

Money and Economics in the Bible (1)

The functions of money, finance, and economics may seem very difficult to understand. Actually, they are not. *Money* means anything of value that can be easily transported and exchanged. Coins, currency, and jewels are forms of money. *Finance* is the management of money. *Economics* is the study of what money does.

The Bible contains some interesting sidelights on the development of money. It even gives basic principles for its use and management.

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I. Divine Ownership. God owns everything! He owns the entire universe; everything that was, and is, and may become. “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). He rules over all: “Say among the heathen that the LORD reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously” (Ps. 96:10).

When God gave the Israelites the land of Canaan as an inheritance, He said: “The land shall not be sold forever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me” (cf. Ex. 15:17–18; Lev. 25:23). This made them *stewards* or caretakers of the land. Ever after, the people of Israel were expected to use their possessions as a sacred trust. This understanding applied to their property, their money, and everything else that they treasured. All belonged to God.

We see the Israelites speak of divine ownership from time to time throughout their history. But we should remember that it was always in the background of their thinking. Jesus spoke directly to this issue in many of His sermons.

II. Money. In the distant past, there were no paper money or coins. People *bartered*—in other words, they traded one thing of value for another. The precious metals gold, silver, and copper were often traded. Later, these metals were made into standard coins. The Bible does not tell us about the steps of this development. Rather, it shows that both systems of trade—barter and coinage—were in use about the same time.

A. Barter. Abram’s wealth was counted in cattle, camels, other livestock, servants, silver, and gold (Gen. 13:2; 24:35). Cattle were a common form of money. They were a unit of trade especially well suited to Abram’s way of life, for “not knowing whither he went,” he followed the Lord’s directions (Heb. 11:8). Pharaoh “entreated Abram well” because he believed that Abram’s wife was actually his beautiful “sister.” Pharaoh gave him sheep, oxen, donkeys, camels, and male and female servants (Gen. 12:14–16). Later, in an identical situation Abram (now called Abraham) again declared his wife Sarai

1James I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney and William White, Jr., editors, *Nelson’s illustrated manners and customs of the Bible [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1995.

(now called Sarah) to be his sister. Abimelech of Gerar, after learning the deception, returned Sarah to her husband and gave him sheep, oxen, and male and female slaves as an indemnity. In addition he gave Abraham “a thousand pieces of silver” (Gen. 17:5, 15; 20:14–16).

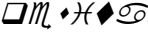
Jacob worked 14 years to pay the dowry for his two wives; he acquired a fortune in cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys by further labor (Gen. 29:30). King Mesha of Moab was a sheep breeder who paid tribute to Jehoram, the king of Israel—100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams annually (2 Kin. 3:4). Solomon traded 20,000 kors of crushed wheat, 20,000 kors of barley, 20,000 baths of wine, and 20,000 baths of oil annually for cedar, cypress, and algum timber from Lebanon (2 Chr. 2:10). The governors of Judah before Nehemiah taxed the people in “bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver” (Neh. 5:15).

B. Pieces of Metal. The word *money* appears in the King James Version of the Old Testament 112 times as the translation of the Hebrew word for silver. (The same word refers 287 times to objects made of silver.) Silver was a common unit of trade in ancient Israel. Merchants often exchanged small pieces of the metal to cinch a deal, as in the case of Jacob’s dowry.

In the New Testament the Greek word for silver is translated 11 times as *money*, 9 times as *pieces of silver*, and 3 times as a general indication of material wealth.

The value of the silver pieces was determined by weight. When Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah he “weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant” (Gen. 23:16). This transaction would have been made at the gate of the city, in the presence of witnesses. Jeremiah also weighed out the price of the land he bought from his relative and signed and sealed the deed (Jer. 32:9–10). David paid 50 shekels of silver to Araunah (Ornan) the Jebusite for his threshing floor, his oxen, and the instruments of threshing to make a sacrifice to the Lord (2 Sam. 24:24; cf. 1 Chr. 21:25). Likewise, the Queen of Sheba gave Solomon a gift of 120 talents of gold (1 Kin. 10:10).

