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Biblical wisdom for days of depression, 1932.

BIBLICAL WISDOM FOR DAYS OF DEPRESSION

GIVEN BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
AT THE TEMPLE

SUNDAY, JANUARY 3d, 1932

Why do people in all parts of the world turn to the Bible in every situation? What is it that makes this book the deathless book that it is? What gives its ancient pages a perennial freshness and timeliness?

It is because the Bible is a book of life; because the whole of life is mirrored and reflected in it. Because every authentic mood of life finds an echo in it.

The Bible is not a book of propaganda, - unless it be a propaganda for the moral life. It is saturated with a moral passion and a consciousness of a living God and of the history and experiences of human being. But beyond that it is not a propaganda book in the sense of avoiding the unpleasant in life, in the sense of avoiding everything that is not particularly germane. It is not a propaganda book in a sense of detouring life's rough and unbroken road. Every heart finds its song and its burden in the Bible whether it be saint or sinner, scoffer, cynic, the man of faith or the man of doubt, the embittered and the disillusioned, the tried and the

troubled, the beaten or the victorious in life. They all find their voice in the Bible.

The style of the Bible is remarkably vivid, incisive, swift-moving as life itself. But it is varied. It responds subtly and sensationally to the mood. When the prophet speaks, the style is fervid, impassioned, majestic. When the psalmist speaks, the style is tender, devotional. When the lover speaks the style is of that wonderful color and spice of the Orient. And when the sage speaks, the style is quiet, calm and unhurried, like the movement of deep silent rivers which mirror the earth.

Only two peoples in antiquity could write real literature, - the Jews and the Greeks. There is no literature in the world until the coming of the Jew and of the Greeks. I don't know if you have ever thought of that. The literature of Egypt consists almost entirely of instruction, records of commercial transactions, royal victories, campaigns, records of dynasties. That's about all we have. The two books which have come down from ancient Egypt, - a people which had a civilization long before the Jews, are "The Book of the Dead", a ritual work placed in the tombs of those who died to guide them through the netherworld, and a "Book of Precepts." But beyond that we have nothing of the Egyptians and their history covering thousands of years before the Jews appeared on the scene of history.

And of Babylon and Assyria we have less, - a few tabletslikewise recording business transactions, laws, one or two priestly sacrificial tablets, occasionally a sacrificial hymn, records of campaigns, - but beyond that we have nothing of ancient literature.

Even of ancient China, whose civilization is one of the oldest, if not the oldest of the world, we have no literature until the time of Confucious. And he lived around the year 500 B. C. when a great deal of Hebrew literature had already been written. Confucius' writings are literature in the newer sense, purely proverbial literature.

In India alone, do we find a literature which is contemporaneous with the Hebrew literature, written in the Sanskrit because the later writings, the Pitakas and the Vedas of the Brahmins are of a time much later than the classic writings of the Hebrew. Where, in these hundred books of the ancient Pali do you find anything approaching a Book of Job or an Isaiah or a philosophic treatise like Ecclesiastes, or an ideal like Ruth, or even a love poem like the Song of Songs?

There is very little Persian literature during the time of conquest. The Zoroaster literature of Persia dates from around the Common Era.

As for the Roman literature, they began to write literature long after the Bible was completed. The works of Ceasar, Horace, Virgil, Sacretæs were of the first century after the Common Era, and the Bible was completed and in its entirety before that time.

That's a very interesting thing to contemplate; that the only two peoples of mankind who knew how to write great literature in antiquity were the Jews and the Greeks.

The Jews were keen observers and artists enough to put their observations and their impressions into a literary form of such beauty that it has endured to the present. A characteristic of great literature, of course, is that it is forever true, timely and applicable.

We recall that great line from Keats' "Ode On a Grecian Urn" when he speaks of the beauty of that urn, "

"Forever warm and still to be enjoyed
Forever panting, and forever young"

That's great literature. Over and over again the Greek literature and Hebrew literature stimulate new movement in thought and style among the people of Europe. They were enkindling every contact. They renewed acquaintance. The study of Greek hastened the Renaissance and the study of Hebrew literature hastened the day of the Protestant Reformation. There is something life giving in great literature and forever timely.

The great American dramatist, Eugene O'Neill, takes for his latest great drama "Mourning Becomes Electra", a Greek drama. He goes back twenty-five hundred years for his inspiration.

And the writer of that charming book recently published, the work of a German Jewish writer, Joseph Roth, called "Job" likewise goes back twenty-five hundred years for his inspiration, for his model, to a Hebrew book, "The Book of Job."

For after all human nature is a rather constant theme and human nature is the same, more or less, under attic skies ~~XX~~ or ~~XXX~~ under the overcast skies of New England, in the hills of Judea or on the steppes of Russia.

