



*“...The heart of the sons of men  
is full of evil,  
and madness is in their heart  
while they live...”  
(Ecclesiastes 9.<sup>3</sup>)*

*Wherewith shall I come before the LORD,  
and bow myself before the high God?  
He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good;  
and what doth the LORD require of thee,  
but to do justly, and to love mercy,  
and to walk humbly with thy God?  
(Micah 6.<sup>6, 8</sup>)*

biblical weights and measures, modern profit margins and quality of services,  
and what they portend for modern society

leviticus 19.<sup>35-37</sup>

*“You are not to engage in injustice in regard to administering the measurement of length, weight, or volume. You are to possess accurate balances, accurate weights, accurate dry measures, and accurate liquid measures. I am YHWH, your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”<sup>1</sup>*

## Introduction

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It is at the very heart of the Hebrew Bible’s witness that the people who would come to be known as Israel was long the victim of Egyptian oppression; that God heard the peoples’ cry of pain and involved Himself in human affairs to emancipate the victims from their victimizers. But emancipation from oppression was only the first part of a divine three-part plan for Israel.

After the emancipation, and as the second part of His plan for Israel, God issued directives concerning the establishment of a new kind of society. The new nation was to be the exact opposite of Egypt. All forms of oppression were to be radically rejected and eliminated while justice was to reign supreme.

The third part of the plan called for Israel to serve as example and evangelist to the world

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<sup>1</sup> author’s translation

through the justice that resided among its citizenry and in its governing bodies.

Israel could only endure through the avoidance and rejection of Egyptian-style injustice and oppression, by establishing a just society through faithful observance of God’s just directives—private and public, individual and national—and through fulfilling its role as servant to the world through example. If Israel reverted to Egyptian style injustice, the nation could have no more expectation of endurance than Egypt.

All of this, in a nutshell, is the central message of the Hebrew Bible. That longest of LDS standard works records Israel’s attempts to fulfill God’s dream for and expectations of a just society—the only kind of society that can endure in this world or the next. The nation’s journey was spotty at best, replete with ups and downs. Mostly downs, it seems. For that reason, it finally ceased to exist.

While God issued many directives aimed at the establishment of a just society in Israel, in this homily we will limit ourselves to the directives given to Israel’s merchants concerning the maintenance of weights, measures, and commercial scales. We will consider Israel’s faithfulness toward these directives—or the lack thereof—and the prophetic response to unfaithfulness in regard to business practices related to weights, measures, and commercial scales. We will consider principles that can be drawn from the directives and the prophetic rebuke of Israel for violation of these directives. Finally, we will consider how these principles might be applied to today’s business environment, how these principles are violated, and—if history is any indication—what the violations of these principles portends for our society’s future.

#### **Weights, measures, and commercial scales —the biblical stipulations**

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The Hebrew Bible reveals a God who is highly “political,” even “partisan.” He is always on the side of justice. He enjoined His people to be just. If they were to be just, they must possess a true and accurate understanding of the nature of justice and what it looks like.

Therefore, God gave directives that would produce a just society. Many of these directives

for the establishment of a just society were first articulated and presented in the Pentateuch, its earliest incarnations presumably originating sometime late in the second millennium B.C. We find some of the directives restated and reemphasized throughout the remainder of the text. It is in Leviticus that we first hear God’s stipulation concerning weights, measures, and commercial scales.

“You are not to engage in injustice in regard to administering the measurement of length, weight, or volume. You are to possess accurate balances, accurate weights, accurate dry measures, and accurate liquid measures. I am YHWH, your God, who brought you out of Egypt.”<sup>2</sup>

Obviously, honesty and integrity are a private matter. Cheating and defrauding others is personally unethical, immoral, and wrong. However, as can be seen in this passages’ final line—and as is so often the case with stipulations found in the Pentateuch—this call for honesty and justice in regard to commercial transactions was in direct response to the injustice Israel suffered in Egypt. The passages’, “I... brought you out of Egypt” as much as says, “I didn’t bring you out of Egypt to have you behave like Egyptians.”