Many kings required their subjects to pay an annual levy of silver or gold. For example, Solomon had an income of 666 talents of gold (1 Kin. 10:14–15). Hezekiah was forced to pay Sennacherib 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold (2 Kin. 18:14).

Jacob paid Hamor 100  of silver for a piece of land at Shechem (Gen. 33:19; Josh. 24:32). The Hebrew root for this word is unknown today; the Septuagint translates it “lamb.” Perhaps this was the shape of the weight used in weighing out the silver; or perhaps the unit was a quantity of silver equal to the price of a lamb. Whatever it may have been, the name indicates that the biblical writers were thinking of the relative value of goods though the medium was silver.

C. Coinage. Archaeologists have found many ancient coins and coin inscriptions that show us how early coinage appeared. A gold talent and two gold half-talents were found in a twelfth-century grave at Salamis, Cyprus. Egyptian wall paintings depict Cretans and Syrians offering copper ingots in tribute to Pharaoh Thutmose III (1501–1447 B.C.). Many coins have been unearthed in the ruins of Israelite towns.

If we carefully examine Scripture, we can see the transition from barter to coinage. Joseph was sold for “twenty pieces of silver” to Ishmaelite traders (Gen. 37:28). This meant that the price was 20 shekels of silver by weight. The *shekel* was a weight unit in the payment of silver; the word was so common that it was often omitted. An example of this omission is when Scripture says that the sons of Jacob took “money” (silver) to buy grain in Egypt (Gen. 42:25, 27).

Standard coins gradually replaced these standard units of weight. The early Egyptians, Semites, and Hittites shaped gold and silver into bars, rings, and rounded nodules for convenience of exchange.

In the area of the Aegean Sea, a unit called a *talent* that had the value of an ox became the standard. These ox-talents were pellets or rings of gold weighing 8.5 grams (.29 oz.). A copper ingot of the same value weighed 25.5 kg. (60 lbs.).

The story of Joseph indicates that the patriarchs used silver pieces of a shekel weight. For this reason, Achan had no difficulty knowing the value of the gold and silver he stole from the spoil of Jericho (Josh. 7:21).

God decreed that “the shekel of the sanctuary” must be 20 gerahs (Num. 3:47). Since God was the true King, His priests and prophets were guardians of the money standards. “Ye shall do no

unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight or in measure,” wrote Moses. “Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have” (Lev. 19:35, 36a).

Honesty in weights and measures was even a part of Israel’s law of holiness. The use of different weights (some true and some false) was absolutely forbidden in both the Law and the Prophets (cf. Deut. 25:13–16; Prov. 11:1; 20:10; Hos. 12:7; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:10–11).

The accompanying chart (*see* p. 331) shows approximate equivalents of the weights and measures used in Old Testament times. Ezekiel tells us the 𐤀𐤃𐤍𐤏 (liquid) and the 𐤀𐤃𐤍𐤏𐤃 (dry) are equal in size (45:11–14).

For the return of his unfaithful wife, Hosea had to pay a homer and a lethech of barley (Hosea 3:2). Solomon bought lumber from Hiram for thousands of cors (kors) of grain and thousands of baths of oil and wine.

Religious fees also had to be paid; this amount was determined by the ritual service performed. For example, a man who had been cleansed of leprosy was required to pay two male lambs, a ewe, an ephah of fine flour, and a log of oil (Lev. 14:19). If a man dedicated himself to the Lord in a vow, the priest charged him according to his age. Males between 20 and 60 paid 50 shekels; those over 60 paid 15; those between 5 and 20 paid 20; and those between one month and 5 years paid the reduced rate of 5 shekels. Women between 20 and 60 were charged 30 shekels. Those above 60 were charged 10 shekels. Those from 5 to 20 had to raise 10 shekels; and those from one month to 5 were let off for 3 shekels (Lev. 27:2–9).

The very poor were charged according to what the priest thought they could pay. Such persons would be charged according to the value of their labor. Indeed, he might serve out his payment by working in the tabernacle under the priests (Lev. 27:2–9).

These passages illustrate why we cannot know when Israel changed from barter measurements to standard coinage. The earliest coins were named for the standard barter measures they represented. Often the Bible uses these terms without saying whether or not they refer to coins.


