



## Biblical Economics 101

### Introduction

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In the past month, we posted several passages from the Pentateuch to the “just scripture” page of this site. Each dealt with Old Testament economic practices, principles, and laws. We suggested that while the various economic practices found in them may not be directly applicable to our society, there may be principles that we could learn and apply to and in our modern society.

In this homily, we will examine these passages, consider applicable principles that can be drawn from them, and compare those principles with current U.S. economic practices and principles.

### Usury

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We will first consider the Old Testament’s prohibition against lending money at interest. This prohibition is repeated in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

“If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 22.<sup>25</sup>

"And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Take thou no usury of him, or increase: but fear thy God; that thy brother may live with thee. Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase."<sup>2</sup>

"Thou shalt not lend upon usury to thy brother; usury of money, usury of victuals, usury of any thing that is lent upon usury..."<sup>3</sup>

Later in the Old Testament, the Psalmist describes those who are worthy to enter the temple. We could likely predict a few of them. We are not surprised to learn that they "walketh uprightly." But we may be startled to learn that one of the characteristics of a temple-worthy individual is "that [he] putteth not out his money to usury,"<sup>4</sup>Jeremiah, under attack, offers the following as his primary defense against the hatred and unjust persecution heaped upon him: "I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury..."<sup>5</sup>

The oft repeated prohibition against lending at interest, its inclusion in the ancient "temple-recommend questions (suggesting that it is far more than an "economic" issue, but is deeply spiritual and indicative of an individual's spirituality)," and its primacy as a defense against guilt all suggest that Yahweh is most interested in this issue of money lending, and how it is conducted in society.

I had a friend in grad-school who is now a very well-known economist at one of America's premier universities. Upon discovering this Old Testament economic principle, he was incredulous. "This is simply impossible," he complained. "World economies would never survive such a prohibition. There would be no lending of money without the security and profit that is achieved through the payment of interest."

As to the latter, of course, he was wrong. I have. I know many like me who have. Among others, I have lent money to all four of my children (I've given them money too, but that is

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<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 25.<sup>35-37</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 23.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 15.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah 15.<sup>10</sup>

another matter). It never occurred to me to lend them the money at interest—giving, for example, a child \$5,000.00 and asking for, say, \$5,500.00 back.

“Well,” he responded, “of course not. They are family.”

“Precisely.” The Old Testament consistently calls the poor in need of a loan, “brother.” This is not, of course, literal. But it teaches a profound truth. You see, under many circumstances the lender and the borrow can be thought of and think of themselves as belonging to different “classes.” But the law of Yahweh demands that they realize they are not of different and competing classes. Rather, they are complimentary. They are relatives. I am, then, asked to treat everyone with whom I have financial dealings as my “brother and sister.” Such perspectives keep both lender and debtor from thinking and treating the other as things rather than individuals.

Now, I am not advocating an interest-free lending system. I am not sure this is what God expects. I could be wrong, but, for now, I think he condones lending at interest—as a concession to our warped priorities and low ethical capacities. However, it seems clear from such a passage that God could not possibly condone the sort of rapacious lending practiced by, for example, “pay-day lenders.” Such lending simply denies and mocks every principle behind Old Testament lending practices. Nor would he approve of “sub-prime” loans that balloon immorally, to use only one more of many examples. Such loans deny and destroy the “brother” and “sisterhood” that God intends and after which he expects us to seek.

In our day, such loans are, of course, “legal.” But this does not make them “just.” Martin Luther King Jr., writing from jail, reminded us of the difference.

“How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of Harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” 16 April 1963; emphasis added.

Such lending practices as those mentioned above, and many others like them, are, without doubt, “degrading to human personality.” They do immeasurable harm to the dignity of those entering such contracts.

In his book, “Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul,” Eddie S. Glaude Jr. tells the tragic, but all too common story of a Chicago home owner named Patricia Hill. Having taken out a fixed-rate mortgage in 2003, she saw her monthly payment go up by \$500.00 in 2008. The bank acknowledged the mistake and said that they would correct the error. Although she continued to pay her original mortgage amount, sometime later she was informed that her account was in the arrears. “Eventually, the Bank of New York Mellon sold the house right out from under her—‘sold it to itself for about a third of its 2010 appraised value.’”<sup>7</sup>

How, in God’s name, can such things happen and legally stand in a nation that claims to be Christian? The answer is clear: they cannot. Such practices abuse every Biblical principle of decency and justice. They are violent acts against the children of God. They mock God, Himself.