The sort of economic justice called for in passages such as this one, then, plays on a stage larger than the individual and the private. It plays on a very public and societal level stage. The rejection of economic injustice of the sort mentioned in this reading is, therefore, akin to the Egyptian injustice and the institutionalized oppression of slaves. Economic injustice of this sort is a return to Egypt, with the oppressed becoming the oppressor.

We next find a restatement of this directive concerning weights and measures in Deuteronomy.

“You are not to keep in your pouch a weight, one heavy and one light.

You are not to keep in your house a dry measure, one heavy and one light.

You are to possess a scrupulously accurate weight and you are to possess a

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<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 19.<sup>35-37</sup>; author’s translation

scrupulously accurate dry measure so that your existence<sup>a</sup> in the land that YHWH, your God, is giving you will be long-standing. For YHWH, your God finds abhorrent all who do these things—all who act unjustly.”<sup>3</sup>

We have already observed that the call for honesty and justice in business transactions was a direct response to, and attempt to avoid, Egyptian-style injustices of all sorts in Israel. In this latter passage, we see that to disregard such directives by defrauding others in regard to the use of weighs and measures not only plays on the private/ individual stage and the public/ societal state but plays on the cosmic/ heavenly stage as well. Fraudulent use of weights, measures, and commercial scales is not only an act of violence against fellow citizens and against society as a whole, but is also an act of violence against God, Himself. It is an “abomination” thrown arrogantly and contemptuously into the face of a just God.

This statement of the prohibition against unethical business practices also contains a warning. A society that allows unethical business practices cannot endure. Economic justice is key to a society’s survival.

Before moving on, we should take a moment to visualize the just and unjust economic actions described in these Pentateuchal texts. We will imagine the transaction between a buyer and seller of wheat. The buyer comes to the seller and request a pound of wheat, for which she agrees to pay one shekel (a weight, not coin) of silver. The merchant places a one-pound weight on the left side of the scale. He then begins to add wheat to the right side of the scale. The left side begins to rise, the right side begins to lower. Finally, the two sides sit next to each other at equilibrium. The customer pays the agreed-on price of one shekel per pound and walks away with a pound of wheat. This is acceptable and just business.

However, as is evident from the very existence of these Pentateuchal stipulations and the prophet criticisms we will see below, ancient businessmen—Israelite and “gentile” alike—became expert in gaming the system through inaccurate weights, measures, and other business tools. In doing so, they harmed the public and enriched themselves through

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 25.<sup>13-16</sup>; author’s translation

manipulating profit margins. We can easily imagine the fraudulent transaction.

Someone wishes to buy a pound of wheat. The merchant places a one-pound weight on the left side of the scale. He then begins to add wheat to the right side of the scale. The left side begins to rise, the right side begins to lower. Finally, the two sides sit next to each other at equilibrium. However, in this transaction, the merchant's one-pound weight is not, in fact, a full pound but, say,  $7/8$  a pound. The customer pays the agreed-on price of one shekel per pound and walks away with  $7/8$  pound of wheat. In addition, the merchant has, perhaps, manipulated the scales in some way so that the two sides were slightly out of equilibrium to begin with. Therefore, our customer walks away with even less than the already scant  $7/8$  pounds.

But we have not yet reached the full scope of the unethical merchant's evil ingenuity. In the pre-coinage economy, the really good gamers also knew how to use their weights and measures and commercial scales to turn the customer's shekel payment into 1 and  $1/8$  shekel, thus not only ripping the customer off by giving her less than she paid for but by charging her more than she thought for that lesser portion—a double whammy.

The Hebrew prophets bear witness that Israelite and Jewish merchants utilized the sorts of unethical business practices forbidden in the Pentateuch. We now turn to the prophet critique of such unethical business practices.

#### Weights, measures, and commercial scales —the prophetic critique

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We begin the biblical critique of unethical practices in relation to weights, measures, and commercial scales with the earliest of the classical Hebrew prophets, Amos, referred to by some as the “prophet of social justice”—a title that is often viewed negatively and with skepticism and even hostility in the perverted and topsy-turvy world of today's apostate American “Christianity.”