1. In the Old Testament. The first statement in the Old Testament that explicitly refers to coins is in regard to the 20 gold bowls worth 1,000 “drams” (darics), which Ezra carried to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. (Ezra 8:27). The 𐤀𐤃𐤍𐤏𐤃 was a Persian gold coin that derived its name from Darius I (522–486 B.C.). It weighed 8.4 grams (0.3 oz.), just a little over a shekel.

Archaeologists believe that the kings of Lydia were the first to coin money; they began doing this in the seventh or sixth century B.C. The Persians adopted coinage from the Lydians when they conquered Asia Minor. Thus the value of freewill offerings given for the rebuilding of the temple in 537 B.C. is said to have been 61,000 darics (Ezra 2:69). The recorded value of the gold contributed for the temple in David’s time is also given in darics (1 Chron. 29:7); apparently a later historian inserted this information, giving the value of the contribution in terms of the currency used after the Exile.


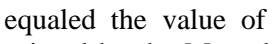

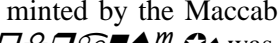

Archaeologists have found some coins with the marking 𐤎𐤏𐤃 (Judah), indicating that the Persian court authorized their production in that province. These coins are of Greek style, indicating that they were made by Persian governors; the Jews would have considered it idolatrous to mint coins stamped with the images of their rulers. The Bible does not mention these coins.

The Maccabean kings of Judea issued coins after 138 B.C., when the Seleucids granted them full sovereignty. The first Maccabean coins were silver; but since silver coinage was considered an exclusive privilege of the Roman emperor, later coins were made of copper. The first coin issued under this arrangement celebrated “Jerusalem the Holy.” It bore the emblem of a chalice on the face and a three-branched pomegranate on the reverse. These Jewish coins generally used symbols from nature or depicted articles used in the tabernacle and temple. Some of these copper coins were still in circulation in New Testament times.

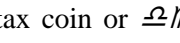
2. In the New Testament. In New Testament times, the silver coin of Tyre and Sidon was called the “temple coin.” It was widely known for its pure metal. But the Roman 𐤀𐤃𐤍𐤏𐤃 quickly superseded all silver coins of the same value. A 𐤀𐤃𐤍𐤏𐤃 was a soldier’s daily wage and worth about 44 cents today. It was the wage mentioned in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:9–10, 13). This coin was also used to pay tribute to the emperor. Jesus recognized it as being Caesar’s due (Matt. 22:19–21).

The Greek silver coin of the same value was the  This was probably the coin in the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8).

As we have already noted, the Greek word for *silver* was frequently used for money. Jesus told His disciples to take no “money” (silver) with them when He sent them out two by two (Luke 9:3). Judas was paid 30 “pieces of silver” to betray Jesus (Matt. 26:15; 27:3, 5. These references cite Zechariah 11:12–13, which did not refer specifically to coins.)

One of the most famous givers in the New Testament was the poor widow (Mark 12:41–44). She dropped two  which equaled the value of a  into the temple treasury. The  was first minted by the Maccabees while the  was the tiniest Roman copper coin. The  was about one-sixteenth of a soldier’s daily pay. Yet the widow’s gift prompted Jesus’ highest praise: “Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living” (Mark 12:43b–44).

When the temple tax collector in Capernaum asked the disciples of Jesus if He paid the two-drachma tax, Jesus sent Peter to catch a fish, in whose mouth he found a coin. This coin was a *stater*—a four-drachma piece. It was sufficient to pay the tax for both of them.



Asked whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, Jesus said: “Show me the tribute money” (Matt. 22:19). The tax coin or  was shown to Him. It had the image of the emperor on its face.

3. In the Roman Era. Many other coins that are not mentioned in the New Testament still survive from the Roman era. Some of these bear witness to the history of the Jewish people. An example of this is a coin bearing the inscription of “Herod the King,” or Herod the Great. This king’s soldiers killed all the male babies in Bethlehem under two years of age, to make sure they eliminated the One who was “born King of the Jews” (Matt. 2:2–16).

Some coins bear the inscription *Herod Ethnarch*, referring to Archelaus, who succeeded his father without the title of king. When Archelaus was deposed and banished, Judea became a Roman province ruled by procurators appointed by Rome.