And so that it is not at all far fetched for one to wish to go back to the Bible in a time such as ours, a time of depression and adversity, to learn what those men of old, who saw life steadily, had to say about similar experiences which undoubtedly were theirs, to see what lessons we can learn, similar to the lessons which they learned long ago and concerning which they advised us.

When I announced the subject a week ago, a man came to me and said, "surely you can not find everything in the Bible. For instance, you have spoken several times about unemployment insurance. Is there anything in the Bible about unemployment insurance?" And I said, "Yes there is."

"There was a man by the name of Joseph, who lived in the land of Egypt and he knew that Egypt was subjected to cycles of

fertility, periods of plenty, and periods of drought. And he advised his king to insure the country against the seven lean years. And the king, during the years of plenty, built store houses and had them filled up, against the seven lean years, so that when the seven lean years came down upon the people, they had enough to tide them over."

Joseph was wiser than the business geniuses of our own day. We do not set aside in our prosperous years enough for our lean years. We, too, have our cycles of prosperity and depression, but we haven't the vision, as they had long ago, of protecting the people against want and misery and the bread lines, by setting aside reserves during the prosperous years for the lean years.

Strange, how Biblical writers could anticipate all that. But there it is. Biblical wisdom for times of depression.

First of all, the Bible warns us over and over again concerning the uncertainty of riches and the instability of earthly fortunes. (quote Hebrew) "The Lord maketh poor and maketh rich. He lifteth up and bringeth low again." "Life is a revolving wheel."

In our country we are not accustomed to life being a revolving wheel. We have the fiction that life is continuously ascending. We have here the legend of the poor boy who started out very poor and ends up as a banker. Life is always going up. We

don't think of going down. In the old world where to go down is the more frequent experience than to go up, they know what is meant by life as a continuous wheel.

So that the Bible admonishes men of the uncertainty of riches, the instability of earthly fortune and proceeds to advise men not to pin their entire life's happiness on the prospect of remaining permanently affluent, nor to trust too much in their possessions. (quote Hebrew) "Wealth does not endure forever." "Any more than the throne of the dynasty endures throughout all generations."

What has happened to the race of millionaires that we had ten years ago? They have vanished like smoke. (quote Hebrew) We are admonished "He who puts his trust in his wealth is doomed to fall."

Men should not build the happiness of their life upon the foundation of the prospect of continually remaining rich. Other foundations must be found for a happy life.

The Bible admonishes men not to exhaust themselves and all their energies in the pursuit of wealth. (quote Hebrew) "Do not exhaust thyself in an effort to get rich". And so we read in the Book of Proverbs, "Weary not thyself to become rich
Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it - it is gone!
For riches certainly make themselves wings.
Like an eagle that flieth toward heaven."

And that gentle cynic of the Bible has this
profound observation to make:

"There is a greivous evil which I have seen under the sun-
Riches kept by the owner to his hurt,
And those riches perish by evil adventure (stock speculation
and what not)
And if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in hand
As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he go back
As he came, and shall take nothing for his labor...
And what profit hath he that he laborouth for the wind?
All his days he eateth in darkness, and he hath much
Vexation and sickness and wrath."

What a perfect description this, of many an American
businessman, who spends his life in vexation and wrath to the turmoil
and heat of a competitive life in pursuit of wealth for himself and
his children. And then some evil adventure befalls him, a depression,
and he is left naked as the day he was born and he has nothing to give
to his children. He has lost not only his fortune, but his life. He
had no other world but economic pursuits and when that crumbled, nothing
else was left for him.

How many of us do just that? How many of us are concerned
about leaving our wealth to our children, as if that was the most
important thing we could leave to our children. In reality it is the
least important thing we could leave to our children. And frequently
it is the bane of our children's life, the wealth which we leave to
them. It is too late to leave your children anything in your will.

When you are about to die, it is too late to leave your children anything of real value. It is while you are alive that you can give them real things, worthwhile things, when you can will to help build them up into fine men and women, develop their character, and teach them fine habits of thought and conduct. That's a precious legacy that a man can leave to his offspring.

The Bible also rebukes the insolence of the rich. (quote Hebrew) "The rich man is wise in his ~~yo~~ own eyes," (Hebrew) "but the poor man who has intelligence soon finds him out."

We didn't find out our rich men in this country until we became poor. We idolized our rich men, made gods of them, regarded them as men of great genius who were going to make us all rich. We gave them college degrees for their great wisdom. And then came the crash of 1929 and the poor man discovered the rich man.