“Hear this, those who trample on the impoverished<sup>b</sup>  
to eradicate the land’s powerless<sup>c</sup>,  
saying: “when will the new moon sabbath be over  
so that we can sell grain;  
and the weekly sabbath  
so that we can make our produce available”—  
diminishing the size of the dry measure,<sup>d</sup>  
increasing the weight of *šeqel*,<sup>e</sup>  
and rigging<sup>f</sup> fraudulent scales—  
to buy the underprivileged with money<sup>g</sup>  
and the impoverished at the cost of a pair of sandals  
and sell rotted grain?<sup>4</sup>

A few observations are in order. First, we note the prophetic insight that it is the poor and vulnerable who are the greatest victims of the wealthy and unscrupulous merchant class and their schemes for manipulating and increasing profit margins.

Second, we note the insight that the prophet possesses into the life priorities of unethical businessmen (for they were all men in those days). They think of nothing but their personal finances. They cannot even put aside this top priority during the various religious sabbaths. As one reads Amos’ scandalized description, one can almost see these entrepreneurs sitting anxiously—their legs nervously bouncing up and down, their eyes anxiously darting back and forth to the timepiece—waiting impatiently for the sabbath to finally end so they can get back to what they really live for: commerce. Sabbath rests are a nuisance. Time’s a wastin’.

Here, the prophet not only identifies the business class’s life priorities but depicts the businessman’s contempt for God. This contempt is seen in his mental preoccupation even on sabbath days—days that rightly belong to God—with buying and selling, with personal finances. Even as they sit in synagogue, their thoughts are most earnestly devoted to business concerns. Their study of scripture is tarnished, potential insights blighted as their mind

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<sup>4</sup> Amos 8. <sup>4-6</sup>, author’s translation

wanders from the sublime to the mundane. Prayer, in which one seeks to know and commune with God, is infiltrated with thoughts of filthy lucre. It isn't that they do not worship on the sabbath. It's that they worship the idol, Mammon. Any religiosity they display is fraudulent. A sham. They, themselves, are religious frauds.

Third, we note the unethical means these businessmen utilize to achieve their unhallowed priority of increased profit margins. It is precisely that which we visualized earlier in this homily when discussing the Pentateuchal stipulations regarding weights, measures, and commercial scales. They manipulate the cost of goods by corrupting both the monetary system and the supply side system. But their corruption goes further. When it comes to the supply side, they not only sell at inflated prices, they sell inferior product, mixing wheat that has fallen to the ground and become rotten with good nutritious wheat. They achieve their goal of increased profit margins through massive, multi-faceted fraud.

Finally, we note the consequences of their single-minded fraud. They trample. They cause death. The targets of their trampling and murderous business practices? Those already underprivileged, poor, and impoverished. Those powerless to stop their onslaught. These businessmen dehumanize their victims. When the businessman looks at his potential customer, he does not see a human being, but an object, a tool through which he can grow richer. His eyes can only send the signal of dollar and cent signs through his optical nerves to his brain twisted by lust. He is retarded, to use a politically incorrect word, in his humanity. He has callously snuffed out the image that God imprinted upon him at the time of creation—the very image of God, Himself—and replaced it with something almost demonic.

So disgusted was Micah at the businessman's inhumanity that he resorted to the language of cannibalism to express his disgust.

“And I said,

Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob,  
and ye princes of the house of Israel;

<sup>2</sup>Is it not for you to know judgment?  
Who hate the good, and love the evil;  
who pluck off their skin from off them,  
and their flesh from off their bones;  
<sup>3</sup>Who also eat the flesh of my people,  
and flay their skin from off them;  
and they break their bones,  
and chop them in pieces, as for the pot,  
and as flesh within the caldron.”<sup>5</sup>

In the final analysis, the consequence of the businessman’s unethical and fraudulent behavior is that he has made himself over into an Egyptian oppressor and his customers into slaves. He has, himself, returned and brought his nation back to Egypt. He has become the very thing he once hated; the very thing that God abominates and from which He emancipates. As far as the prophet is concerned, when one observes such hateful behavior it ought to be clear—for it was foretold centuries ago when God first revealed his directives—that the end is drawing nigh. Time is running out. Turning Egyptian, this society cannot endure any more than that proto-typical Egypt of long ago.

