

Economic equality

or, Holy land, holy living, holy giving – do we have the heart of a servant, or the mentality of a master?

... it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt.

I am Yahweh your God.

— LEVITICUS 25:55

Analysis

A. (25:23-34) Redeeming property

[25:23-28] Regarding what archaeology has brought to light, **Wenham** [317] quotes famed OT archaeologist Roland de Vaux to illustrate the contrast between pre-monarchy and post-monarchy (by now mostly urban) living conditions in Israel: “The rich houses are bigger and better built and in a different quarter from that where the poor houses are huddled together.” This social inequality, of course, could never have developed had God’s will regarding land distribution been carried out in Israel. And what will the church do today, to “declare liberty throughout the land”?

The sabbatical and jubilee years were a constant reminder of God’s right to the people and their possessions and time (cf. v.23, “Mine” – “Ye are not your own”). [Thomas 132]

[25:23] For “the land belongs to Jehovah:” the Israelites, to whom He would give it (Lev 25:2), were not actual owners or full possessors, so that they could do what they pleased with it, but “strangers and sojourners with Jehovah” in His land. [Keil ii 461]

[23:23] Thus in the theocracy there was no such thing as either private or communal ownership in land. Just as in some lands to-day the only owner of the land is the king, so it was in Israel; but in this case the King was Jehovah. [Kellogg 492]

[25:23] As a holy nation, their hearts and minds were to be set upon God and His holiness, and they were not to think in terms of accumulating vast holdings ... The prescribed interruption in the normal course of national life once each half-century would

Land belonged to the family ... not to the state, nor the corporation

(see Walter Kaiser, p. 5)



furnish an opportunity for reflection upon covenant values, and remind the nation that man does not live by bread alone. [Harrison 223]

[25:23] Since the reason for this law was peculiar to the children of Abraham, its provisions can hardly be applied to other nations; for so equal a partition of the land was made under Joshua, that the inheritance was distributed amongst the several tribes and families; nay, in order that each man’s possession should be more sacred, the land had been divided by lot, as if God by His own hand located them in their separate stations. In fact, that allotment was, as it were, an inviolable decree of God Himself, whereby the memory of the covenant should be maintained, by which the inheritance of the land had been promised to Abraham and his posterity; and thus the land of Canaan was an earnest, or symbol, or mirror, of the adoption on which their salvation was founded. Wherefore it is not to be wondered at that God was unwilling that this inestimable benefit should ever be lost; and, lest this should be the case, like a provident father of a family, He laid a restraint on His children, to prevent them from being too prodigal; for, when a man has any suspicions of his heir, he forbids him to alienate the patrimony he leaves him. [Calvin iii 168]

[25:23] The singular institution of the Jubilee year had more than one purpose. As a social and economical arrangement it tended to prevent the extremes of wealth and poverty. Every fiftieth year the land was to revert to its original owners, the lineal descendants of those who had ‘come in with the conqueror,’ Joshua. Debts were to be remitted, slaves emancipated, and so the mountains of wealth and the valleys of poverty were to be somewhat levelled, and the nation carried back to its original framework of a simple agricultural community of small owners, each ‘sitting under his own vine and fig-tree’ and, like Naboth, sturdily holding the paternal acres.... it was appointed to enforce, and to make the whole fabric of the national wealth consciously rest upon, this thought contained in our text. The reason why the land was not to pass out of the hands of the representatives of those to whom God had originally given it, was that He had not really given it to them at all. It was not theirs to sell – they had only a beneficiary occupation. While they held it, it was still His, and neither they, nor any one to whom they might sell the use of it for a time, were anything more than tenants at will. The land was His, and they were only like a band of wanderers, squatting for a while by permission of the owner, on his estate. Their campfires were here today, but tomorrow they would be gone. They were ‘strangers and sojourners.’ That may sound sad, but all the sadness goes when we read on – ‘with Me.’ They are God’s guests, so though they do not own a foot of soil, they need not fear want. ... Undisturbed possession for ever so long does not constitute ownership here. God is possessor of all, by virtue of His very nature, by His creation and preservation of us and of all things. So that when we talk about ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ we are only speaking a half truth. There is a great sovereign ‘His’ behind both. [Maclaren ii 269-70]