Ancient Judah tried to hide from their sins by building and entering their precious temple. This only succeeded in making a sham of the temple. In like manner, America hides behind its mythic “Christian nation” deception, while its real religion is the false and idolatrous religion of capitalism. Without doing the least bit of harm to the meaning behind Jeremiah’s ancient warning concerning the lie of temple worship, we can adapt his words to read,

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying,

‘A Christian nation, A Christian nation, A Christian nation, are we’...<sup>8</sup>

Declaring, “Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit,” Jeremiah pronounces his

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<sup>7</sup> Chapter 1.

<sup>8</sup> See Jeremiah 7.<sup>4</sup>

fellow Jews more robber than righteous.<sup>9</sup> Note well his mention of “profit.” Their real religion was “profit.” But, appropriate to the law of restoration, their beloved idol would flee them because of their unjust ways. In trying to hide its idolatrous hunger for unjust profits in the lie of being a Christian nation, America too will find what it loves most slipping through its sticky little fingers.

Patricia saw through the masquerade and named things for what they are. “Patricia said that her foreclosure was just a symptom of a deeper sickness in America... that corporations, or what she called “corruptorations,” and “the banksters” had turned people into commodities...”<sup>10</sup>

## Debt cancellation

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My famous economist friend lamented the foolishness of yet another Old Testament economic stipulation.

“At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release:

Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release... that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; save when there shall be no poor among you...”<sup>11</sup>

In the same chapter, Yahweh further stipulates

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not

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<sup>9</sup> See Jeremiah 7.<sup>8 & 11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> “Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul,” Chapter 1, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Deuteronomy 15.<sup>1-4</sup>

a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, “The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand;” and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; and he cry unto the LORD against thee, and it be sin unto thee. Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him: because that for this thing the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all thy works, and in all that thou puttest thine hand unto. For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land.”<sup>12</sup>

Now, again, I am not advocating for this type of debt cancellation, though I do think that debt cancellation should at times and under certain conditions be considered, not only as a “just” principle, but as a “constructive” principle (I’ll suggest one momentarily). We can permit the lender to earn a bit of money on his debt investment. But I am advocating for the principles that are to be drawn out of such Old Testament economic policies. What are those principles? Here are just a couple.

First, to Yahweh’s way of thinking, loans are less about profits earned by lenders and more about advancing the needs of the vulnerable poor. This, I know, is a radical thought. Who thinks more on the advancement of the poor than on the profiteering of the rich? God, that’s who—certainly not America the beautiful. It seems highly likely that God does not acknowledge the legitimacy of lending as a profit-making enterprise. Rather, he sees it as a means of raising the economic level of the poor. The goal of lending is to do away with the poverty of the poor not line the pockets of the wealthy. Money lending is a tool to rid society of poverty. Have I said it enough times yet?

You might ask, “Can’t we do both at once—help the poor and enrich the advantaged?”

Uh, no! We could, but we won’t.

Where have you been the past forty years? Have you not seen what we have done—what we are doing? Do you not know how many crooked lenders have made billions conning the likes

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<sup>12</sup> Verses 7-11

of Patricia Hill of Chicago? Remember her? Here was an opportunity to advance the cause of the poor. How'd we do with that? Perhaps we should consider Atlanta home owner, Christine Frazier. She was evicted from her home after paying a total of \$240,000 over eighteen years on a home that had depreciated in the housing crash of 2007 to \$40,000.<sup>13</sup>

That's right. She had faithfully paid \$240,000 on a \$40,000 home.

Come on! Let her have the damn house! Cancel the debt, for crying out loud. Here is yet another opportunity to do as God intended and advance the interests of the poor. Wouldn't you think that, surely, the bank has made enough money off her? WRONG! No, they take the poor woman's \$240,000—far, far more than she borrowed—and her house. They then, no doubt, waited for the market to recover and sell it to another victim, making themselves another quarter million dollars. All sorts of investors and CEO's are raking in buku bucks to oversee and perpetuate such inhuman and ungodly fraud, while the vulnerable poor, far from being advanced, are shoved further underground.

Such “legal” practices are absolutely criminal. But, how many of those big-time crooks do you see rotting in jail—rotting in jail alongside those small-fry drug dealers?

But it gets even worse when one compares the actual with the divine expectation. The bank was not only forbidden to rip off Christina Frazier. They were expected to “open wide the hand” to her. They were to soften their hearts toward her. They were to be uncommonly generous. Yes, that's right. They were not to simply be generous. They were to be uncommonly generous. However, rather than producing one less poor person as God intends, they have deepened the poverty of the already vulnerable.

