced by enslaved African Americans, the book reached an audience of millions in the United States and in Great Britain, energizing anti-slavery forces in the American North, while provoking widespread anger in the South.

Questions

- › How do you feel about exploring your family ancestry to find out if any owned enslaved people?
- › If you discover that they did, would you be willing to apologise, and, if you can, pay reparations?

SUMMARY

Foundational to Zacchaeus's change of mindset and subsequent payment of reparations was his humble seeking after the Lord, which the Lord willingly and generously met. Like Zacchaeus, a continual awareness of our spiritual poverty, rooted in humility, will give us open hearts and minds to receive the Spirit's empowerment to take the journey towards changed hearts and minds that will hopefully make payment of reparations a reality both personally and as historic churches.

Through writing this study, I have embraced the English Standard Version Anglicised translation: '*recovering* of sight to the blind' (Luke 4:18). In my personal grappling with reparations, it conveys an ongoing lifelong process of the Lord opening my eyes to how I must continually recover from caste prejudice to meaningfully be more just. I am sure that for Zacchaeus, the flush of salvation joy will have given way to his eyes continuing to be opened to hidden sinful habits that enabled him to be an adept extortionist, of which he would have had to repent and do justice. Therefore, a continual spirit of humility is needed to receive such painful admonition from the Lord as he helps us see ourselves more clearly so that we may repent, do justice and be conformed to his image for his glory.

Questions for personal reflection and small group study

- Having engaged with the texts and views in this study, please indicate below where you now stand regarding reparations using the scale below? What has led you either to remain where you were or move in either direction?
- Are there any aspects of the Zacchaeus story that lead you to reassess your response to the call for reparations? Please share why this is the case.
- Are there any aspects of James’ denouncement of the rich and God’s eternal character of justice that lead you to reassess your response to the call for reparations? Please share why this is the case.
- What contribution(s) of others in the group have helped you explore this issue?
- How do you respond to the statement: ‘Therefore, the sin of racism, which either preceded or developed alongside slavery, has been cascading down the generations for more than 500 years, with the Western church playing a pivotal role’?
- Are there particular portions of Scripture or views you would like to study to further your understanding of the issue?
- What practical step do you hope to take because of this study?

◀ Against

Neutral

For ▶

-5 -4 -3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3 4 5

SESSION FOUR:

REPARATIONS – ATONEMENT, RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE BY ELESAH LOUIS

INTRODUCTION

This last study session considers how we can understand reparations/ restitution in relation to the Gospel – the good news of access to undeserved justification that binds us together as brothers and sisters in Christ. As mentioned before, Christians can be divided on how they view the Gospel – is it limited to personal salvation (our soul and body) that can have influence through the righteous shape of our living, or does it permeate throughout society, redeeming these societies – a social gospel?

As you continue to discuss this, in this session we will look at some key scriptures about justice, righteousness and atonement that may help develop a blueprint for how we might respond to the discussion about reparations from a Christian, biblical perspective.

Task: Review and discuss what you have learned so far, new ideas, and challenges to and from the resource. What are your opinions on the cases being made so far?

Opening questions

- › How do we understand righteousness and justice?
- › On what grounds do we perform justice in the world?
- › How do you understand Jesus' death on the cross?

CORE DISCUSSION

Atonement, or *Kippur*, which means to pay a debt and to purify, was a requirement of the Hebrews in the Old Testament – specifically Leviticus 1–7. Sacrifices were required to pay for sins so the people could remain in right standing with God. The New Testament records how Christ, the Messiah, enacts *Kippur*, the ultimate sacrifice to God, taking on the guilt and shame of our sins so that we can stand in righteousness and be accepted by God despite our inevitable failures. Yeshua covers the debt that we owe to God for our wrongdoing; he makes restitution, rendering and restoring to God what is his, his beloved and unique creation – those who bear his image:

Romans 5:6-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die – but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Christ satisfies a principle or a law that seems to transcend the Mosaic Laws, a seemingly eternal law that wrongs must always be put right, that debts must be paid. *Restitution* (to make peace, restore, make safe, compensate, recompense) is a central feature of Christ’s atoning act on the cross and leads us to reconciliation with God the Father.

Irenaeus, an early church father, a Greek, considers the plunder we read about in Exodus 12 as directly related to our salvation and justifies the seemingly forceful acquisition of goods on a few counts:

Those, again, who cavil and find fault because the people did, by God's command, upon the eve of their departure, take vessels of all kinds and raiment from the **Egyptians**, and so went away, from which [spoils], too, the tabernacle was constructed in the wilderness, prove themselves **ignorant** of the righteous dealings of **God**, and of His dispensations; as also the **presbyter** remarked: For if God had not accorded this in the typical exodus, no one could now be saved in our **true** exodus; that is, in the **faith** in which we have been established, and by which we have been brought forth from among the number of the **Gentiles**.⁵⁴

Irenaeus links this form of reparations as necessary because of the symbolism and foreshadowing of the Exodus account that points to the restitution that the salvation for all brings through Christ. He also posits that Egypt is in debt to the Hebrews because God used Joseph to protect them from famine.

