



UNIT 3: HUNGER IS A NATIONAL ISSUE

The Fast That I Choose

A Bible Study On Hunger

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF GOVERNMENT

Government affects our lives every single day. Government tells us how fast we may drive. It regulates commercial enterprise. It provides for our common defense and protects us from domestic strife. Yet rarely do we consider government's responsibility from a biblical perspective.

Developing a Christian view of government is complicated by the fact that the Bible does not give an exhaustive treatment of government. Nonetheless, from what the scriptures do say about government we can come to some conclusions about its authority and responsibility.

The Bible teaches that government is instituted by God and that its authority comes from God (Romans 13:1). However, the Bible also makes clear that with governmental authority comes certain responsibilities. For example, Psalm 72 is a prayer of guidance and support for the king of Israel. It outlines how God expects rulers (governmental powers) to exercise their power. They are to:

- Judge the people with righteousness
- Judge the poor with justice
- Defend the cause of the poor
- Give deliverance to the needy
- Crush the oppressor

The Bible also makes clear that government is responsible for protecting its citizens from wrongdoers (Romans 13:3-4) and for treating all its citizens justly (Deuteronomy 16:18-20).

With responsibility comes accountability. Just as the authority of government comes from God, the Bible teaches that governments are accountable to God for how they live up to their responsibilities. One of the key messages brought by the prophets over and over again was that God was not pleased by how the governmental authorities treated the poor. For example, the prophet Isaiah had a gloomy message for the "elders and the princes" of his time:

*The LORD enters into judgment
with the elders and princes of his people:
It is you who have devoured the vineyard;
the spoil of the poor is in your houses.
What do you mean by crushing my people,
by grinding the face of the poor? says the
Lord God of hosts. (Isaiah 3:14-15)*

ABUNDANCE IN AMERICA

It is almost impossible for Americans to grasp just how wealthy they are in comparison to the rest of the world. Abundance is the norm in the United States, and our abundance can lead to us getting caught in the trap of believing that no matter how much we have, it is never enough.

Every day we are bombarded by the messages of our consumer-oriented culture. These messages constantly tell us that we need more, we need bigger, we need better, we need newer, we need to buy this, we need to own that. Our society tells us over and over again that it is not enough to keep up with the Joneses. Instead, we are supposed to want the Joneses to have to keep up with us!

Is it any wonder that Americans accumulate "stuff" on a scale unprecedented in the history of the world? In fact, it is common for us to accumulate so much "stuff" in our houses that it overflows into our garages and we end up parking our cars on the streets. And once our garages are filled up with "stuff" we rent storage space to hold the overflow!

The abundance of food in America is no different than our abundance of "stuff." Most Americans eat for pleasure, not because we are really hungry. And because we eat for enjoyment, we are extraordinarily picky. That is one reason why each year 96 billion pounds of food available for human consumption in the United States is lost at the retail, consumer, and foodservice levels.¹ The annual value of this lost food is estimated at around \$31 billion. But the main point is that roughly 49 million people could have been fed annually by those lost resources.²

What is truly amazing is that the food waste figures just cited do not include losses at the farm level. On American farms a huge amount of food is produced but not harvested because of market forces or for cosmetic reasons. By some estimates, as much as 20% of commercially grown produce in the U.S. does not make it to the marketplace.³



UNIT 3: HUNGER IS A NATIONAL ISSUE

PURPOSE OF THIS UNIT:

- TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF GOVERNMENT.
- TO RECOGNIZE THE ABUNDANCE WITH WHICH GOD HAS BLESSED AMERICA.
- TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF HUNGER IN AMERICA.



*The LORD rises to argue his case;
he stands to judge the peoples.*

Isaiah 3:13

HUNGER IN AMERICA

Just as it is difficult for Americans to grasp how wealthy we are, it is difficult for us to recognize the reality of hunger in America. For some reason we are much more inclined to accept that there are 6.7 million people with a net worth over a million dollars in America than we are to accept that there are 36 million Americans who struggle daily to get enough to eat.⁴

For a number of reasons hunger in America is quite invisible. For instance, seldom does anyone starve in the U.S. That results in America's hunger problem not carrying a sense of urgency. Also, when compared to the impoverished in places like Somalia, America's poor seem to be pretty well off. Stereotypes help render America's hungry invisible, as well. When we think of a person in the U.S. who is hungry we tend to think of an unkempt homeless person with a drug or alcohol problem. When we think of the poor in America, we also often think of those living in the inner city. Neither group garners much attention.