Here is another of God’s directives concerning a just society: guilt was only to be established “at the mouth of two or three witnesses.”<sup>6</sup> So, we will now consider the words of a second witness to Israel’s unethical business environment: Amos’ younger contemporary, Hosea.

“A merchant<sup>h</sup> with an inaccurate scale at hand  
enjoys defrauding.  
And, ’Eprayim thinks,<sup>i</sup> “I’m rich! I have discovered the source of power!  
With all my profits,  
no one will identify<sup>k</sup> my abuse<sup>l</sup> as sin.”<sup>m,7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Micah 3. <sup>1-3</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Deuteronomy 17.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hosea 12. <sup>7-8</sup>, author’s translation



If one reads the corrupt wealthy's, "I'm rich! I have discovered the source of power!" and thinks of Cain... well, that is as it should be. The attitudes are the same. "Truly I am Mahan, the master of this great secret," exalts Cain, "that I may murder and get gain."<sup>8</sup>

So, Hosea also reminds us that the wickedness found in unethical and fraudulent business practices, works in this world—at least in the short term. These fraudulent business practices bring power and influence to their practitioners. Amos observed,

“Therefore, because of your plundering of the vulnerable  
by the grain taxes you extract from them,  
you have built the most luxurious<sup>n</sup> of homes...<sup>9</sup>

Over a century later, the wicked would still be prospering by the same immoral and unethical means.

“For among my people are found wicked men:  
they lay wait, as he that setteth snares;  
they set a trap, they catch men.  
As a cage is full of birds,  
so are their houses full of deceit:  
therefore they are become great,  
and waxen rich.  
They are waxen fat, they shine:  
yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked:  
they judge not the cause, the cause of the fatherless,  
yet they prosper;  
and the right of the needy do they not judge.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Moses 5.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Amos 5.<sup>11</sup>, author's translation

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 5.<sup>26-28</sup>

The wealthy plunderers might not be allowed to comfortably live out all their days in their homes built with ill-gotten gains, but this does not negate the prophetic insight that their wickedness built their homes and filled their coffers.

Many chafe at the reality that in this world wickedness can and often does produce success. Chaffing, they ignore and deny it. Denying it, they create newfangled and false theologies of the “prosperity gospel” type. But, however much it chafes, it is a historical fact. Most wealth has been and is earned fraudulently and through the violation of others. We must possess the faith to accept this sad reality notwithstanding the unrelenting propaganda to the contrary. We must be guided by the reality as we look out at the world around us—especially the business world—and evaluate its financial policies and successes.

The Psalmist saw. He chaffed. But, finally, he accepted. This world’s practitioners of the dark arts of economics, eventually, get their comeuppance, but in the meantime their wickedness would bring earthly success.

“Even in death, they experience no suffering,  
but die with stomachs full.

They do not experience the hardships of common people,  
nor are they struck as others are struck.

So, they adorn themselves with self-conceit;  
cloak themselves in a garment of cruelty.

Their eyes bulge out on account of their corpulence;  
their physique goes beyond imagination.

They are disdainful and promote wanton oppression.  
Their rhetoric is ever so soaring.

They claim divine license;  
their assertions are found the world over.

This is why peoples keep turning to them;  
why, as overflowing water, they flow to them.”<sup>11</sup>

Yes, the wealthy to whom and of whom Hosea speaks are doing just fine, thank you very much. They credit their success, accurately enough, to their fraudulent business practices—among them the manipulation of price controls, supply chains, and profit margins.