It really requires obscenities to describe the despicable depths of such “legal” banditry. It is completely inconsistent with every godly principle. It is clear from such modern “Made-in-America” examples—multiplied by the hundreds of thousands—just how “apostate” and “rebellious” our American loaning industry, and thus our entire economy is in the eyes of

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<sup>13</sup> Read the full story in Eddie S. Glaude Jr.'s “Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul,” Chapter 1

God.

Many who have accumulated—notice that I did not say “earned”—ungodly amounts of money in the past thirty-plus years, have done so, in no small part, by “betting”—for it is simply no less sleazy than gambling—on debt, mortgage debt as well as other forms of debt. Immoral profits have accumulated to those who make the loans and those who bet on the loans. At the same time, the vulnerable poor are harmed, abused, and oppressed, while a divinely unacceptable economic inequality increases to epidemic, even suicidal levels.

O.K. I am getting myself wound up. I’ll take a breath or two before continuing.

Alright then. I’m better now.

Nope. We do not seem to be able to do two things at once. This should come as no surprise. After all, it was no other than Jesus, God Himself, who warned, “no man can serve two masters.”<sup>14</sup> We either serve God by aiding the poor, or we serve mammon by enriching the wealthy.

the year of release

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With the end of the American Civil war and the emancipation of slaves, the rebellious white south embarked on a campaign of injustice and downright terror in order to, essentially, maintain slavery and the southern life-style to which white folk had grown accustomed. The vile abuses to which freed slaves were subjected are simply too numerous to catalogue here. We might think, for example, of the “Black laws” that arose across the south. Black laws criminalized non-criminal activities in a kind of Kafkaesque tautological trap.

For example, “vagrancy” was a crime for which one—let’s be clear here, only “black ones”—would be convicted and sentenced to a prison work gang. Among other things, vagrancy was defined as being out of work. White land owners refused to hire or rent land to freedmen. Business men conspired together to refused to employ freedmen. As intended,

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 6.<sup>24</sup>



such conspiracies made unemployed and thus vagrants of many freedmen, allowing the white southern (il)legal system to sentence freedman to labor gangs. The gangs worked for “legitimate” businesses, thus allowing white southerners to earn a profit, as before, off the free labor of African-Americans.

While the ability of southerners to profit off such black laws was to some extent curtailed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these laws warped and woofed into the perverted “Jim Crow” laws that kept African-Americans as second-class citizens. For example, many a black citizen was arrested for behavior on buses that was criminalized by Jim Crow laws—being “sassy,” for example, or not yielding a seat to a white passenger, or sitting in the same row of the bus as a white passenger (yes, if there were four seats in a row, two either side of the center aisle, and a white passenger was sitting in any one of them, the black passenger could not sit in any of the remaining three) etc., etc., etc.

It is too often forgotten that it has only been a generation—during my adult life-time—since such insane and unjust laws ceased to terrorize the victims against whom the terrorism was intended. We will not even mention the bodily mutilation of black men, the rape of black women, the wonton murder of black men and women, and the lynching of any innocent black victim that somehow unwittingly offended the delicate sensitivities of white supremacists. Hell, Mississippi only ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. constitution in 1995! Do not tell me such abuses are part of a long-gone past; that they have nothing to do with today’s society, and should just be let go.

This is how the supposed Christian nation—the one that speaks mythically of its “exceptionalism” and likes to think of itself as a city on a hill—has acted. Now, compare all of this with the real deal, the truly godly. Compare it with the Biblical expectation.<sup>15</sup> The two approaches—God’s and America’s—could not be more polar-opposite.

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve

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<sup>15</sup> We will not take the time here to address Yahweh’s apparent acceptance of slavery in the Old Testament. I have no doubt that had anyone asked him, he would have suggested doing away with the damnable practice. But, probably, no one asked.

thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day.... It shall not seem hard unto thee, when thou sendest him away free from thee; for he hath been worth a double hired servant to thee, in serving thee six years: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in all that thou doest.<sup>16</sup>

While some might—might—grant that such a passage tells us much about America’s unjust past, they might also argue that it has nothing to do with our modern American society. I beg to differ. There are principles that are entirely and necessarily applicable to our present societal needs.

When freeing the slave, the ex-owner was not to “let him go away empty,” but was to “furnish him liberally out of thy flock... floor, and...winepress.” Where was our “Christian nation” as ex-slaves were cast out to fend for themselves in a grotesquely hostile post-war economic and legal environment? Where is our precious “Christian nation” when individuals such as Patricia and Christina are treated—enslaved, really— with such “legal” fictions and tight-fistedness as we have already described?

