

## Economic Principles, Part 4

Written by Calvin Fox  
Monday, 22 September 2008 15:53 -

---

God required a particular Lifestyle of those who lived on the Land. The creational economic Principles, adjusted for life under the Covenant, are as follows:

Sharing remains mandatory. The Hebrew families had been allotted different size portions of the Land. Given the differences in terrain, the variety of geographic features, there was need for trade and commerce. Everyone would have enough, but not the same. Given changes in Seasons and weather, as well as disasters and violence (especially warfare and crime, many families lost their portion of the Land. Widows, orphans, indentured servants, as well as resident aliens, unable to support themselves, sank into destitution and became the landless poor.

These victims of terrible circumstances and oppression are the Poor of the Bible. Except for the aliens, they belong to the Covenant People of God. They are righteous people of faith, who look to the Lord as their only hope in their distress. When Scripture mentions repeatedly God's concern for the Poor, these are the people He is concerned about: innocent victims of tragedy. Mosaic Law required that such landless poor be provided for by the people who still had their share of the Land. They were to share it. Failure to honor and obey the laws about caring for these Poor was considered by God and His prophets to be very serious sin. The primary responsibility to provide for the Poor is given by God to their extended families and neighbors (as a community). This is an important part of what it meant to be a Covenant People. The State government was not involved. See Deuteronomy 15:4-11

God commands (through the laws He gave to Moses) specific ways in which people were to share the wealth God has given them. All Israelites were to tithe [which I take to be 10% of gross income] Two thirds is to be given toward Worship (sacrifices) and to support the Priests, who have no land (income) of their own. One third of the tithe goes to the Poor, distributed by the Temple staff. Produce from crops were to be left in the fields for the poor to help themselves (Gleaning). Every seventh year debtors were to be "forgiven" their debts and indentured servants freed. The Land itself was to lie fallow.

Work by and for all remained mandatory (as above). However, all workers (i.e.- employees) were to be paid fairly and promptly. All workers, including animals, were to be given regular time of for rest from their labor (the observance of Sabbath was a labor law, as well as a religious one). Indentured servants (employees) were to be treated fairly and not oppressed or abused. People working for their Debtors, in order off their debts, were to be given freedom from their servitude after 6 years. Failure to honor these laws about workers was evil.

Economic growth was still expected (see above), but laws were laid out to guard against greed and exploitation that might follow. There was no State as we know it in the time of Moses. There were monarchies and totalitarian regimes. The Tribes of Israel during this period lived together in a loose federation, with ad hoc leadership, arising from the people, for seasons and occasions as needed. There were patriarchs, priests, judges, and, ultimately, kings.

With the Fall, sin entered the economic process. It particularly leads to the control of both production and distribution for the personal advantage of those in control. Greed and

## Economic Principles, Part 4

Written by Calvin Fox

Monday, 22 September 2008 15:53 -

---

selfishness leads to massive accumulation of wealth by a relative few for the benefit for those few. There were many Mosaic laws designed to prevent or limit the growth of private wealth at the cost of economic injustice, i.e.- transgression of the four creational Principles. Even the King was prohibited from accumulating great wealth for his personal use.

There was to be multiple division and ownership of land (preventing monopolistic practices by a few). Land was the great source of income and economic security. Land ownership was inalienable. No one could be robbed of it. Property markers were inviolable. If a parcel of land was lost, relatives (kin) had the right and obligation to acquire it back (keep it in the family). A major law in this regard is that of the Jubilee Year. See Leviticus 25 This interpretation and application of this text is controversial.

The Jubilee Law is about the land staying in the original family. This Law prevents a few people from actually buying up and keeping other people's land. Conservative evangelical Bible scholars (eg- W.Kaiser, G.H. Wenham, R.Laird Harris), Commentaries and Dictionaries agree that Jubilee Law was not based on an initial equal distribution of Land, did not deal with inequality of wealth and did not redistribute wealth.

We can not assume that most people sold their land. Many owners probably maintained their family's agricultural land and, if this is the case, most people would not be involved in any redistribution.

Jubilee Law forbade the permanent, outright sale of land outside the family. The land could be rented (leased) out. Therefore, the "Buyers" mentioned in the passage were actually "Lessees" and they knew the land would revert to the Lessor upon the end of the agreed time. The land was not stolen. The owners were compensated for its use. The price received by owners was the total value of the combined annual crops over the length of the contract. The Lessees were actually tenant farmers. Here is an example-

Lessee: How much do you want for the land? Owner: There are 20 years before the Jubilee Year. I want the projected value of 20 crops. The two men agree on what that will be. The Lessee pays \$2000 total for 20 annual crops, up front, to the Owner. No one is cheated or robbed. Over the period of 20 years, the Lessee will sell his annual crops. He may make more than the \$2000 rent or, over the years, the Lessee may suffer losses on his crops. The agreed upon amount may or may not turn out to be a good deal for either the Lessor or the Lessee. The original Owner gets his land back at the end of 20 years. He thus ends up with the Land and the amount the Lessee paid for its use. He may decide to rent it again or not.

The Jubilee Law is about protecting private property (land) and making it productive and profitable at the same time. The Law is about preserving the family heritage and its children's inheritance, i.e.- their land. It did not apply to home owners or city dwellers.

Other laws on the Mosaic books prohibited taking interest on loans (usury) from fellow Covenant members and there were restrictions of the practice of requiring pledges to cover loans. Israelites were not to take advantage or profit off the misfortunes of other Israelites. That was considered contemptible.

## **Economic Principles, Part 4**

Written by Calvin Fox

Monday, 22 September 2008 15:53 -

---

Finally, the Principle of Stewardship is still primary and essential. The Mandate to cultivate and care for God's creation, and all that doing that involves (all the economic processes, as well as developing culture and civilization), was given to all Humanity. This Cultural Mandate was not assigned to Israel, but is a privilege and responsibility given to all Humanity, as the bearers of God's Image. All humans are like God in order to represent God in developing His Creation. The Fall did not annul or negate this.