Herod Antipas built Tiberias, which became the capital of the Roman province of Galilee shortly before Jesus began His ministry. A coin bears his portrait and title on the face, and the inscription *Tiberias* on the reverse. Herod Antipas also beheaded John the Baptist (Luke 9:7, 9) and participated in the trial of Jesus (23:8–12).

Herod Agrippa I minted a coin bearing his portrait with the inscription, “King Agrippa the Great, friend of Caesar.” Agrippa persecuted the church; he beheaded James and imprisoned Peter. Luke recorded his agonizing death under the judgment of God. (Agrippa’s officials minted another coin in Caesarea to mark the great prize fights, during which he suddenly fell ill.)

Some scholars have disputed Paul’s reference to a Roman official called the  on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13:7). But a coin from Cyprus bears the head and superscription of Claudius Caesar on the face, and on the reverse the inscription,  Paul visited Cyprus during the reign of Claudius.

Many other coins support the disputed accuracy of Luke. They confirm the existence of the *Asiarchs* or “chief (people) of Asia,” who were listed among Paul’s friends in Ephesus (Acts 19:31). Coins also confirm the fact that Philippi was a Roman colony and the chief city of Macedonia (Acts 16:12), and that Tarsus was “no mean city” (21:39).

III. Finance and Economics. The principles that control economics—the production, distribution, and consumption of the material means of satisfying human desires—are the same as those that direct finance, the management of an enterprise. The Bible provides useful guidance on all of these issues.

In God’s first appearance to man, He let man know that the earth was good and delightful, and it was to be used to meet his needs (Gen. 1:29). But man’s enjoyment of life should come from God, not from the things God had made! God Himself was to be the focus of man’s desire and attention.

A. The Tithe. When he returned from destroying the Mesopotamian kings, Abraham gave Melchizedek the priest a tenth of the spoil (Gen. 14:20). This was his confession that God was his Lord, the Possessor of heaven and earth, and the Giver of victory (14:19).

Jacob recognized the same responsibility. He vowed to give God a tithe of all that he received if God would protect him in this journey and return him to his land. This humble confession of dependence on God stands against the proud boast, "... My power, and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth" (Deut. 8:17; cf. Dan. 4:30). There was no middle road between these paths.

The giving of a tithe was man's acknowledgment that he is a steward of God's creation. The Old Testament clearly demonstrates that every spiritual relationship of man is expressed in some material way. Rites of worship gave the Israelites a way to confess the operation of their faith in every sphere—not the least of which was the economic sphere.

Israel came out of Egypt by faith in the promises of God. God then claimed the firstborn of Israel (Ex. 13:11–16) and commanded that they be redeemed by the payment of five shekels per male child (Num. 3:46–47). This token payment reminded the people of Israel that they belonged to the Lord; they were not their own (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

God brought the Israelites into the land promised their fathers (Ex. 6:8), where He would rule over them forever (15:17–18). God would drive out the inhabitants and give the land to them (Ex. 23:28–30). In return, they would acknowledge His bounty by offering to Him the firstborn of all clean animals and the first ripe grain and fruits, at the place He would choose (Deut. 12:11–12, 17–18). There they would bring annual tithes of the fruits of the ground and of the flock (Deut. 26:1–12).

When the Israelites offered their tithes, they confessed God's providence to their fore-fathers, His deliverance in their time of need, His redemption of them from oppression, and His gift of the land of Canaan (Deut. 26:5–9). They invited the Levites, the poor, the widows, and the orphans of their local community to join them at the central sanctuary as they made these offerings to the Lord. No man could appear at a feast empty-handed. The Law required each man to bring an offering proportionate to the way he had been blessed (Deut. 16:10, 17). (*See also* "Worship Rituals.")

Notice the economic dimension of Israel's worship. They offered the Lord a large part of their time; they presented the first fruits of their grain and livestock; they came to the feasts with offerings and tithes; they made freewill offerings of their lives and property; and they gave liberally for the building of the tabernacle and temple. When they returned with booty taken in battle, they set aside a portion for the Lord and Levites before dividing it among themselves (Num. 31:26–54). Their devotion to God cost them the best of all they had (cf. 2 Sam. 24:24). The tithe clearly expressed this costly devotion.