[23:28] The buyer lost nothing by this, for he had fully recovered all that he paid for the annual harvests up to the year of jubilee, from the amount which those harvests yielded. Through these legal regulations every purchase of land became simply a lease for a term of years. [Keil ii 462]

[25:29-34] This law is founded upon the assumption, that the houses in unwallled towns are not so closely connected with the ownership of the land, as that the

“... when we talk about ‘mine’ and ‘thine,’ we are only speaking a half truth. There is a great sovereign ‘His’ behind both.”

– Alexander Maclaren

alienation of the houses would alter the portion originally assigned to each family for a possession. Having been built by men, they belonged to their owners in full possession, whether they had received them just as they were at the conquest of the land, or had erected them for themselves [Keil ii 462]

[25:31] ... the villages being properly the country, built as they were amid the olive, and fig, and pomegranate, and palm, with the vine entwining its boughs by the sides of their houses, must fall under the rule of redemption, and must never be alienated. And thus, while the type in regard to the land is preserved entire here also, there is a provision against the tyranny of the princes, who might have tried from their baronial residences to subject the people of a poor village to their domination. [Bonar 461-62]

B. (25:35-46) Remembering the poor – poverty never to become perpetual slavery

[25:35-38] Whatever the cause of a brother's poverty, he is to be given the hospitality accorded to a stranger or alien, and not be allowed to die of starvation.

The concept of the covenant community as comprising brothers and sisters in the Lord applies to financial as well as to moral and spiritual matters. ... A needy Israelite must not be exploited by his fellows, and the Torah is distinctive here in its insistence that loans to the poor must be free of interest. [Harrison 227]

[25:36,37] Interest-free loans are well attested in ancient financial records, and laws against taking excessive interest are also known, but

Israel is alone in totally prohibiting interest payments on loans to the poor. [Wenham 321-322]

[25:23-55] The basis of the law that made property inalienable was not the rights of man but the crown rights of God ('the land is mine', 23), which were incidentally a man's best protection. ... As well as limiting what money could buy, the emphasis on God's primacy raised the question of how money should be made and spent (35-38), and whose servants, ultimately, were the men you seemed to own ('For they are my servants', 42,55). [Kidner 131]

[25:46] You are not to say, "Let me leave my poor brother as he is; he will soon get relief better than I could give; for the jubilee is coming on." No, saith the Lord, you in the meantime must do what is in your power to help him, even though he be no relative of yours, nor acquaintance, but a mere sojourner. Let him "live with thee," i. e. live

prosperously, or lead what may be called a life. Be generous to him. You must not relieve him in the hope of recompence (except that at the resurrection of the just, Luke 14:14); no usury for the loan, far less any "increase" (or interest on his very victuals) must be ever thought of. "Fear thy God;" do all from holy love and regard to his will. "I brought you from Egypt;" let redemption open your heart to others. "I gave thee Canaan;" and may I not ask thee to give of its produce to the poor? "I am thy God;" and so thou hadst all things in me, and art never poor. How easily may

"Israel is alone in totally prohibiting interest payments on loans to the poor."

Basis of freedom? Not the rights of man, but the "crown rights of God"!

you part with all things, since I am your God! See Acts 2:43, to the end, for a New Testament proof that redeemed men estimate fully all these arguments, and are easily led to obey. [Bonar 463-64]

C. (25:47-55) Redeeming the poor – the responsibility of those who are truly redeemed

(v 55, as in v 42) The end of slavery is legislated – at least for those who subscribe to the law of Israel. No citizen of Yahweh's land, by right of redemption a servant of Yahweh, shall ever be a slave to another man!