While hunger in America might be nearly invisible, it is also pervasive. Every day there are American mothers who must choose between feeding their children or buying medicine or clothing for them. Every day people in the U.S. must struggle to get enough for their families to eat. Every day parents must sacrifice nutrition for volume when feeding their families.

That people go hungry while an incredible amount of food is wasted in the U.S. is nothing less than a justice issue. If God holds nations accountable for "giving deliverance to the needy" and "defending the cause of the poor" we must certainly wonder how God will judge America.



Make sure to have the class materials recommended on page 7 ready for Unit 3.

UNIT 3 OUTLINE:

The two lessons of Unit 3 focus our attention on hunger as a national issue. The first lesson looks at the question, "What are the priorities of a just government?" The second asks, "What is the key to the godly use of power?"

In the first lesson, we will look at what the Bible identifies as the authority, responsibilities, and functions of government. We will also consider the reality of hunger in the midst of the abundance in America.

The second lesson examines what the Bible says about the exercise of political and economic power. We conclude by dealing with the issue of judgment as it relates to nations.

Hunger In America

- In 2001, the number of Americans who were food insecure, or hungry, or at risk of hunger, was 33.6 million. In 2007 that number rose to 46.2 million.
- 3.9 percent of U.S. households experience hunger. Some people in these households frequently skip meals or eat too little, sometimes going without food for a whole day. A total of 11.9 million people, including 3.7 million children, live in these homes
- The U.S. Conference of Mayors reported in 2008 that requests for emergency food assistance increased 18% over the previous year. They also found that 59 percent of those requesting emergency food assistance were members of families with children. Fifteen percent of those requesting assistance were elderly. High fuel costs, housing costs, low-paying jobs, unemployment, and the economic downturn led the list of reasons contributing to the rise.
- *Feeding America*, the nation's largest network of food banks, reports that 25.3 million people turned to the agencies they serve in 2006. Thirty-six percent were from working families.