TABLE OF WEIGHTS AND MEASURES**

UNIT	Equivalents (approx)	
	Metric	English
*UNITS OF WEIGHT		
bekah, 1/2 shekel	1.9 gram	.067 oz
shekel, 20 gerahs	3.8 gram	.134 oz
maneh, 50 shekels	.57 kg	1 1/4 lbs
talent, 3000 shekels	34.02 kg	75 lbs
UNITS OF VOLUME (LIQUID)		
log	.32 liter	.67 pt
Hin	6.5 liter	1.7 gal
bath, ephah, 1/10 homer	37 liter	10 gal
cor (kor), homer, 10 baths	370 liter	100 gal
UNITS OF VOLUME (DRY)		
omer, 1/10 ephah	4 liter	0.45 pk
ephah, 1/10 homer	40 liter	1.1 bu
lethech, 1/2 homer	200 liter	5 1/2 bu
cor (kor), homer, 10 baths	400 liter	11 bu
cab (kab)	2.2 liter	2 qt

***Tables for gold and silver differed, as did the actual weights of light or normal shekels.**

**** Based on *Collier's Encyclopedia*, Vol. 23, ed. by William D. Halsey (New York: Crowell-Collier Publishing Company, 1965), p. 394**

B. Property Rights. Every family received a tract of land as a perpetual inheritance. This land was a trust from the Lord. It enabled every family to produce enough for their own needs and share with their neighbors—especially the poor and strangers living among them. The land remained the Lord's (Lev. 25:23), although He gave each family the right to produce food and clothing from it. (See "Agriculture"; "Laws and Statutes.")

The Israelites were to exercise stewardship of the land. They were to use the land and its products unselfishly for those in need around them. Even the passer-by on the road was free to gather grain or fruit to satisfy his hunger (Deut. 23:24–25). They were to be gracious and bountiful to others, just as God had been bountiful to them.

C. Care of the Poor. The welfare of the individual was primarily the responsibility of the family. The closest male relative, known as the kinsman-redeemer, was the protector of the individual. He was to "avenge his blood" and redeem his kinsman from indebtedness (Num. 35:12, 19; Lev. 24–26).

The most notable example of the kinsman-redeemer was Boaz, who bought from Naomi all that had belonged to her husband and married her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth. Thus Naomi was no longer obligated to Ruth and Boaz for her daily provision. Her property was eventually given to the child of Ruth, the heir of Naomi's son, Mahlon. (See also "Marriage and Divorce.")

Any crops that grew during the sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee were set aside for the poor to gather. This made the poor responsible to gather their own grain. Thus they preserved their personal dignity and self-respect.

The Law called upon the people in each community to take personal interest in the poor and give them individual encouragement. The third-year tithe was to be stored for the poor of the community, so that they "shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest" (Deut. 14:29b; cf. 12:11–12; 26:1–19). Thus the Jewish congregation showed interest in the needy. This practice also helped to prevent division between the comfortable middle-class farmer and the gleaning poor.

The Law told individuals how to deal with neighbors in progressive stages of poverty (Lev. 25:35–43). If a poor man lost all sense of security, his neighbor was to treat him with hospitality, as if he were a stranger or sojourner (Lev. 25:23). If a poor man needed to borrow money, he was not expected to pay interest or return more goods than he borrowed. If the poor man became so indebted that he had to sell himself as a bond servant, he was to be treated as a hired servant. (See "Laws and Statutes.") He remained a free man (cf. Deut. 15:18), and in the Year of Jubilee he would be freed. Further, the master was obligated to share with him grain, livestock, and wine (Deut. 15:14).

The Law calls the poor man "your brother" (Lev. 25:35, 39). He was a fellow Israelite; but more importantly, he was a brother in God's covenant. For this reason, an Israelite was not to begrudge the bond servant his freedom nor the goods he gave him.

The fourth commandment required a man to let his servants rest on the Sabbath, just as he refreshed himself. He was to pay his hired servants at the end of the day (Lev. 19:13).