In passages like this one, we witness Yahweh’s desire for humility; his desire for gratitude; his desire for generosity; his desire that individuals put people before profit; his desire, again, to see the advantaged classes seek the advancement of everyone, in particular the vulnerably impoverished—as often as not impoverished by the active immorality of the tight-fisted, money grubbing monied interests.

Much of what the slave owner has is attributable to the hard work of the slave. Is he able to see and acknowledge this? Or does pride not allow such personal honesty? Having seen and acknowledged it, can he express appreciation? Can he part with a few crumbs to give to the

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<sup>16</sup> Deuteronomy 15.<sup>12-16</sup>

freedman? Nay, can he impart “liberally” of his abundance to help the ex-slave get on his feet? Can he do all of this happily, thrilled for the new opportunities of the released slave? Can he demonstrate that he has priorities above those of profit—the almighty dollar?

I will not go so far as some who call the employment for wages, “wage slavery.” But it is often something very, very close to it. Nevertheless, employers would do well to consider passages such as this one. Do they appreciate, and show appreciation for and to their laborers? They could not have their business without them, you know. No rugged individualism allowed here. It is a group effort. Why is the “capitol” so much more highly prized and “rewarded” than the “labor”? Do employers seek the advancement of their employees, or are they willing to sacrifice the good—the physical and mental health, the family, the economic security—of their employees for the sake of profit? Can they be satisfied with “sufficient for their needs,” or must they have more, more, and more? Does it grieve them to give up a single extra buck to the employee in order to bring additional security to his employees? Will the CEO and stockholder be harmed, or even miss the pittance that such appreciative generosity cost them?

Can they not see their way toward putting people before profit, trusting that God will take at least as good care of them as he does the sparrow? Can they do all of this without it “seeming hard unto them”? This divine injunction to put people before profits is one of the most common themes of the Old Testament’s economic stipulations. And it is to be done gladly.

## Law of the harvest

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What to do with our “excess.” And what is excess, anyway? When is enough, enough? How much generosity is too much generosity? Consider the following surprising—some would say irresponsible—agricultural practices.

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou reapest, neither shalt thou gather any gleanings of thy harvest: thou shalt leave them unto the poor, and to the stranger: I am the Lord your

God.”<sup>17</sup>

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”<sup>18</sup>

In these passages, Yahweh asks that the farmer purposefully—purposefully!—leave a portion of his crop unharvested. In addition, once the crop, be it of whatever kind, has been harvested, the farmer is not to go over the field or vineyard a second time to gather in any unharvested residue.

Why engage in this agricultural practice? Why, to feed the poor and vulnerable, of course.

This all seems most irresponsible: irresponsible because it cuts into the farmer’s profit margin—always, we know, a nerve-rackingly narrow one. Irresponsible, because we know that lean harvests are always but a year away. We need all we can get our hands on to prepare ourselves and our family for the potential lean year—now that’s responsible! Irresponsible, because the poor did nothing to “deserve” the “handout.” What were they doing while I performed all the back-breaking work of planting, nourishing, irrigating, weeding, etc.? Such largess allows someone else to get fat off my labor, and will simply breed laziness and dependence to boot.

And what portion is it that the “corporation” is to let go unharvested so that it can be harvested by the poor? The portion that is most assessible and most easily “harvested,” of course. The unharvested crops at the “edges” are those assessible by bordering byways. In the case of the residue, crops are most assessible because they have already been “shaken from the tree,” if you will. All the poor need do is bend over and pick it off the ground what someone else has labored to pick.

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<sup>17</sup> Leviticus 23.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>. See also Deuteronomy 24.<sup>19-21</sup>

What are we to make of all of this. Well, first, Yahweh seems not so concerned about the farmer—relatively wealthy. He will be just fine. The question becomes, once more, will the farmer, the business owner put people before profits, and trust Yahweh to look after him and his family—especially if he observes such just action.

While Yahweh is sure of the business owner’s well-being and security, he is not so sure about the well-being and security of the vulnerable poor. He seeks to alleviate their exposure. In making these provisions for the poor, he does not seem anxious about their becoming “dependent,” because, first, they are just above survival mode, and second, as we have said, there is only dependence.

You see, “everyone is to some extent dependent”—the business owner on God, and the poor on the business owner. “Independence” is a lie. We are all connected. We are connected to God and to each other. These economic principles that appear, at first, so mundane and simple, turn out to contain within them deep and profound moral and spiritual truths. We all need each other. We are all “dependent.” We will return to this momentarily.