SOURCE: See note 5

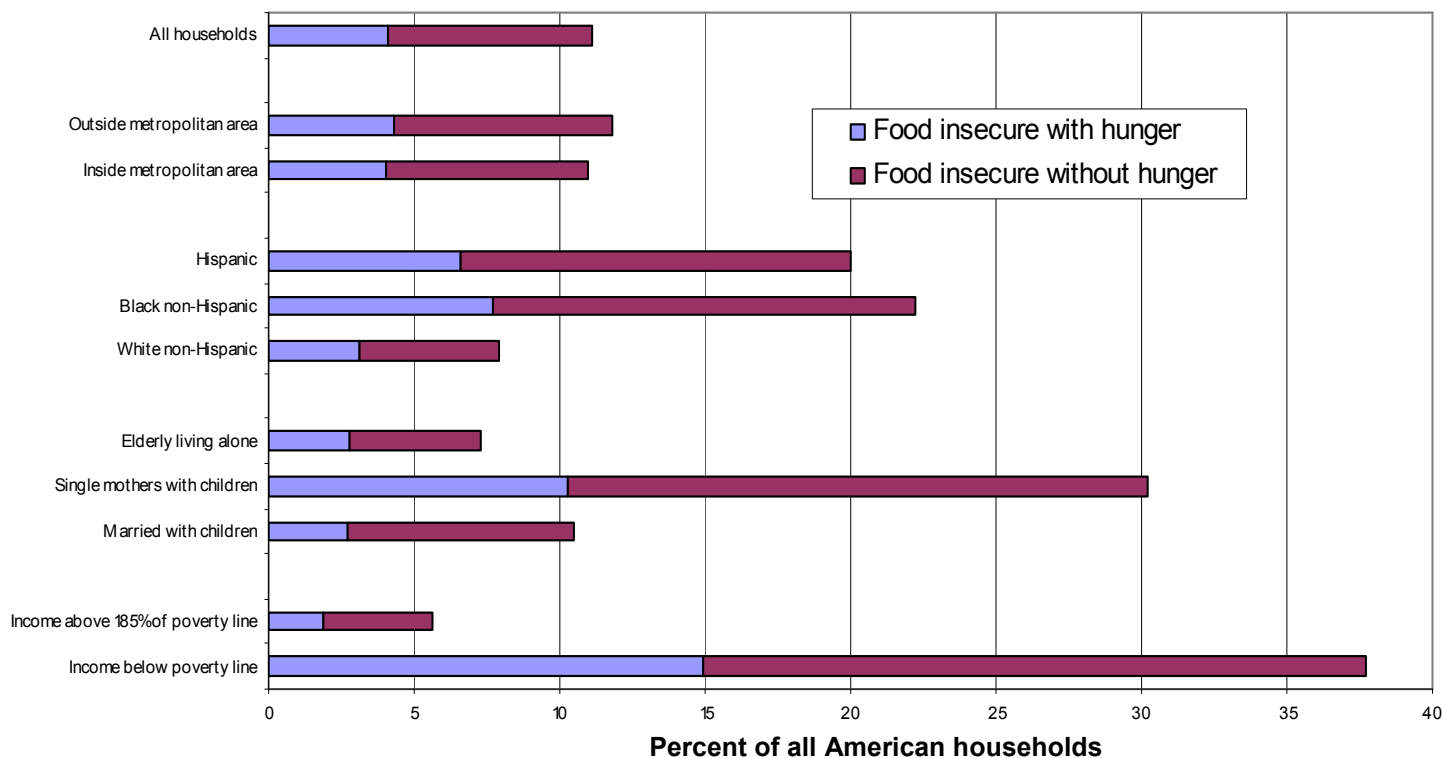


**Who Experienced
Food Insecurity
America's Spending
Priorities**

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Who experienced food insecurity in 2007?



SOURCE: Economic Research Service, USDA, 2008 (ERR-66)

America's Spending Priorities

Ice cream products: _____

Candy: _____

Motion pictures: _____

Restaurants: _____

DVD rentals & purchases: _____

Soft drinks: _____

Pet products: _____

Salty snack foods: _____

Candy: _____

Weight control products: _____

Video/computer games: _____

Music: _____



Lesson 1 WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES OF A JUST GOVERNMENT?

UNIT 3: *Hunger is A National Issue*

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TEACHING LESSON ONE

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Point out that in the United States millions of people woke up hungry today.
- Conclude with reading **Isaiah 3:13-15**.
- Collect the offering.

INTRODUCTION

- Remind the class that thus far we have looked at hunger as a God issue and as a global issue. Tell them that today we will start to look at hunger as a national issue.
- Point out that to recognize hunger as a national issue requires that we first understand the biblical view of government.
- Explain that three concepts come into play when considering the biblical view of government:
 - Authority: The legitimate power and resources to accomplish responsibilities.
 - Responsibility: An obligation or duty.
 - Accountability: Subject to being called to account for results in meeting or failing to meet one's responsibilities.

GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY

- Ask the class where, according to the Bible, does government receive its authority? Allow the class to discuss this question for a few minutes.
- Have someone read **Romans 13:1-2** to find the answer.
 - Paul asserts that ultimate authority belongs to God alone.
 - Paul also points out that government authority is delegated by God.
 - **TEACHING NOTES:**
 - ◇ Remember the concept of "authority" above.
 - ◇ Some students may question whether God grants authority to evil governments such as Nazi Germany. However, the government Paul was referring to was the Roman Empire. It was certainly a harsh, corrupt government. Yet Paul says that even its authority came from God.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY

- Ask the class what, according to the Bible, are the responsibilities of government? Allow the class to discuss this question for a few minutes.
- Point out that **Psalms 72** may have been a coronation anthem for Israel's kings. In it we can find an idealized list of responsibilities the monarchy—government—had.
- Divide the class into three groups. Have each group go through **Psalms 72** and list the specific responsibilities of the king.
- Have each group share its list. Record the information on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint that all can see.
- Have someone read aloud **Deuteronomy 16:18-20**. Ask what government responsibility is identified in this scripture. Add answers to the previous list.