So how did the Israelites act unjustly, if out of many things they took a few, when they might have possessed much property if they had not served them [the Egyptians]? They might then have gone forth wealthy; whereas they received only an insignificant payment for their heavy servitude and went away poor. (4:30,2)⁵⁵

Isn't it interesting that centuries later, Jews and Christians are arguing about the morality of exchanging goods between the Egyptians and the Hebrews? How such a pivotal moment for the people of God affects how we understand salvation and justice? It brings us back to what God said, that the Passover was to remain a statue *for ever*.

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, (2016) *Irenaeus Against Heresies*. [eBook] Aeterna Press

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, (2016) *Irenaeus Against Heresies*. [eBook] Aeterna Press

JUSTICE

God’s justice is complex, and while people often think of feeding the poor and looking after the orphans and widows – and now quite topical is equality of outcome in the various corners of first-world society – the responsibility to compensate for wrongdoing between the church and the descendants of those whom the church was complicit in enslaving is still largely contested.

Tim Keller, a well-known and widely read theologian, outlines different types of justice that we can enact as people of God in society: generosity, equality, advocacy and responsibility.⁵⁶

On responsibility, he reflects on the complexity of being responsible for our sins as individuals and the corporate and institutional sins in which we are complicit. While many believe that we are only responsible and judged for our individual choices, do our individual choices not engage and affect the sins of our societies?

Jeremiah 22:3-5

Thus says the Lord: Do justice and righteousness, and deliver from the hand of the oppressor him who has been robbed. And do no wrong or violence to the resident alien, the fatherless, and the widow, nor shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed obey this word, then there shall enter the gates of this house kings who sit on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their servants and their people. But if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that this house shall become a desolation.

Delivering the oppressed (the one who has been robbed) from the hand of the oppressor calls us outside our personal issues, struggles and circumstances to engage in the issues of others.

⁵⁶ Timothy Keller, ‘Justice in the Bible’, *Life in the Gospel*, quarterly.gospelinlife.com/justice-in-the-bible/#:~:text=Biblical%20justice%20requires%20that%20every,of%20any%20other%20social%20category (accessed 29 August 2023).

Do we not see this example with Christ? According to Jeremiah and what we have witnessed through Christ, the call to righteousness upon receiving personal salvation should not only have an impact on those around us, but also transform how we live. As this resource looks at the responsibility of church bodies, made up of individuals who consider themselves the Body of Christ and organised into man-made pods of organised church, how does our individual righteousness affect the actions of our organisation? Is the righteousness that we have accessed undeservedly not offended by the guilt of our organisations? Can we consider our organisation blameless because the individuals who make it up consider themselves justified by grace?

Task: Read Romans 12 together.

RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE IN THE EVERYDAY

The letter to Romans is written to Christians living in Rome, some Jews and some Gentiles converted by the good news. The Apostle Paul deals with various issues, such as persecution and in-house tensions. Paul roots his encouragement and instruction by unpacking Jesus’ death on the cross – redemption and restitution for all. He instructs the Christians in Rome about living in righteousness and justice in the everyday – in a hostile environment. In chapter 13, Paul instructs regarding ways of living honourably on the matter of a person’s sins of the flesh and as a subject in wider society. He begins with an instruction to submit to the nation’s authorities, a complicated task amid persecution. Here, he is suggesting that God is ultimately in control (beyond our feelings and experiences), and so also is the principle of paying what is due (verse 7).

Render, Pay apodidomi – ἀποδίδωμι **apodídomi**, ap-od-eeed’-o-mee; from **G575** and **G1325**; to give away, i.e. up, over, back, etc. (in various applications): – deliver (again), give (again), (re-)pay(-ment be made), perform, recompense, render, requite, restore, reward, sell, yield.⁵⁷

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet’, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Paul also speaks to relationships with one another, to owe nothing to one another but love as a fulfilment of the Law. Having peace between one another is an essential part of working together as the Body of Christ, but it is also symbolic of the peace Christ has made for us with the Father and the righteousness that we stand in as his heirs. When thinking about the division and strife that the conversation of righteousness brings, in light

⁵⁷ Romans 13:7, *Blue Letter Bible*, www.blueletterbible.org/esv/rom/13/1/t_conc_1059007 (accessed 29 August 2023).

of debts that are owed, offence that has been enacted and the legacies of the neglect and denial of restitution to the oppressed (the oppressors received restitution), what does the call to peace look like? To right the wrongs of today and yesterday – to, as stewards, hold our human-made organisations accountable?