The Lord promised that if Israel faithfully obeyed His commandments, there would be no poor in the land because He would bless them (Deut. 15:1–5). But notice the condition of the promise: "There shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee ... Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God" (Deut. 15:4–5). If God's people listened, they would be so prosperous that they would lend their wealth to many nations (15:6).

D. Solomon's Reign: An Era of High Finance. Solomon engaged in an extensive building program. This work demanded a complex organization of men, the gathering of imported building materials, and the accumulation of wealth.

At the beginning of his reign, Solomon loved the Lord and walked in His statutes (1 Kin. 3:3). In response to his request, God gave him great wisdom (1 Kin. 4:29–30). With this wisdom, Solomon organized his people, made international covenants for materials, collected wealth, and pursued his

building programs. He gave his most careful attention to the building and dedication of the temple, for that was the central event of his life.

Solomon began by making a mutual trade agreement with Hiram (Hiram), king of Tyre, to buy cypress, cedar, and alnum lumber. He paid for it with wheat, barley, oil, and wine (1 Kin. 5:2–12; 2 Chr. 2:3–10). Solomon drafted 30,000 woodcutters from Israel and sent 10,000 of these men to Lebanon. They worked on a regular schedule: one month in Lebanon and two months at home.

Needing more workers, Solomon made slaves out of the Canaanites who remained in Israel. Of these, 70,000 worked in transportation, 80,000 were stone cutters, and 3,600 were overseers.

As Solomon's kingdom expanded, he demanded tribute from the kings of the territories he conquered (2 Chr. 9:13). Solomon also collected money from merchants who used Israel's trade routes (9:14).

Solomon's merchants bought chariots from Egypt and sold them to the kings of the Hittites and Syria (1 Kin. 10:28–29). They built a fleet of ships, manned them with Israelite sailors and the sailors of Hiram, and sent them to Ophir. These men returned with 420 talents of gold. From sources other than the Bible we learn that Solomon conducted a large mining and smelting enterprise in the Sinai Desert. As a result, silver became common in Jerusalem (1 Kin. 10:27; 2 Chr. 9:20, 27).

By the end of his life, Solomon had turned his heart away from the Lord. His extravagant living soon brought disaster to the realm. Indeed, 10 tribes broke away from Rehoboam to form the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:16–24).

The Bible says nothing about the care of the poor under Solomon's reign, nor about the sabbatical year or the Year of Jubilee.

In one generation, the agrarian economy of Israel had become a highly organized state machine. By concentrating the control of labor and the means of production in the hands of a government, Solomon sowed seeds of discontent among his people.

Solomon controlled kingdoms from the Euphrates to the Nile. He saw an end to the devastating wars of David's rule. But he achieved only a meager part of the promised reign of righteousness and peace (Ps. 72).

E. The Divided Kingdom. The economy of united Israel depended upon its agriculture and its control of the trade routes. But during the period of the divided kingdom, Syria became strong and took from Israel all the pasture lands east of the Jordan and the plain of Galilee and Jezreel. To Jehoahaz, Syria left but a little circle of land around Samaria. Indeed, Israel was reduced to poverty and near collapse (2 Kin. 13:3, 22; 14:26).

But by the time Jeroboam II ascended the throne, God had weakened Syria internally. The Syrian kings were worried by the rise of Assyria. This enabled Jeroboam to restore Israel's former borders (2 Kin. 14:25–26). By recovering its pasture and grain lands and regaining control of the trade routes, he made Israel prosperous once more.

But the new wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few rich people, who lived in luxury and oppressed the poor (Hos. 12:7–8; Amos 2:7–8; 4:1–7, 11; 8:4–6; Mic. 2:1–2). Prophets denounced the rulers and merchants for enriching themselves at the expense of the helpless poor. They predicted that the kingdom would crumble and fall before the powerful Assyrian armies.

By God's grace, the kingdom of Judah continued 150 years longer than the Northern Kingdom of Israel. But Judah's kings frequently broke their loyalty to the Lord by making treaties with pagan powers. They lost God's promised blessings, weakened their strategic position, and brought military destruction on themselves (cf. 2 Kin. 16:7–9; 2 Chr. 16:1–10; 2 Chr. 28:20). Prophets denounced these elders of Judah and princes of the house of David for their injustice and oppression of the poor (Is. 3:13–14; 10:1–4; Mic. 2:1–2; Jer. 22:1–5).