[25:48] The land belonged to the tribe. Pauperism was thus kept off. There could be no 'submerged tenth.' The theocratic reason was, 'the land shall not be sold at all for ever for it is Mine!' [Maclaren ii 281]

[25:55] Because Jehovah had brought the children of Israel out of Egypt to give them the land of Canaan, where they were to live as His servants and serve Him, in the year of jubilee the nation and land of Jehovah were to celebrate a year of holy rest and refreshing before the Lord, and in this celebration to receive foretaste of the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, which were to be brought to all men by One anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, who would come to preach the Gospel to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to bring liberty to the captives and the opening of the prisons to them that were bound, to proclaim to all that mourn a year of grace from the Lord (Isaiah 61:1-3; Luke 4:17-21); and who will come again from heaven in the times of the restitution of all things ... to glorify the whole creation into a kingdom of God, to restore everything that has been destroyed by sin from the beginning of the world, to abolish all the slavery of sin, establish the true liberty of the children of God, emancipate every creature from the bondage of vanity, under which it sighs on account of the sin of man, and introduce all His chosen into the kingdom of peace and everlasting blessedness, which was prepared for their inheritance before the foundation of the world (Acts 3:19-20; Romans 8:19.; Matthew 25:34; Colossians 1:12; 1 Peter 1:4). [Keil ii 467]

D. (summarizing why the Jubilee was apparently NEVER celebrated in Israel) What is the only lawful use of wealth? Redeeming the poor – the responsibility of those "rich in the world's goods".

Wenham [324] points to the messianic passage in Isaiah 61, quoted by the Lord Himself in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18-19). *He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives ...* . The Hebrew word for "release" is the same as in Lev. 25:10, thus leading us inevitably to connect Christ's following thought about *proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord* to the Jubilee. Are we Christians faithfully following through on Christ's original gospel proclamation?

"... failure to implement an ideal does not mean it could not have been realized had the will been present."

But as a social institution the jubilee year remained an ideal, which was rarely, if

ever, realized. Rabbinic literature says that it was reckoned to be obsolete in postexilic times. Chronicles may imply that not even the sabbatical year was observed in preexilic times (2 Chron 36:21). But failure to implement an ideal does not mean it could not have been realized had the will been present. [Wenham 318]

An emphasis upon humanitarianism and social justice is a pronounced feature of the legislation in this chapter, and it should be noted that the tenor of the laws pursued a middle course between the extremes of unrestricted capitalism and rampant communism. The absolute rights of the individual to his personal freedom and his ancestral holdings are written into law so that they are guaranteed ... [Harrison 229]

Therefore, this law prevented all monopolies that might come from an unfettered capitalism as well as a total communism that placed all property in the hands of the state. Land belonged to God, who in turn placed it on permanent lease in the hands of families. Thus the unity of the economy was found in the family rather than in the artificial organization created by the state or a corporation. [Kaiser 1174]

E. EXCURSUS: Slavery, economic equality and the Jubilee

Even with the burdensomeness of debt lightened as above, it was yet possible that a man might be reduced to poverty so extreme that he should feel compelled to sell himself as a slave. Hence arises the question of slavery, and its relation to the law of the jubilee. Under this head two cases were possible: the first, where a man had sold himself to a fellow-Hebrew (vv. 39-46); the second, where a man had sold himself to a foreigner resident in the land (vv. 47-55).

With the Hebrews and all the neighbouring peoples, slavery was, and had been from of old, a settled institution. Regarded simply as an abstract question of morals, it might seem as if the Lord might once for all have abolished it by an absolute prohibition; after the manner in which many modern reformers would deal with such evils as the liquor traffic, etc. But the Lord was wiser than many such. As has been remarked already, in connection with the question of concubinage, that law is not in every case the best which may be the best intrinsically and ideally. That law is the best which can be best enforced in the actual moral status of the people, and consequent condition of public opinion. So the Lord did not at once prohibit

slavery; but He ordained laws which would restrict it, and modify and ameliorate the condition of the slave wherever slavery was permitted to exist; laws, moreover, which have had such an educational power as to have banished slavery from the Hebrew people.

