

BIBLICAL ECONOMICS



Pastor's Class August 2020



The Biblical Alternative to Rapacious Economies



Four Case-studies

I am informed, in part, by...



I studied with Walter for many years and my thinking about biblical economics is deeply shaped by his work. This book is a great beginning place if you are looking for a place to begin thinking through this topic.

INTERPRETATION
Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church



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MONEY AND POSSESSIONS

FOREWORD BY RICHARD HORSLEY

WALTER BRUEGGEMANN

God's Vision of Covenantal Economics

● Economics of Empires and Kings

- Money flows to an ever-smaller subset of people who amass excess / surplus capital.
- This tends to be an economy with a Darwinian slant — we compete for scarce resources and the weak are meant to be eliminated.
- It is a fearful, anxious, way of ordering the economy. The average person is meant to be anxious enough that they do not cause trouble and the shop / consume a lot.
- It claims to be meritocracy . . . but does not deliver.

● The Alternative Script Offered by Bible

- No one has too much. No one has too little.
- The “problem” of the non-productive elements of society is solved not by extermination - but by neighborly compassion.
- This alternative invites a relaxed and trusting ordering of the economy which we are not anxiously grasping after scarce resources . . . but are trusting in the God who is surprisingly generative.
- This is a grace-based system. We are warned to remember that we have not gotten our wealth.

No Distinction Between Liberals and Conservatives

- We are — **all of us** — wedded to the rat-race economy and we are all, liberals and conservatives alike, deeply challenged by the idea of rearranging our economic lives along the lines of biblical economics.
- This is why Jesus is so insistent that we **cannot serve two masters**. He knows that the normative patterns of our economic lives are inconsistent with the Kingdom of Heaven.
- I suspect that *most* of the theological angst I feel stems from my refusal to *choose*. I want to both be a good Christian AND continue amassing wealth in ways that disregard the needs of people who are an inconvenience to me.

I

PHARAOH VERSUS EXODUS

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PHARAOH VERSUS EXODUS



Genesis 47

Exodus 1, 15-20

Moses explicates the commandments

▣ **Care for the Poor — Deut. 15:7** If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the LORD your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. **8** You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. **9** Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt. **10** Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. **11** Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

Moses explicates the commandments

- ▣ **Care of the poor in making loans — Deut. 24:10** When you make your neighbor a loan of any kind, you shall not go into the house to take the pledge. 11 You shall wait outside, while the person to whom you are making the loan brings the pledge out to you. 12 If the person is poor, you shall not sleep in the garment given you as the pledge. 13 You shall give the pledge back by sunset, so that your neighbor may sleep in the cloak and bless you; and it will be to your credit before the LORD your God.
- ▣ **Deut. 24:14** You shall not withhold the wages of poor and needy laborers, whether other Israelites or aliens who reside in your land in one of your towns. 15 You shall pay them their wages daily before sunset, because they are poor and their livelihood depends on them; otherwise they might cry to the LORD against you, and you would incur guilt.

Moses explicates the commandments

▣ **Deut. 24:17** You shall not deprive a resident alien or an orphan of justice; you shall not take a widow's garment in pledge. 18 Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this.

▣ **Deut. 24:19** When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all your undertakings. 20 When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

▣ **Deut. 24:21** When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. 22 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

Moses explicates the commandments

- ▣ **Preserving Human Dignity of those in the wrong —**
- ▣ **Deut. 25:1 Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, declaring one to be in the right and the other to be in the wrong. 2 If the one in the wrong deserves to be flogged, the judge shall make that person lie down and be beaten in his presence with the number of lashes proportionate to the offense. 3 Forty lashes may be given but not more; if more lashes than these are given, your neighbor will be degraded in your sight.**

Moses' Third Address

▣ This commandment is not too hard — Deut. 30:11 Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” 14 No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

Moses' Third Address

▣ Blessings or Curses; Life or Death . . . it's our choice!

▣ Deut. 30:15 See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. 16 If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. 17 But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, 20 loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

11

SOLOMON VERSUS PROPHETS

WHAT MAKES A KING?

Jer. 22:15 Are you a king
because you compete in cedar?

Did not your father eat and drink
and do justice and righteousness?
Then it was well with him.

16 He judged the cause of the poor and
needy;

then it was well.

Is not this to know me?

says the LORD.