But their fraud has brought them more than financial security and abundance. It has bought them “righteousness.” Consistent with the false ideology of all “prosperity gospels,” the wealth marks them as god’s favorites. Because their actions have brought wealth, then, almost by definition and in a tautological whirlpool that makes the head spin, their actions are “righteous.” And if, perchance, some self-righteous ne’er-do-well gets it in his or her head to attempt bringing them to trial for their fraud, well, their money will come in handy then too. They will simply buy off the judges and juries—if they haven’t already bought off the politicians, encouraging them to write fraud into their laws.

We come now to our third witness to Israel’s fraudulent crimes involving weights, measures, and commercial scales. Micah is the youngest of the three contemporaries, Amos, Hosea, and Micah.

“YHWH’s voice calls out to the city—  
and it is wise to reverence his power;<sup>o</sup>  
pay heed to the warning<sup>p</sup> of the one who issues it—  
“Do they continue to exist—a house built by wicked means<sup>q</sup>,  
treasuries acquired through wicked means<sup>f</sup>  
even through fraudulent<sup>s</sup> measures, which are condemned<sup>t</sup>?  
Should I acquit any with false balances,  
acquit any with a bag of fraudulent weights,

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 73.<sup>4-10</sup>

acquit the city's wealthy who are full of violence,  
acquit its citizens who utter deception,  
their tongues flapping deceptively in their mouths?"<sup>12</sup>

Micah has heard a voice. It is the voice of God speaking a message directly to Israel. The voice of God and the message it announces are not to be ignored. To ignore the message is most unwise. With his own voice, God charges Israel, and particularly its merchant class, with not having obeyed His directives, the foundational and constitutional principles of Israelite society. The nation's merchant class have utilized fraudulent weights, measures, and commercial scales to cheat and defraud their unsuspecting and vulnerable customers and to enrich themselves through the manipulation and expansion of profit margins

No doubt, there is much to learn from Micah's critique of the merchants. We would note four things that stand out most to us. First, increased profit margins and wealth were the very purpose of and motive behind the fraud. The merchants can, of course, be criticized for their lack of personal integrity and their willingness to cheat. But they did not cheat to *be cheaters*. Being cheaters was not their goal. They engaged in fraud in order to increase their profit margins. The cheating was merely a means to an end. The cheating was not the disease, but the symptom of the disease. The disease was lust and covetousness. The disease was their lust for increased profit margins and the material advantages they brought to themselves and their families.

The second thing we note is something we have already seen: the fraud perpetuated through the use of inaccurate weights, measures, and commercial scales worked. The merchants have grown rich. They live in big homes with spacious treasuries. We can imagine these treasuries filled with gold and silver chalices, plates, candle holders, etc.; with jewels and artwork made of alabaster and lapis lazuli; with the finest of potteries; with the best of linens and wool weavings; with the latest in clothing fashions; with the latest in home decor.

As we have previously mentioned, the reality that, in this world, immoral and unethical

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<sup>12</sup> Micah 6.<sup>9-12</sup>, author's translation

business practices often produce wealth is a view shared by all the Hebrew prophets, contrary to the view of those who propagate false “prosperity gospel” narratives about wealth and “righteousness.” Indeed, much of the wealth accumulated through business is a direct result of fraud. Skepticism about the legitimacy of accumulated private wealth is biblical and justified.

Third, we note Micah’s prophetic boldness and insight in his naming the economic fraud, “violence.” The businessman’s fraud is a violation of another every bit as much as is that of that proverbial young urban male who robs a convenience store at gunpoint. One uses a gun, the other a briefcase, but both are deadly weapons.

Finally, we note that God holds accountable those who increase profit margins and accumulate wealth through fraudulent, immoral, and unethical means. It is true, as the Psalmist disappointedly recognized, that it may take a while for their wickedness to catch up with them. But catch up with them it will.