In the first place, slavery, in the unqualified sense of the word, is allowed only in the case of non-Israelites. That it was permitted to hold these as bondmen is explicitly declared (vv. 44-46). It is, however, important, in order to form a correct idea of Hebrew slavery, to observe that, according to Ex. 21:16, man-stealing was made a capital offence; and the law also carefully guarded from violence and tyranny on the part of the master the non-Israelite slave lawfully gotten, even decreeing his emancipation

from his master in extreme cases of this kind (Ex. 21:20, 21, 26, 27).

With regard to the Hebrew bondman, the law recognises no property of the master in his person; that a servant of Jehovah should be a slave of another servant of Jehovah is denied; because they are His servants, no other can own them (vv. 42, 55). Thus, while the case is supposed (v. 39) that a man through stress of poverty may sell himself to a fellow Hebrew as a bondservant, the sale is held as affecting only the master's right to his service, but not to his person. "Thou shalt not make him to serve as a bondservant: as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee."

Further, it is elsewhere provided (Ex. 21:2) that in no case shall such sale hold valid for a longer time than six years; in the seventh year the man was to have the privilege of going out free for nothing. And in this chapter is added a further alleviation of the bondage (vv. 40, 41): "He shall serve with thee unto the year of jubilee: then shall he go out from thee, he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. For they are My servants, which I brought forth out of the land of Egypt: they shall not be sold as bondmen."

That is, if it so happened that before the six years of his prescribed service had been completed the jubilee year came in, he was to be exempted from the obligation to service for the remainder of that period.

The remaining verses of this part of the law (vv. 44-46) provide that the Israelite may take to himself bondmen of "the children of the strangers" that sojourn among them; and that to such the law of the periodic release shall not be held to apply. Such are "bondmen for ever." "Ye shall make them an inheritance for your children after you, to hold for a possession; of them shall ye take your bondmen for ever."

It is to be borne in mind that even in such cases the law which commanded the kind treatment of all the strangers in the land (19:33, 34) would apply; so that even where permanent slavery was allowed it was placed under humanising restriction.

In vv. 47-55 is taken up, finally, the case where a poor Israelite should have sold himself as a slave to a foreigner resident in the land. In all such cases it is ordered that the owner of the man must recognise the right of redemption. That is, it was the

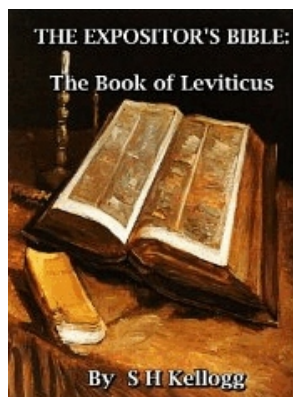
privilege of the man himself, or of any of his near kindred, to buy him out of bondage. Compensation to the owner however, enjoined in such cases according to the number of the years remaining to the next jubilee, at which time he would be obliged to release him (v. 54), whether redeemed or not. Thus we read (vv. 50-52): "He shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he sold himself to him unto the year of jubilee: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years; according to the time of an hired servant shall he be with him. If there be yet many years, according unto them he shall give back the price of his redemption out of the money that he was bought for. And if there remain but few years unto the year of jubilee, then he shall reckon with him; according unto his years shall he give back the price of his redemption. As a servant hired year by year shall he be with him."

Furthermore, it is commanded (v. 53) that the owner of the Israelite, for so long time as he may remain in bondage, shall "not rule over him with rigour;" and by the

The right to his service, not to his person

"Families were not to be parted ..."

Why did God not simply abolish slavery?



addition of the words "in thy sight" it is intimated that God would hold the collective nation responsible for seeing that no oppression was exercised by any alien over any of their enslaved brethren. To which it should also be added, finally, that the regulations for the release of the slave carefully provided for the maintenance of the family relation. Families were not to be parted in the emancipation of the jubilee; the man who went out free was to take his children with him (vv. 41,54). In the case, however, where the wife had been given him by his master, she and her children remained in bondage after his emancipation in the seventh year; but of course only until she had reached her seventh year of service. But if the slave already had his wife when he became a slave, then she and their children went out with him in the seventh year (Ex. 21:3,4). The contrast in the spirit of these laws with that of the institution of slavery as it formerly existed in the Southern States of America and elsewhere in Christendom, is obvious.