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

- Ask the class who, according to the Bible, is government ultimately responsible to? In other words, to whom is government accountable? Allow the class to discuss this question for a few minutes.
- Have someone read aloud **Isaiah 10:1-4**.
- Ask, "What exclusive governmental powers are listed by Isaiah in verses one and two of this scripture?" These are:
 - Making decrees
 - Writing statutes
- Ask what the iniquitous decrees and oppressive statutes enacted by the government of Isaiah's time resulted in. They include:
 - Corruption of justice for the needy
 - Robbing the poor of their rights
 - ◇ **TEACHING NOTE:** You may wish to remind the class of the rights of the poor under Old Testament Law (see Unit 1, Lesson 2).



God pays attention to how societies treat the poor through their use of governmental power.

UNIT 3, Lesson 1: WHAT ARE THE PRIORITIES OF A JUST GOVERNMENT?



*The LORD rises to argue his case;
he stands to judge the peoples.*

Isaiah 3:13

- Discuss whether verses three and four of this passage suggest judgment.
- Point out that many passages in the Bible promise God’s judgment on governments that do not live up to their responsibilities to the poor. Divide the class into four groups, each to look at one of these passages:
 - **Isaiah 3:13-15**
 - **Amos 8:4-7**
 - **Micah 3:1-4**
 - **Psalms 146**
- Ask each group to share what they discovered.
- **Recap:** The Bible tells us that governments are given their authority by God, that God expects them to be just and to care for the needy, and that God will ultimately hold them accountable for doing so.

ABUNDANCE IN AMERICA

- Tell the class that we will now turn our attention to our own nation, beginning with a look at abundance in America.
- Pass out to each student a copy of page 29, *Who Experienced Food Insecurity/America’s Spending Priorities*.
- Point out that Americans are blessed with incredible abundance. Remind the class of the previous lesson’s exercise on *Contrasting Lifestyles*.
- Point out that one measure of the abundance we have in America is how we spend money on things that are not vital to our survival.
- Call the class’ attention to *America’s Spending Priorities* in the handout. Ask each student to guess how much Americans spend per year on each of the items listed. You may give them the answer for ice cream products (\$23 billion) as a hint.
- When all the students have finished, give the answers shown on page 9 and the total for these items.
- Discuss what this list says about the abundance we enjoy in America.
- Ask the students to guess how much food they think goes to waste in America each year. Write their guesses on a chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint.
 - Tell the class that 96 billion pounds of food are lost each year at the retail, consumer, and foodservice levels. That amount could feed 46 million people.

HUNGER IN AMERICA

- Explain that hunger remains a reality in America. In 2007 there were 36 million people in the U.S. who did not always get enough to eat.
- **TEACHING NOTE:** See page 11 for definitions of hunger and food insecurity.
- Call the class’ attention to the graphs in the handout (page 29). Point out the following information gleaned from the graph:
 - ◇ 15% of all American households with an income below the poverty line experienced hunger. Nearly 40% of American households experienced food insecurity (bottom bar).
 - ◇ Over 10% of all households in America experienced food insecurity (top bar)
- Ask the class to discuss other findings revealed by the graph. Ask if there are any surprises.
- As time permits, share with the class the information about hunger in America discussed on page 28.
- Ask: How is it possible that anyone in America goes hungry or is food insecure when so much food goes to waste in this country?

ACCOUNTABILITY IN AMERICA

- Discuss who is responsible for hunger in America.
- Ask if God will hold nations accountable for “giving deliverance to the needy” and for “defending the cause of the poor” (**Psalm 72**), then how might God judge America’s government.

CLOSING

- Remind the class that there will be people in America who today will go hungry. Ask the class to keep those people in their prayers this week.
- Ask the class to read aloud together **Isaiah 3:13**.
- Close with prayer.



Lesson 2
WHAT IS THE
KEY TO THE
GODLY USE OF
POWER?