“Until, that is, I entered the holy place of God,  
there to discern what awaits the ungodly.  
Contrary to what I had thought, you subject them to delusions.  
You let them fall prey to lies.  
How suddenly they become objects of horror;  
come to a complete end through multiple catastrophes!  
They are as a dream from which one awakens.  
My Lord, upon waking up, the shadowy memory of them is loathsome.”<sup>13</sup>

Yes, the wealthy and their propogandists talk a good game, “their tongues flapping deceptively in their mouths.” They are, as the wicked usually are, good at justifying their one-track mind—increase profits—no matter its cost to their fellow citizens and the society that makes their lives possible and enjoyable. Their justifications sound, as they are meant to, ever so reasonable and rational. But God will finally expose the fraud. God will expose them

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<sup>13</sup> Psalm 73.<sup>17-20</sup> author’s translation

as frauds. And all who once bought their fraudulent justifications and wished to be like them will, like the Psalmist, feel fraudulent, foolish, beastly even.

“But I, for a time, lost my footing;  
lost my balance.  
I felt envious of the corrupt  
when I observed how well off the ungodly were...  
My mind then became disillusioned.  
Inside, I felt humiliation.  
I, myself, had been stupid and knew nothing.  
Beastly was I before you.”<sup>14</sup>

#### Weights, measures, and commercial scales—principles

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From all of this, we can draw the following conclusions and principles.

The fraudulent manipulation and expansion of weights, measures and commercial scales has one overarching goal: the manipulation and expansion of profit margins.

The manipulation and expansion of profit margins by any unethical means (in this homily, we deal only with the manipulation of profit margins through the fraudulent use of weights, measures, and commercial scales) is unjust and ungodly.

The manipulation and expansion of profit margins by any unethical means is indicative of more than an lack or absence of personal integrity. It is indicative of a contempt for vulnerable members of society. Indeed, it is viewed as an assault upon those least able to defend themselves: the poor. Furthermore, the manipulation and expansion of profit margins is indicative of a contempt for society at large. And finally, and most seriously, the manipulation and expansion of profit margins is indicative of a contempt for God, Himself.

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<sup>14</sup> Psalm 73.<sup>2-3, 21-22</sup> author’s translation

The manipulation and expansion of profit margins by any means is not only indicative of a contempt for God. It is indicative of idolatry in which wealth, as the highest priority in one's life, is god.

Manipulation and expansion of profit margins through fraudulent and unjust means is common practice. It is a principal tool used by the unscrupulous and unjust to acquire wealth. Much, if not most, of the wealth acquired in this world has been and is fraudulently and unjustly gained. In this world, fraud pays.

The accumulation of wealth, whether by fraudulent means or not, is falsely seen as a sign of "righteousness." Possession of wealth is a, if not the, principal means of acquiring, maintaining, and increasing personal power and influence. This accumulation of power is often, nearly always used to influence economic policy and laws to the benefit of the lustful and corrupt wealthy class. This accumulation of power is also used by the wealthy to escape accountability for fraudulent and unjust economic behavior.

While the manipulation and expansion of profit margins by any means is, according to the Biblical witness, "wicked," "abominable," "abhorrent," "fraudulent," and "deceitful," it is, above all, an act of violence. It is a violation of the individual, of society, and of God.

The violent manipulation and expansion of profit margins for personal gain breaks down and is ruinous to the welfare and cohesion of society. No society that permits, legalizes, or leaves such economic injustice unpunished can long endure.

Weights, measures, and commercial scales—applications of the principles

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As a result of high inflation as of late, we all know a little about expanded profit margins.

There is more than enough data out there to confirm what we know intuitively: while other factors are at play in the current inflationary crisis, the fraudulent manipulation and

expansion of profit margins is near the top of the list.

We could fill pages with reporting on American businesses' manipulation and expansion of profits. Since this is a homily and not an economic treatise, we will spare the reader, and refrain from repeating them here. But it is clear that profit margins have skyrocketed and are of dubious character.

Price markups—the difference between the actual cost of a good or service to the business and the selling price to the consumer—and profits are the highest they have been in three-quarters of a century. That means that the higher cost to consumers is far beyond the additional costs to the businesses. Whereas, for example, an apple was costing a business, say, 50 cents and they were selling it for 75 cents (and making a profit thereby), now that same apple is costing them 65 cents and they are selling it for \$1.25.