Man-stealing was a capital offense
- Exodus 21:16

These, then, were the regulations connected with the application of the ordinance of the jubilee year to rights of property, whether in real estate or in slaves. In respect to the cessation from the cultivation of the soil which was enjoined for the year, the law was essentially the same as that for the sabbatic year, except that, apparently, the right of property in the spontaneous produce of the land, which was in abeyance in the former case, was in so far recognised in the latter that each man was allowed to "eat the increase of the jubilee year out of the field" (v. 12).

Practical Objects of the Sabbatic Year and Jubilee Law.

Such was this extraordinary legislation, the like of which will be sought in vain in any other people. It is indeed true that, in some instances, ancient lawgivers decreed that land should not be permanently alienated, or that individuals should not hold more than a certain amount of land. Thus, for example, the Lacedemonians were forbidden to sell their lands, and the Dalmatians were wont to redistribute their lands every eight years. But laws such as these only present accidental coincidences with single features of the jubilee year; an agreement to be accounted for by the fact that the aim of such lawgivers was, in so far, the same as that of the Hebrew code, that they sought thus to guard against excessive accumulations of property in the hands of individuals, and those consequent great inequalities in the distribution of wealth which, in all lands and ages, and never more clearly than in our own, have been seen to be fraught with the gravest dangers to the highest interests of society. Beyond this single point we shall search in vain the history of any other people for an analogy to these laws concerning the sabbatic and the jubilee year.

What was the immediate object of this remarkable legislation? It is not irrelevant to observe that in so far as regards the prescription of a periodic rest to the land, agricultural science recognises that this is an advantage, especially in places where it may be difficult to obtain fertilisers for the soil in adequate amount. But it cannot be supposed that this was the chief object of these ordinances, not even in so far as they had respect to the land. We shall not err in regarding them as intended, like all in the Levitical system, to make Israel to be in reality, what they were called to be, a people holy, i.e., fully consecrated to the Lord. The bearing of these laws on this end is not hard to perceive.

In the first place, the law of the sabbatic year and the jubilee was a most impressive

lesson as to the relation of God to what men call their property; and, in particular, as to His relation to man's property in land. By these ordinances every Israelite was to be reminded in a most impressive way that the land which he tilled, or on which he fed his flocks and herds, belonged, not to himself, but to God. Just as God taught him that his time belonged to Him, by putting in a claim for the absolute consecration to Himself of every seventh day, so here He reminded Israel that the land belonged to Him, by asserting a similar claim on the land every seventh year, and twice in a century for two years in succession.

"Surely, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that God's ownership of the land was limited to the land of Palestine..."

No one will pretend that the law of the sabbatic year or the jubilee is binding on communities now. But it is a question for our times as to whether the basal principle regarding the relation of God to land, and by necessary consequence the right of man regarding land, which is fundamental to these laws, is not in its very nature of perpetual force. Surely, there is nothing in Scripture to suggest that God's ownership of the land was limited to the land of Palestine, or to that land only during Israel's occupancy of it. Instead of this, Jehovah everywhere represents Himself as having given the land to Israel, and therefore by necessary implication as having a like right over it while as yet the Canaanites were dwelling in it. Again, the purpose of God's dealing with Egypt is said to be that Pharaoh might know this same truth: that the earth (or land) was the Lord's (Ex.9:29); and in Psalm 24:1 it is stated, as a broad truth, without qualification or restriction, that the earth is the Lord's, as well as that which fills it. It is true that there is no suggestion in any of these passages that the relation of God to the earth or to the land is different from His relation to other property; but it is intended to emphasise the fact that in the use of land, as of all else, we are to regard ourselves as God's stewards, and hold and use it as in trust from Him.