God had promised Moses that He would bless the land if Israel was obedient. But Israel was not obedient. The rulers no longer held the land in trust for the welfare of the people. Rather, they were using their power to enrich and glorify themselves. They perverted the entire economic system.

The prophets believed the divided kingdom was doomed. But they believed the Lord would raise up another David who would shepherd the flock in righteousness (Jer. 23:5–6; Ezek. 34:23–25). This new David would proclaim good news to the afflicted and liberty to the captives (Is. 11:4–5; 61:1–3). He would do what the Davidic kings had failed to do (Ps. 72), and would devote the unjust gains of the world to the Lord (Is. 60:1–12; Mic. 4:1–13).

F. The New Testament Era. The New Testament affirmed that God is the final authority over every part of our lives. Jesus and the apostles dealt with money, finance, and economics as areas of privilege and responsibility for the people of God.

1. The Economic Teachings of Jesus. Jesus proclaimed good news to the poor and liberty to the captives (Luke 4:16–19). He called people to demonstrate their single-hearted devotion to God in their economic pursuits (Matt. 6:19–21, 24). With profound simplicity, Jesus pointed out that God clothes the plants with beauty and gives the birds their food—and so will He care for the needs of His people. He insisted that His followers seek to live in righteousness, for then “all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, He commanded them to take no money with them. He insisted that each man would be worthy of his support (Matt. 10:1–10). Thus He taught that the children of the Kingdom should support His servants with their material goods. Jesus demonstrated His own devotion to the will of God by refusing to lay up material wealth for Himself (cf. Luke 9:58). He was the King of kings, yet he lived like a pauper in His own world.

Jesus’ life demonstrated that every spiritual condition has a material manifestation. For example, Jesus and His disciples had a common treasury; the responsibility for handling it was given to one of the group, Judas Iscariot. The unfaithfulness of Judas in this task (which they dubbed the “least”) revealed his unworthiness to be entrusted with true riches (Luke 16:10–11; John 12:6).

Jesus made it clear that His true children distinguish themselves from hypocrites by the way they minister to their brothers who are in need (Matt. 25:31–46). He did not teach some new doctrine of material goods or try to establish a new economic system. He came to affirm the Law of Moses, not to destroy it. The difference lay in who He was: He was the Lord of glory who became a man and lived in perfect obedience to the Law of God.

2. The Apostles’ Principles. The apostles reaffirmed that God created all things through Jesus Christ for Himself (Col. 1:16). All things have their origin, continuation, and goal in Him (Rom. 11:36). Believers exist for Him (1 Cor. 8:6); they were purchased to glorify Him with their bodies (6:20).

The apostles taught that, since Christ laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16). This means that if we have this world’s goods and see a brother in need, we should love him in deed by sharing our goods with him (1 John 3:17–18).

The early church displayed its stewardship by placing its goods in the care of the apostles (and later the deacons) for distribution as people had need (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37; 6:1–7).

Paul asked the churches of Asia Minor and Greece to share their wealth with the needy church of Jerusalem. He wrote, “For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened” (2 Cor. 8:13).

In other words, Paul made it clear that he expected each congregation to give according to its ability. God gives abundance to one so that he may supply the want of another (2 Cor. 8:14). This is why Paul was so grateful for the gift he received from the Philippians. It demonstrated their liberality, it was the fruit of their love, and it was pleasing to God (Phil. 4:10–19).

James approved of Christians’ engaging in business for profit; but he reminded them that their first concern should be the will of God. Anyone who failed to follow this course, he said, is boastful and arrogant (James 4:12–16). James also rebuked his fellow Christians for failing to pay their laborers adequately. He said that riches acquired through stinginess would rust, and the rust would witness against them in the day of judgment (James 5:2–4). Paul spoke more positively. He instructed the rich to store for themselves a spiritual treasure by doing good works and sharing their material goods (1 Tim. 6:17–19).

John heard the heavenly choir singing: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). At the end of John’s Book of Revelation we see the kings of the earth bringing their glory to the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:24, 26). Thus the fruits of man’s toil would be remembered and celebrated in the presence of God to all eternity.

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