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## JUBILEE ECONOMIC JUSTICE, PART 2

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By Jim Jordal

If your brother has become poor, and his hand can't support him among you; then you shall uphold him. As a stranger and a sojourner he shall live with you. Take no interest from him or profit, but fear your God; that your brother may live among you. You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit. I am Yahweh your God, who brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.

Leviticus 25:35-38 (WEB)

Last week we investigated several land and resource-use principles of the biblical Year of Jubilee. Jubilee (The Year of the Lord's Favor) is detailed in the 25th chapter of Leviticus, and took place once every 50 years. The purpose of Jubilee was to create an egalitarian society in which poverty, oppression, exploitation, and debt were absent; and in which freedom, justice, and righteousness were operative.

Moving on, we find that Jubilee created a society in which intergenerational (on going over many generations) poverty was impossible. Since the major productive factor, land, was returned to its original owners every 50 years, each family was guaranteed a base of wealth and a source of income. Should anyone fall into what we might term situational poverty (short-term poverty due to unfortunate circumstances), neighbors were required to provide for their needs with no interest charged on loans or profit earned on material gifts. Thus were the basics of life given, not loaned, to those in need; with renewed opportunity provided for persons impoverished by misfortune or hard times.

Because oppression is against the very nature of God, Jubilee prohibited any person from using social or economic position or power to abuse anyone. Since all members of society were essentially brothers and sisters, economic or social abuse constituted not only sin against God, but an immoral act against society as well. This principle alone would solve most problems of economic and social injustice, and would greatly reduce the human drive to accumulate riches and goods at the expense of others.

Jubilee provided a general release from human bondage of every sort. Prisoners, captives, and slaves who desired were freed. We might wonder if Jubilee resulted in a widespread release of criminals, but we must remember that under Mosaic Law most crime was punished swiftly by death, corporal punishment, or financial restitution. Thus there were few prisoners, as we understand the term today. What little personal restraint of freedom there was consisted of persons

committing accidental injuries who fled to special Cities of Refuge to escape family members called avengers of blood. And even that form of banishment was limited in length to the lifetime of the existing High Priest.

But it is in the prohibition of usury (interest) and the amelioration of debt that Jubilee perhaps has its greatest impact. In ancient times usury was personal in nature, and the economic and social damage limited mainly to individuals and families.

Not so today! Usury and debt threaten not only individuals and families, but also businesses and nations.

As consumer debt in the U.S. reaches staggering proportions, families find it ever more difficult to provide the necessities of life, even with two full-time workers. Enter modern advertising, with its generally denied function of transforming wants into needs; and banks issuing credit cards to virtually anyone; and we have a credit/debt burden overwhelming to many individuals and families. We see families earning over \$100,000 yearly who cannot pay their bills and who inexorably slip toward bankruptcy. But the financial powers continue to deny culpability with the plea "Well, they didn't have to buy what they did, and they didn't have to use the credit card we so generously gave them, did they?"

Then there is the nation's debt, both internal and external, which seemingly has no limit and no end.

And finally, there is Third World debt which crushes and devours poverty-stricken nations and their peoples without compassion or common sense. Everything is done in the name of efficiency and profit.

Critics will no doubt claim that Jubilee principles are unworkable in modern society. But God says otherwise. It remains to be seen if we will place human wisdom above that of the Creator. Let's hope and pray we have enough sense to realize that the present situation resulting in oppression, injustice, poverty, ignorance, disease, and hopelessness for a majority of the world's population cannot continue much longer.