The vital relation of this great truth to the burning questions of our day regarding the rights of men in land is self-evident. It does not indeed determine how the land question should be dealt with in any particular country, but it does settle it that if in these matters we will act in the fear of God, we must keep this principle steadily before us, that, primarily, the land belongs to the Lord, and is to be used accordingly. How, as a matter of fact, God did order that the land should be used, in the only instance when He has condescended Himself to order the political government of a nation, we have already seen, and shall presently consider more fully.

"... the natural and therefore intended effect of these regulations, if obeyed, would have been to impose a constant and powerful check upon man's natural covetousness and greed"

It is obvious that the natural and therefore intended effect of these regulations, if obeyed, would have been to impose a constant and powerful check upon man's natural covetousness and greed of gain. Every seventh year the Hebrew was to pause in his toil for wealth, and for one whole year he was to waive even his ordinary right to the spontaneous produce of his fields; which year of abstinence from sowing and reaping once

in fifty years was doubled. Add to this the strict prohibition of lending money upon interest to a fellow-Israelite, and we can see how far-reaching and effective, if

obeyed, were such regulations likely to be in restraining that insatiate greed for riches which ever grows the more by that which feeds it.

Yet again; the law of the sabbatic year and the jubilee was adapted to serve also as a singularly powerful discipline in that faith toward God which is the soul of all true religion. In this practical way every Hebrew was to be taught that "man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The lesson is ever hard to learn, though none the less necessary. This thought is alluded to in v. 20, where it is supposed that a man might raise the very natural objection to these laws, "What shall we eat the seventh year?" To which the answer is given, with reference even to the extreme case of the jubilee year: "I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for the three years; until the ninth year ... ye shall eat the old store."

"... preventing excessive accumulations either of land or of capital in the hands of a few ..."

But probably the most prominent and important object of the regulations in this chapter was to secure, as far as possible, the equal distribution of wealth, by preventing excessive accumulations either of land or of capital in the hands of a few, while the mass should be sunk in poverty. It is certain that these laws, if carried out, would have had a marvellous effect in this respect. As for capital, we all know what an important factor

in the production of wealth is accumulation by interest on loans, especially when the interest is constantly compounded. There can be no doubt of its immense power as an instrument for at once enriching the lender and in proportion impoverishing the borrower. But among the Israelites, to receive interest or its equivalent was prohibited. One other chief cause of the excessive wealth of individuals among us, as in all ages, is the acquirement in perpetuity by individuals of a disproportionate amount of the public land. The condition of things in the United Kingdom is familiar to all, with its inevitable effect on the condition of large masses of people; and in parts of the United States there are indications of a like tendency working toward the similar disadvantage of many small landholders and cultivators. But in Israel, if these laws should be carried into effect, such a state of things, so often witnessed among other nations, was made for ever impossible.

Individual ownership in the land itself was forbidden; no man was allowed more than a leasehold right; nor could he, even by adding largely to his leaseholds, increase his wealth indefinitely, so as to transmit a fortune to his children, to be still further augmented by a similar process in the next and succeeding generations; for every fifty years the jubilee came around, and whatever leaseholds he might have acquired from less fortunate brethren, reverted unconditionally to the original owner or his legal heirs.

However impracticable such arrangements may seem to us under the conditions of modern life, yet it must be confessed that in the case of a nation just starting on its career in a new country, as was Israel at that time, nothing could well be thought of more likely to be effective toward securing, along with careful regard to the rights of property, an equal distribution of wealth among the people, than the legislation which is placed before us in this chapter.

No possibility of unbridled capitalism ... nor communism!

