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# JUBILEE DEALS WITH INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY

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By Jim Jordal

The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and live as foreigners with me. In all the land of your possession you shall grant a redemption for the land. If your brother becomes poor, and sells some of his possessions, then his kinsman who is next to him shall come, and redeem that which his brother has sold. If a man has no one to redeem it, and he becomes prosperous and finds sufficient means to redeem it; then let him reckon the years since the sale of it, and restore the surplus to the man to whom he sold it; and he shall return to his property. But if he isn't able to get it back for himself, then what he has sold shall remain in the hand of him who has bought it until the Year of Jubilee: and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his property.

Leviticus 25:23-28, WEB

This Jubilee principle was originally aimed at preventing intergenerational poverty, or the kind of poverty that brings generation after generation into destitution and desperation. This sort of poverty historically occurred as creditors accumulated great land holdings by foreclosing on delinquent debtors. Then, as now, crop failures forced farmers to borrow for subsistence this year and seed for next year. Several crop failures could cause debtors to lose their land and fall into indentured servanthood with no hope of recovery. This cause of permanent poverty was prevented by Jubilee land redemption principles.

Back then land was the major productive resource, the possession of which could provide adequate income and sustenance for a family or clan. People could still become poor through misfortune or personal sloth; but the problem of long-term, hopeless, degrading poverty was forestalled because all Israelites has access to the financial benefits of God-given productive resources.

But as time passed national leaders grew more intent on war and power than on caring for their people. As Jubilee principles fell into disuse persons with money or power began to accumulate large holdings of land. As the centuries passed these land holdings evolved into feudalism with its manors, Lords, serfs and peasants. Possession of land meant power, so fiefdoms grew into principalities and then into early nation-states—all based on accumulation of land, resources and money. In the absence of Jubilee, this condition continues unabated today, with the exception that ownership of land has often been replaced by vast accumulations of capital in the form of paper investments, buildings, factories and natural resources.

But the outcome for workers and the poor is still the same, no matter what chips are used in the game. For workers and the poor it still means domination by the powerful few operating the system, with little recourse either in the courts or in public opinion.

Today, specific rules concerning land redistribution would be virtually impossible to implement since most people are not farmers or even capable of wisely developing and profiting from whatever natural resources they might obtain. But the principle of redistribution of productive resources still remains. Now the principle could be implemented by simply considering that all citizens by virtue of their birth have a right under natural law to a share of God's creation sufficient to provide them with a decent life. Writers call this distribution of the national wealth by several names—national dividend, basic income grant, or guaranteed annual income—but the principle of equitable (not equal) sharing of national wealth is the same.

The very thought of such activity draws the ire of those who hold the values of the domination system that private property is sacrosanct and that profits should go only to those diligent, lucky, or crooked enough to have far more than their fair share of the earth's productive resources. Dominators are seldom willing to admit that their riches arise not only from their own efforts but also from the labor of the masses and from their ability to use for their profit the infrastructure and public institutions developed over centuries by average people, their money, and their labor.

Apply this Jubilee principle to the current mess of ever-increasing mortgage foreclosures and repossessions and the fraud lying behind many of the so-called toxic mortgages and you will see just another attempt by the power structure to rob average people of their stake in the American Dream. Jubilee would end this also.