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TEACHING LESSON TWO

OPEN WITH WORSHIP

- Remind the class that the previous lesson dealt with the reality of hunger in America and about government authority, responsibility, and accountability.
- Explain that this lesson will look at what the Bible says is the key to the godly use of power. We will also look more closely at the issue of God’s judgment as it relates to nations.
- Read aloud **Isaiah 3:13-15**.
- Collect the offering.

POLITICAL POWER

- Point out that there are different kinds of power. Today we will be looking at political power and economic power and how they can oppress the poor.
- Explain that in the context of this lesson, political power refers to the social, legal, and regulatory systems of communities, states, and nations.
- Have prepared before class a chalkboard, whiteboard, or newsprint with these issues written on it:

➤ Housing	➤ Zoning laws
➤ Lending practices	➤ Education
➤ Gambling laws	➤ Voting laws
➤ Unemployment	➤ Political districts
➤ Health care	➤ Courts/legal system
➤ Tax laws	➤ Social Security
- Ask the class if they can think of any ways that political power in the U.S. might promote injustice against the poor in any of the listed areas. Record their responses.
 - Some ideas to prompt the class:
 - ◇ Lotteries are actually “voluntary” tax on the poor.
 - ◇ Sales taxes on food and other necessities of life disproportionately impact the poor.
 - ◇ Hiking taxes on cigarettes means that the poor will pay higher taxes since lower income people tend to smoke more than those with higher incomes.

- ◇ Some lending agencies take advantage of the poor by charging exorbitant interest rates for short term loans (pay advances).
- ◇ Zoning laws can make it impossible for a free clinic to be established in a low income area and thereby deny the poor convenient access to health care
- Divide the class into groups of three or four.
- Remind the students of the story of Joseph and how he came to rule over Egypt in preparation for seven years of famine (**Genesis 41**).



It is very important to not let the discussions in this lesson devolve into arguments. The purpose of these discussions is to help students understand that how political and economic power is exercised often has consequences for the poor even if those consequences are unintended.

- Ask each group to read **Genesis 47:13-26** and to discuss the various ways Joseph exercised political power in managing the distribution of food during the famine. Here is a breakdown:
 - First he collected all the money in Egypt as he sold grain (vv. 13-15).
 - Second, he sold grain in exchange for all the livestock in Egypt (vv. 16-17).
 - Next, he bought their land in exchange for grain and seed (vv. 19-20).
 - He also bought the people and enslaved them (v. 23)
 - He moved the people to the cities (v. 21-22)
 - He later levied a tax of 20% on the people (v. 24).
- After the groups have finished, hand out a copy of page 34 to each student.
- Using the handout, discuss:
 - Was Joseph’s handling of the famine an example of a Just or an Unjust exercise of political power? Why?
 - How else might Joseph have distributed food during the famine?

UNIT 3, Lesson 2: WHAT IS THE KEY TO THE GODLY USE OF POWER?



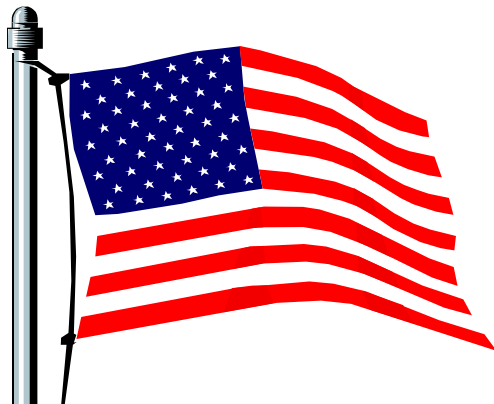
*The LORD rises to argue his case;
he stands to judge the peoples.*

Isaiah 3:13

- **TEACHING NOTE:** There is no “right” answer about the justness of Joseph’s actions. The box on page 34 shows two views of the various situations Joseph faced (there may very well be additional views). The point of this discussion is to get the class to wrestle with the issue of political power and how it can be exercised justly or unjustly.