In periods of increased pricing, justice does not ask the business to continue to sell the apple at the old rate. It does not even demand that they sell at reduced profit. But it does demand that they not manipulate and expand the profit margins to the detriment of not only the poor but society at large. In their lust to expand profit margins, businesses are clearly doing harm right now to both the poor and to society at large.

Now, we all know we are paying more for gas. This increase in the cost of transportation is one of the primary factors in the increasing cost of everything else (though it would not explain something like, for example, the rising costs of rent which is a whole other injustice we will address in a separate homily). Once again, there are many factors at play in this increase in gas prices. However, what was true in our example of the apple is true in the price of oil and gas. The costs being passed on to consumers far, far outpaces the additional cost to the oil and gas industry. The profits that the gas and oil industry have made always has been morally questionable, but they are far more so now.

Again, we do not expect companies to be unprofitable. But we do not, God does not accept price gouging, profit manipulation and increase in order to line the pockets of the merchant



and at the expense of the poor and society at large. But, this is precisely what is happening at present. It is clear as clear can be that the expanded profits are not being reinvested. They are not going back into business for research or development or expansion or renovation or renewal or improved services. This means, for one thing, that the quality of their services are not improving, but, in fact, worsening—think, airline industry—while they charge the consumer more for the deteriorating product.

If increased profit margins are not being used to improve business, where is the money going? Predominantly, it is going into what was illegal for the better part of American history: stock buy backs. It is going into the pocket of wealthy investors and shareholders. Money is being taken out of the pocket of workers and consumers and being siphoned off into the pocket of those whose pockets are already overflowing with questionable wealth. Company CEOs, whose only job in corrupt modern business theory is to line the pocket of shareholders, are richly rewarded, by the tens of millions, for their sacrifice of the poor, society, and even the long-term welfare of the companies they manage.

Modern day merchants are manipulating and expanding profit margins through the modern-day equivalent of manipulating weights, measures, and commercial scales. As in ancient Israel, this is being done in order to feed the insatiable lust of the wealthy and to further enrich a small class of the already wealthy at the expense of the consumer, the poor, and society. This evil is not only transgressive against individuals—like a bully pounding on someone half their size. It is also transgressive against society—like a tick sucking blood from a host. Finally, it is transgressive against God—like a toddler shouting abuses at a caring parent.

This evil is not a result of science, or that which masquerades as science— “supply and demand,” “market forces,” and all that malarkey. It is a result of lust and greed. It is the consequence of idolatry, which is covetousness. It is “wicked,” “abominable,” “abhorrent,” “fraudulent,” and “deceitful.” It is an act of violence. Violence against individuals. Violence against society. Violence against God.

This violence cannot endure any more than that which ancient Egypt perpetrated against Israelite slaves or that which the ancient Israelite merchants perpetrated against their customers. There will be a price to pay. Unfortunately, the price will not be paid by the violent perpetrators only. We will all pay the price. Our society will pay the price. We are now seeing only the beginnings of the travails that await us.

#### Conclusion and benediction

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The scriptural witness is clear. God is just.

“But YHWH remains enthroned forever—  
having established his throne to bring about what is just.  
He rules rightly the world over.  
He judges nations evenly.”<sup>15</sup>

“And thou hast taken Zion to thine own bosom, from all thy creations, from all eternity to all eternity; and naught but peace, justice, and truth is the habitation of thy throne; and mercy shall go before thy face and have no end...”<sup>16</sup>

“Proper governance is the foundation of His throne.”<sup>17</sup>

God justly emancipated a vulnerable population subject to Egyptian injustice. He directed those who he emancipated to establish a just society that could serve as a light to the world, an example for all to follow. They failed in their calling. They engaged in the same forms of injustice as their oppressors had. Due to their failure; due to their having become what they had escaped, they met a fate like that of oppressive Egypt.