Amending our perspective

- › Who is accountable? White people generally? Only the people who were involved in slavery? Their descendants? The Body of Christ? Human-made denominations that we as Christians have inherited or joined and now steward?
- › Is the Body of Christ on trial or earthly church organisations who have social, legal and political engagement and participate in society. Are they subject to the laws of the land?
- › Is it possible to think of the conversation about reparations as a historic issue if the debt to the British Government that borrowed money to pay the enslavers was only paid off in 2015? This included contribution via tax from descendants of those enslaved.
- › Many people will argue that Christians should simply forgive and move on, forgive and be forgiven. Yet does forgiveness rid one of a legal responsibility? Are we as Christians never to engage a social issue legally, to seek compensation as an injured party? To never connect crime with consequence?
- › Should the oppressed be pressed to forgive and not receive any justice? Should the oppressor always be allowed to shirk responsibility under the act of forgiveness?
- › Or should we hold our organised church bodies accountable the way others have held businesses accountable?
- › Do we equate our organised church bodies as the Body of Christ? Is that why many feel reluctant to consider responsibility?

SUMMARY

The fulness of restitution/reparation is fully revealed within the good news of Christ – the revelation to both Jews and Gentiles that our sinful selves could not ‘make good’, yet God’s redemption plan ensures that payment is made to cover the sins we commit and the broken state we are in because of the sin that entered through Adam (Romans 5:12-14). We see the system in the Old Testament of animal sacrifices satisfied when Christ performs the ultimate sacrifice (personal sin) and demonstrates the blueprint for reconciliation, peace and righteousness through justice, which includes national and or institutional restitution (corporate sin).

Romans 14:19

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Questions

- Do you believe that reparation/restitution should be understood in relation to the Gospel of Christ?
- What does it mean to be a light in the world?
- Do you think certain European/American church institutions stand guilty for having not made restitution?
- Do you think the church (broadly speaking) is selective in its civic responsibility and engagement on social issues?
- If a letter were to be written to the complicit churches in the style of the letters to the seven churches in the Book of Revelation on the matter of historical evils with residual gain and social, what might it say?



Champions of emancipation: Olaudah Equiano (c. 1745 – 1797), known for most of his life as Gustavus Vassa, was a writer and abolitionist. According to his memoir, he was from the village of Essaka in modern southern Nigeria. Enslaved as a child in West Africa, he was shipped to the Caribbean and sold to a Royal Navy officer. He purchased his freedom in 1766. As a freedman in London, Equiano supported the British abolitionist movement, in the 1780s becoming one of its leading figures.

Isaiah 61:1-4

The Year of the LORD's Favour

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor;
he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour,
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
to grant to those who mourn in Zion –
to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit;
that they may be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified.
They shall build up the ancient ruins;
they shall raise up the former devastations;
they shall repair the ruined cities,
the devastations of many generations.

CONCLUDING WORDS

BY BISHOP MIKE ROYAL, GENERAL SECRETARY,
CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND



‘We Will Repay’ is a comprehensive, biblically based study around the principle of reparations. Written from a British perspective it provides a vital theological backdrop to enable intelligent and objective conversations to take place around reparations. This text puts to bed ignorant comments, lazy sound bites and ill-informed attitudes around the nature of reparations and its relevance today particularly in relation to the African/ African Caribbean Transatlantic Chattel Slave Trade and the lived experience of those still living with the legacy of the slave trade.

I am looking forward to directing church leaders, theologians, and Christian thinkers to read this text before engaging in conversation on reparations. It will certainly separate out the time wasters from those who wish to seriously engage. In his 1968 speech entitled ‘Remain Awake Through the Great Revolution’, Revd Dr Martin Luther King Jnr states that “the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice”. ‘We Will Repay’ bends that arc! I commend the work of its contributors and would encourage people to engage with it near and far.

In a British context this subject is an uncomfortable truth, close to home. Unlike Germany, who fully came to terms with their history around the Jewish Holocaust and paid reparations, Britain has never fully faced up to its role in the Transatlantic Chattel Slave Trade. As someone once remarked to me, Britain threw the kitchen sink at the slave trade, and benefited enormously. The money accumulated from the slave trade fuelled the Industrial Revolution. The compensation given to Slave Traders in the 1830’s was only recently fully paid up by the British Taxpayer in 2015! Repair to the enslaved peoples and those impacted by its legacy was never considered. That moment has finally come. I commend this Bible study to every reader.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REVD DIANE WATTS,
BAPTIST UNION OF GREAT BRITAIN



In November 2007 the Baptist Union Council **made a resolution** that acknowledged our share in and benefit from Britain’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade. Out of the resolution came a commitment to develop ways of promoting racial justice across our Union. We have had much time in the intervening period to reflect on the practical outworking of this apology and how to resource church communities as they consider its implications in their own contexts as well as for the wider Baptist movement.