It deserves to be specially noticed by how exact equity the laws are distinguished. While, on the one hand, excessive accumulations, either of capital or of land, were thus made impossible, there is here nothing of the destructive communism advocated by many in our day. These laws put no premium on laziness; for if a man, through indolence or vice, was compelled to sell out his right in his land, he had no security of obtaining it again until the jubilee; that is to say, upon an average, during his working lifetime. On the other hand, encouragement was given to industry, as a man who was thrifty might, by purchase of leaseholds, materially increase his wealth and comfort in life. And the effect on inheritance is evident. There could, on the one hand, be no inheritance of such colossal and overgrown fortunes as are possible in our modern states – no blessing, certainly, in many cases, to the heirs; and neither, on the other hand, could there be any inheritance of hopeless and degrading poverty. A man might have had an indolent or a vicious father, who had thus forfeited his landholding; but while the father would doubtless suffer deserved poverty during his active life, the young man, when the jubilee returned, and the lost paternal inheritance reverted to him, would have the opportunity to see whether he might not, with his father's experience before him as a warning, do better, and retrieve the fortunes of the family. In any case, he would not start upon the work of life weighted, as are multitudes among us, with a crushing and almost irremovable burden of poverty.

No inheritance of excess wealth ... nor endemic poverty

It is certain, no doubt, that these laws are not morally binding now; and no less certain, probably, that failing, as they did, to secure observance in Israel, such laws, even if enacted, could not in our day be practically carried out

any more than then. Nevertheless, so much we may safely say, that the intention and aim of these laws as regards the equal distribution of wealth in the community ought to be the aim of all wise legislation now. It is certain that all good government ought to seek in all righteous and equitable ways to prevent the formation in the community of classes, either of the excessively rich or of the excessively poor. Absolute equality in this respect is doubtless unattainable, and in a world intended for purposes of moral training and discipline were even undesirable; but extreme wealth or extreme poverty are certainly evils to the prevention of which our legislators may well give their minds. Only it needs also to be kept in mind that these Hebrew laws no less distinctly teach us that this end is to be sought only in such a way as shall neither, on the one hand, put a premium on laziness and vice, nor, on the other, deny to the virtuous and industrious the advantage which industry and virtue deserve, of additional wealth, comfort, and exemption from toilsome drudgery.

In close connection with all this it will be observed that all this legislation, while guarding the rights of the rich, is evidently inspired by that same merciful regard for the poor which marks the Levitical law throughout. For in all these regulations it is assumed that there would still be poor in the land; but the law secured to the poor great mitigations of poverty. Every seventh year the produce of the land was to be free alike to all; if one were poor his brother was to uphold him; when lending him, he was not to add to the debt the

"... all good government ought to seek ... to prevent the formation in the community of classes, either of the excessively rich or of the excessively poor."

burden of interest or increase. And then there was to the poor man the ever-present assurance, which alone would take off half the bitterness of poverty, that through the coming of the jubilee the children at least would have a new chance, and start life on an equality, in respect of inheritance in land, with the sons of the richest. And when we remember the close connection between extreme poverty and every variety of crime, it is plain that the whole legislation is as admirably adapted to the prevention of crime as of abject and hopeless poverty. Well might Asaph use the words which he employs, with evident allusion to the trumpet sound which ushered in the jubilee: "Happy the people that know the joyful sound!" i.e., that have the blessed experience of the jubilee, that supreme earthly sabbatism of the people of God.

Most significant and full of instruction, no less to us than to Israel, was the ordinance that both the sabbatic and the jubilee years should date from the day of Atonement. It was when, having completed the solemn ritual of that day, the high priest put on again his beautiful garments and came forth, having made atonement for all the transgressions of Israel, that the trumpet of the jubilee was to be sounded. Thus was Israel reminded in the most impressive manner possible that all these social, civil, and communal blessings were possible only on condition of reconciliation with God through atoning blood; atonement in the highest and fullest sense, which should reach even to the Holy of Holies, and place the blood on the very mercy-seat of Jehovah. This is true still, though the nations have yet to learn it. The salvation of nations, no less than that of individuals, is conditioned by national fellowship with God, secured through the great Atonement of the Lord. Not until the nations learn this lesson may we expect to see the crying evils of the earth removed, or the questions of property, of land-holding, of capital and labour, justly and happily solved. [Samuel H. Kellogg *Expositor's Bible: Leviticus 498-510*]

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