17 But your eyes and heart

are only on your dishonest gain,

for shedding innocent blood,

and for practicing oppression and
violence.

SOLOMON

First Kings 2 David (who is dying) instructs Solomon to kill his brother and others . . . Solomon does it in a bloody transition of power.

Adonijah (brother), Abiathar (priest), Joab - chief of staff eliminated.

First Kings 3:1 - Solomon becomes Pharaoh's Son-in-Law.

1 Kings 4 - Solomon has a Cabinet-level person in charge of "forced labor."

Next paragraph names tax-collection regions and 5 sons-in-law are put in charge of 5 of the 12 regions.

1 Kings 4:22 - ff one day's provisions — enjoying the excesses of accumulation!

1Kings 4:22 Solomon's provision for one day was thirty cors of choice flour, and sixty cors of meal, 23 ten fat oxen, and twenty pasture-fed cattle, one hundred sheep, besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and fatted fowl. 24 For he had dominion over all the region west of the Euphrates from Tiphseh to Gaza, over all the kings west of the Euphrates; and he had peace on all sides. 25 During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all of them under their vines and fig trees. 26 Solomon also had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. 27 Those officials supplied provisions for King Solomon and for all who came to King Solomon's table, each one in his month; they let nothing be lacking. 28 They also brought to the required place barley and straw for the horses and swift steeds, each according to his charge.

SOLOMON - THE ACCUMULATOR

Wisdom — 1Kings 4:29 God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment, and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore, 30 so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 He was wiser than anyone else....

Wealth — 2Chr. 9:1 When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions, having a very great retinue and camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she discussed with him all that was on her mind. 2 Solomon answered all her questions; there was nothing hidden from Solomon that he could not explain to her. 3 When the queen of Sheba had

observed the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, 4 the food of his table, the seating of his officials, and the attendance of his servants, and their clothing, his valets, and their clothing, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit left in her.

Women — 1Kings 11:1 King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women ... 3 Among his wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines...

HOSEA ON KINGS

Hos. 13:9 **I will destroy you, O Israel;**

who can help you?

10 **Where now is your king, that he may save you?**

Where in all your cities are your rulers,

of whom you said,

“Give me a king and rulers”?

11 **I gave you a king in my anger,**

and I took him away in my wrath.

MICAH'S TAKE . . .

Mic. 6:3 "O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of
Moab devised,

what Balaam son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the
LORD."

Mic. 6:6 "With what shall I come before the
LORD,

and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

7 Will the **LORD** be pleased with thousands of
rams,

with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the **LORD** require of you

but to do justice, and to love kindness,

and to walk humbly with your God?

III

NEHEMIAH VERSUS
PERSIAN COLLABORATORS

NEHEMIAH 5

Neh. 5:1 Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. **2** For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.” **3** There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.” **4** And

there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. **5** Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others.”

NEHEMIAH 5

Neh. 5:6 I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. 7 After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials; I said to them, “You are all taking interest from your own people.” And I called a great assembly to deal with them, 8 and said to them, “As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!” They were silent, and could not find a word to say. 9 So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? 10 Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. **Let us stop this**

taking of interest. 11 Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.” 12 Then they said, “We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests, and made them take an oath to do as they had promised. 13 I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised.

IV

JESUS/PAUL VERSUS ROMANS

PAUL IN CORINTHIANS

2Cor. 8:1 We want you to know, brothers and sisters, about the grace of God that has been granted to the churches of Macedonia; 2 for during a severe ordeal of affliction, their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. 3 For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, 4 begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints— 5 and this,

not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us, 6 so that we might urge Titus that, as he had already made a beginning, so he should also complete this generous undertaking among you. 7 Now as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you—so we want you to excel also in this generous undertaking.

PAUL IN CORINTHIANS

2Cor. 8:8 I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. 9 For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. 10 And in this matter I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something — 11 now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. 12 For if the

eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has—not according to what one does not have. 13 I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14 your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15 As it is written,

“The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”

JESUS

Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” 14 But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” 15 And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” 16 Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to

store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

JESUS

Luke 12:22 He said to his disciples,
“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. 23 For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. 24 Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! 25 And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? 26 If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? 27 Consider the lilies, how

they grow: they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. 28 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! 29 And do not keep striving for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying. 30 For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, strive for his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

JESUS

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

37 “Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;
38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”