In this homily, we have examined the just guidance that God gave Israel in relation to the use

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 9.7-8, author’s translation

<sup>16</sup> Moses 7.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 97.2, author’s translation

of weights, measures, and commercial scales. We have seen that Israel rejected this guidance. We have seen that this rejection was motivated by the hope of manipulating and increasing profit margins. Profit margins became the be all and do all of society. They became god.

We have suggested that the profit margins that we see in today's America flows from the same corrupt motivation of benefiting the few at the expense of the many. We have suggested that the increased profit margins are achieved through fraudulent means analogous to the fraudulent manipulation of weights, measures, and commercial scales. We have suggested that most of the world's wealth always has been and still is largely the product of fraudulent business practices. Finally, we have suggested that no society that legislates and permits such fraud can long endure.

The history of all nations serves as warnings to our own. Israel's history as found in the Hebrew Bible serves as a warning to us. What we see in these national histories does not portend well for us. If we are to endure, we must repent.

Mine, then, is a call to repentance. It is a call for merchants to repent and change their ways. It is a call for them to regain their humanity, recognize the image of God that is found in all with whom they do business, and put this image before their false god of profits and profit margins.

It is a call for sellers to wake up and realize they have been duped. It is a call for them to demand that just economic laws be written—laws that make illegal what is economically immoral and unethical—whatever profit they may bring to the practitioners. We must demand laws that punish the economically fraudulent, unethical, unjust. We must do this before it is everlastingly too late.

In this, I only do what I have been asked to do.

“And verily I say unto you, the rest of my servants, go ye forth as your circumstances shall permit, in your several callings, unto the great and notable cities and villages,

reproving the world in righteousness of all their unrighteous and ungodly deeds, setting forth clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days. For, with you saith the Lord Almighty, I will rend their kingdoms; I will not only shake the earth, but the starry heavens shall tremble.”<sup>18</sup>

Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

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<sup>18</sup> DC 84.<sup>117-118</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Literally, “days.”

<sup>b</sup> Hebrew, *’ebyôn*.

<sup>c</sup> Hebrew, *’ānî*.

<sup>d</sup> Hebrew, *’êpâ*. We might translate even less literally, “diminishing the amount sold.”

<sup>e</sup> Less literally, “increasing the cost.”

<sup>f</sup> Hebrew, *’āwat*, literally, “to bend, make crooked.”

<sup>g</sup> Literally, “silver.”

<sup>h</sup> Hebrew, *kena’an*.

<sup>i</sup> Literally, “says.”

<sup>j</sup> Hebrew, *’ôn*.

<sup>k</sup> Hebrew, *māšā’*. To identify something is often to discover it.

<sup>l</sup> Hebrew, *’awôn*. *’ôn*, power, and *’awôn*, abuse, are alliterative and seem to come from the same root, reminding us that power is most often used to abuse and oppress.

<sup>m</sup> This line literally reads, “not they will find to me abuse which is sin.”

<sup>n</sup> Hebrew, *gāzît*. “This word indicates a particular type of dressed stone that was considered to be building material of the highest quality and of pleasing appearance” (*NIDOTTE*, Vol. x, p. x). The translation, “houses of ashlar masonry,” while accurate and literal does not send the message to the common reader who does not go beyond the page he or she is reading. With little appreciation for what is really being said, the reader can then hide behind ignorance and run the risk of behaving in the same despicable and punishable way. I am loath to be the cause for someone else’s justifying sin due to ignorance or the lack of clarity. Here, I show myself to be, as I am, more preacher and shepherd than scholar.

<sup>o</sup> This line is difficult and has been subject to a variety of translations. Here we rely on the LXX.

<sup>p</sup> Literally, “rod.” Here, we take it to refer to a rod used to punish, chastise, or correct. It could refer as well to a scepter held by a ruler, in which case we might translate, “Take heed to the one holding the scepter of power.”

<sup>q</sup> Literally, “house of wickedness.”

<sup>r</sup> Literally, “treasuries of wickedness.”

<sup>s</sup> Hebrew, *rāzôn*, literally, “diminish, be lean, be shrank.”

<sup>t</sup> Hebrew, *zā’am*.