ECONOMIC POWER

- Explain that economic power is the use of one’s wealth to influence the social, legal, and regulatory systems of communities, states, and nations.
- Ask the class if they can think of any instances of the exercise of economic power by individuals in America.
 - Some ideas to prompt the class:
 - ◇ Political campaign contributions that “buy” an individual access to a politician
 - ◇ A large chain store coming into a community and underselling local merchants
 - ◇ An urban renewal project that displaces the poor
- Assign one or two of the following scriptures to each of the earlier groups of three or four. Each group should discuss what their assigned scripture(s) say(s) about how the affluent should use their economic power.
 - **Nehemiah 5:1-13** ➢ **Isaiah 32:5-8**
 - **Amos 5:11-13** ➢ **James 2:1-7**
 - **Amos 8:4-7** ➢ **Amos 6:3-7**
- Once they have finished discussing their scripture(s), ask each group to share with the class what the scripture says and what they discussed.
- Once all groups have shared, discuss what common themes emerged from the scriptures.



ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EXERCISING POWER

- Note that judgment is often a concept we shy away from. However, there is no escaping the fact that the Bible speaks of judgment.
- Remind the class that we talked about government accountability to God in the previous lesson.
- Have the class read along in their Bibles as you read aloud **Ezekiel 22:23-29**. Ask for their reaction to this scripture.
- Have the class read along in their Bibles as you read aloud **Amos 2:6-8**. Ask for the class’ reaction to this scripture.
- Discuss what Ezekiel and Amos tell us about God’s judgment on the unjust exercise of political and economic power.

THE GODLY USE OF POWER

- Ask the class, in light of the scriptures we have looked at and the examples of political and economic power we’ve discussed, who do they think is accountable for hunger in America. Allow the class to respond.
- Remind the class that in the U.S. it is not a king, nor the president, nor the congress who holds sovereignty. The sovereign in America is “We the People”.
- Ask: If God holds America accountable for hunger in the U.S., exactly who do you think will be held accountable?
- Explain that every American has a degree of economic and political power they can exercise in the United States; some have more and some have less, but everyone has some.
- Discuss: How can we exercise our individual political and economic power in a godly way?

CLOSING

- Read aloud “Some Astonishing Figures” from page 35. Remind the class that we live in a nation where 35 million people have to struggle to get enough to eat.
- Ask the class to read aloud together **Isaiah 3:13**.
- Close with prayer.



**Two Views Of
How Joseph
Exercised Political
Power**

***The Fast That
I Choose***

A Bible Study On Hunger

Two Views of Joseph's Exercise of Political Power		
Situation	One View	Another View
In the midst of extreme famine the people came to Joseph to buy food	The people had produced this grain during the seven plentiful years. Joseph actually sold back to them food that they had already produced.	As he was responsible for looking after Pharaoh's interests, Joseph could not simply give them the food. He had to sell it to them
When their money ran out, Joseph required the people to pay with their flocks and livestock	By taking their flocks and livestock, Joseph took away from many of the people their very livelihoods.	Joseph recognized that the people could not afford to feed their flocks and livestock. He therefore exchanged them for grain so that the cattle would be supported at Pharaoh's expense.
When those were gone, he exchanged food for their land and labor	The rest of the people now had their means of livelihood controlled by Pharaoh.	Joseph was still responsible to Pharaoh's interests so he took the only commodities the people had to sell in order that they might survive.
Once the famine was over, Joseph gave seed to the people on the condition they pay a 20% tax on what is produced	Joseph made sure that into the future Pharaoh would benefit from the famine through this high tax.	A 20% tax was not unreasonable. After all, government needs funds to operate.
THE RESULT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pharaoh came to own all the land except that of the Egyptian priests ➤ All of the people except the Egyptian priests were enslaved ➤ All the wealth of Egypt ended up in Pharaoh's hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Joseph's prudent management made sure the people survived seven years of famine. ➤ The interests of Pharaoh were balanced against the needs of the people. ➤ Joseph was hailed as a hero by the people for saving them (v. 25)
SUMMATION	The political power that seemed to promise life ended up delivering an economy of slavery.	The prudent application of political power ensured the survival of the people for which they were truly grateful.



Many Christians believe that social reform emerges from spiritual renewal. In other words, they believe people will change how they live and treat others as a result of their relationship with Christ. To put it simply, they believe that grace leads to justice. While that may very well be true, the biblical witness also makes clear that when God's people work for social justice they give people hope at the same time they win a hearing for Christ's message of love. In other words, the Bible also teaches that justice leads to grace.