We are delighted to be able to work with *Churches Together in Great Britain and Ireland* and *Racial Justice Advocacy Forum* to support these seminal Bible Studies on reparations. This is a great opportunity to take time to study Scripture, to reflect and to discuss together. As we talk with one another and seek justice, it is vital we turn to God’s Word to establish a Scriptural foundation for action. There are many opinions and on-going conversations on the topic of reparations; we believe the biblical testimony will guide and lead us as we listen carefully and step forward.

The contributors to this resource have each brought a range of Scriptures to us for thought, study and discussion. We are so grateful for all the hard work that has gone into making this resource available to churches and we pray that they will help us as we strive to follow Jesus who says, ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.’

DR NICOLA BRADY, GENERAL SECRETARY, CHURCHES TOGETHER IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND



The ecumenical work we do as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) calls us to focus on reconciliation and healing of relationships as we strive for the unity that is Christ's dream for us (Jn 17:21).

Gathering as Christians of different denominations, traditions, ethnicities and cultures, we explore together what it means to respond to that call to unity in the circumstances of today: reflecting on our past and examining the challenges of the present, in the hope of a better future for all.

Our experience teaches us that the work of reconciliation is about restoring relationships through justice. It is challenging and costly work, but necessary if we are to face the challenges of the future as a united global human family. Slavery, in its cruel denial of the dignity and rights of some for the profit of others, is undeniably one of the greatest barriers to that unity today. The legacy of that stripping of dignity and rights casts a shadow that extends over generations. Increasing numbers of Christians are calling for the Church to show leadership by acknowledging and making reparation for the failure to defend the rights and dignity of those who were enslaved, and for complicity in that exploitation. This is necessary both in terms of what we owe to those who have suffered and for the credibility of the Church as it seeks to be a witness for justice in the challenges we face today, not least that of modern slavery.

CTBI is grateful for the opportunity to partner with our colleagues in the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum to share this resource which we hope will help to nurture and grow those conversations that are already happening across the Church, bringing the guiding light of faith, as conveyed in Scripture, to our reflections on troubling issues that continue to divide people and inhibit human flourishing. We are very grateful to the editor, Dr Eleasha Louis, and to all the contributors, for their very thoughtful and detailed contributions to this resource. We look forward to building on this dialogue to strengthen our collective response and witness on this issue into the future.

CONTRIBUTORS

REVD KUMAR RAJAGOPALAN

Kumar is a first-generation immigrant from Chennai, S. India. As a young teenager he rejected Hinduism to embrace atheism when his Brahmin caste enabled him to experience unearned caste privilege and power. Through the study of chemistry, Kumar accepted the existence of God, and came to faith in Christ in 1985. His favourite text is Galatians 3:28, ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.’



Following training for Baptist ministry he served in local pastorate, and from 2003 to 2018 served as regional minister for racial justice with the London Baptist Association. Throughout this tenure he emphasised that racial justice is integral to mission because we can only preach a Gospel of reconciliation with credibility if we first practise the Gospel of reconciliation as Christians.

Kumar is passionate about politics, history, justice, curry and cricket, proudly failing the Tebbit test when India play England. He is married to Georgina from Northern Ireland and they live in Enfield where he serves as minister of Totteridge Road Baptist Church.

ELEASAH LOUIS PHD

Eleasah is a theologian, researcher and resource developer with a PhD from Canterbury Christ Church University in the Department for Religion and Theology.



Previous to this, Eleasah read her MA in Christian Faith and Practice at Spurgeon's College in South London. Eleasah's research focuses on Afroasiatic Diasporic Religions (Black Bible-reading Religions) such as Rastafari, The Nation of Islam, the (Black) Hebrew Israelites and the Holy Qubtic Church and methods of decolonisation for Christians and Churches in Britain.

Currently, Eleasah is consulting for Christian and church organisations, delivering webinars and short courses and contributing to various academic projects, focusing on developing an anti-racist church by putting decolonisation into practice.

Recent projects include editing The Sam Sharpe Lectures 2012–2022 (2023) with SCM; *Visions of Colour*, an anti-racist professional development programme for Baptist ministers in Britain for the Baptist Union of Great Britain; and *Racism and Anti-racism in Christian Educational Material for Children* on behalf of Birkbeck University for the Council for World Mission. Eleasah also provides academic support for The Sam Sharpe Project and the Racial Justice Advocacy Forum.

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'Jesus as Dread'; The 'Dread' Christ is one who sides with all oppressed people in their struggle against anything denying them full humanity. From 'The Christ We Share' [USPG 2012]




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