In addition, Yahweh teaches us that there are some things more important than money and profits. People are more important than profit.<sup>19</sup>

Yes, it seems to me that Old Testament passages such as we have reviewed suggest that God would have the business owner leave some of his profits out in the field for his employees—a higher wage (a living wage), help with healthcare, retirement, etc.

Remember that thou wast a bondman

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All these economic practices seem aimed at teaching the principle that the desire for gain must be subservient to meeting the needs of the vulnerable poor, and advancing the security

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<sup>19</sup> “Well,” one might say, “the more I profit, the more I can help.” This is, as one author said many years ago, “dangerously rare.” Besides, there is no room for this type of false justification to be found in the Old Testament economic laws.

of all. Or, as we have said repeatedly, people are to be placed above profits. Because we are all connected, I cannot advance my own cause at the expense of another without doing harm to myself. I cannot advance the cause of another, or assist the vulnerable without advancing myself and alleviating my own vulnerabilities.

The advancement of the advantaged who follow Yahweh's economic stipulations is not to be worried over. They will be just fine. They will have sufficient for their needs. And that will be enough. There is never worry about their being "taken advantage of." The worry is always over the vulnerability of the poor and the near certainty that they will find themselves "taken advantage of."

Now, nearly all the stipulations, including those in the economic realm, are based upon one encompassing reality. It is repeated over, and over again. Here is a very small sampling of its statements.

"I am the Lord thy God."<sup>20</sup>

This reminder is not simply a reminder of his divinity. Nor is it simply a reminder that because of his divinity he is to be obeyed.

"I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God."<sup>21</sup>

"Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee..."<sup>22</sup>

"Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Leviticus 23.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Leviticus 25.<sup>38</sup>. Emphasis added

<sup>22</sup> Deuteronomy 15.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Deuteronomy 24.<sup>22</sup>. Emphasis added

This, it seems to me, is the equivalent of Benjamin's, "Are we not all beggars? Do we not all depend upon the same Being, even God, for all the substance which we have..."<sup>24</sup>

The Old Testament's call to follow Yahweh and his teachings—and we are talking, now, specifically of those involving economic principles and practices—is based upon Yahweh's having delivered Israel from their previous uncontrollable vulnerability as slaves. Having been bondmen, they are to remember the insecurity it produced and do all in their power to be sure that such insecurities are not found among them—especially see that they are never the source of another's insecurities.

The wealthy and successful are never to think that they are where they are due to their own hard work—because they "earned" it—but because God did something for them that could not do for themselves.

"Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land.... Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people. Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the Lord thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the Lord."<sup>25</sup>

The wealthy and successful are expected to remember not only their foundational, but continuous dependence upon God.

"When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the Lord thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; and when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; then thine heart be lifted up, and thou

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<sup>24</sup> Mosiah 4.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Deuteronomy 9.<sup>5-7</sup>

forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage... and thou say in thine heart, 'My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth.' But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day."<sup>26</sup>

They are, then, to acknowledge dependence and interdependence. They are to acknowledge the necessary connectedness that must exist between all beings if they are to survive and thrive. They are to acknowledge that there will always be poor among them who might depend upon them to alleviate insecurity and vulnerability. They are not to feel put upon or aggrieved by this reality. They are presented with the privilege of acting in the lives of the vulnerable poor as God had in theirs. They are—how glorious!—given the privilege to act as gods.

## Conclusion

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Our modern “capitalist” society is very different from that of the Old Testament. Notwithstanding the inspiration bestowed, it is certainly asking too much of the ancient writer that he provide specific practical recommendations for use in our capitalistic economy. Nevertheless, such Old Testament economic laws and practices as those we have discussed contain within them, it seems to me, principles that can be applied to our modern society.

To my way of thinking, such principles must be applied if we wish our society to endure. It seems, however, that our modern society is nowhere near being consistent with such principles. Worse, such principles are actively resisted. They are viewed as hostile to our way of life. They are viewed as impeding the progress of the “deserving,” and encouraging the “indolence” of the “undeserving.” The idea of community, of relatedness and connectedness, is weakened and denied. All that is left is a Darwinian based neo-liberal survival of the fittest.

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<sup>26</sup> Deuteronomy 8. <sup>10-14, 17-18</sup>



This will not go without notice in heaven. Though the heavens weep, the destruction that is seeded into all ungodly laws, practices, principles, and institutions is inevitable. Only an honest acknowledgement of our sins and a sincere effort to correct our corrupt nature can save us.