One of the Senators in the United States Senate, a week or two ago, following the Senatorial hearing of the bankers, those super-men who took the wealth of America and invested it in foreign countries, this Senator said as follows in the Senate Chamber of the United States:

"As I have listened to distinguished bankers who testified before the Finance Committee and as I heard their statements - statements uttered with a prescience of wisdom that it is impossible for me to describe, uttered when we sat at their feet to drink in their words as if they were inspired - I looked at those gentlemen and I thought that this day,

this time, this hour, we are liquidating something else than the debts which Europe owes us. We liquidated at the treaty of Versailles the statesmanship of the world. The statesmanship of the world in the making of the treaty of Versailles showed itself to be absolutely bankrupt. It left us this horrid legacy which during the years since that treaty was executed has led to many difficulties, and that statesmanship of which we used to boast wrote for the world not a treaty of peace but an irritant for war."

"Since October, 1929, we have been liquidating the wisdom and the omniscience of our great banking institutions and of those masters of finance who were supposed to be super-men before that time and who have been shown since that time to be very, very common clay."

"We have been liquidating not only their unwisdom but we have demonstrated beyond the possibility of a doubt that those men who were thought to be financiers who by the slightest legerdemain could conjure up success and who could guide any movement wherein there were dollars were, after all, just as astute as we are and no more so, and we, some of us, belong to the debtor class still. They have demonstrated that there are no supermen financially in the United States; no supermen who could deal with great financial problems and solve them for a people."

That's a good thing that happened in the United States. We have destroyed a legend, a superstition, an idolatrous worship in the United States and that will help us to weather our own economic sanity in the future.

The Bible warns us that there are blessings in life more worthwhile than the blessings of wealth. (quote Hebrew) "There are some men who become rich and have nothing. There are some men who become poor and have great wealth."

There is, for example, the wealth of honest toil, of work, of having an interest in things, to do things even if those interesting things do not yield an abundance of wealth. Even the cynic of the Bible, Coheleth, is forced to acknowledge:

"Sweet is the sleep of a laboring man
Whether he eat little or much.
But the satiety of the rich will not
Suffer him to sleep."

Work! The Bible praises work, praises industry.

(Quote Hebrew) "The Industrious Hand." That, the Bible holds up in praise. One of the great menaces involved in our present situation is that the continuous periods of unemployment act as a discouragement of industry and thrift. That, to my mind, is perhaps the most serious menace in the present situation. Our whole industrial morality is built on the idea that it will reward industry and therefore that a man who is industrious and wants to work will inevitably receive the rewards which the economic order can give for his industry and his labor. These last years and months of depression are undermining the purpose of this entire industrial morality for even the man who is industrious

and wants to work, and was thrifty, has been driven through penury and want to the doors of our charitable institutions by enforced unemployment, not by his own inability. The industrious man today is in the same plight as the shiftless man. Both have been driven to want and charity. The whole moral code upon which our economic system is built, the moral principles which we used to indoctrinate our youth with, is in danger. We can not praise today 'the industrious hand' because even "the industrious hand" is compelled to remain in enforced idleness and can not feed a man and his family.

The Bible enumerates many other blessings more durable than wealth, - character. (Hebrew) "A good name is better than great riches." (Hebrew) "Graciousness is better than silver and gold."

Money is not the test of human worth. A man's character is, a man's service, a man's achievement.

When you have lost your money and retained your character, your good name, respect and admiration of your fellowmen, you haven't lost much. You can move among your fellowmen as profoundly and as upstandingly as you always were. You have met with economic reverses. They know it. But you have not lost your moral standing, your reputation, your good name, your character. It is only the man who had no character, but only money, who when he loses his money loses everything.

And among the blessings enumerated in our Sacred Script more valuable than that of money, is love and devotion in the home.

I met a woman not long ago and I asked her, as I frequently ask people whom I meet, how she and her family were getting along. She said, 'well you know my husband has met with reverses. We have far less today than we had a few years ago. We have been compelled to change our mode of living. We have moved into smaller quarters. We have had to discharge our maid. I have to do all the work myself now. It is rather hard.'

She had gotten out of the habit of doing it. She was not used to it any more. But she said:

"You know I prepare the meals myself now. I see the children off to school myself now. I look after the house myself now. It is a little hard but somehow I feel that I have never been so much needed, never so much wanted, never so much necessary in my home as now." And there was a light in her eye as she said; "I have never been so much loved as I am now."

You know that sort of character which asserts itself in times of adversity is of the noblest and the finest. (Quote Hebrew) "The Lessons of adversity are the way of life."

This woman is finding her way in life, a deeper devotion and a greater love.

You recall the beautiful words of Emerson written in

his essay on "Compensation." He says:

"And yet the compensations of calamity are made apparent to the understanding also, after long intervals of time. A fever, a mutilation, a cruel disappointment, a loss of wealth, a loss of friends seems at the moment unpaid loss, and unpayable. But the sure years reveal the deep remedial force that underlies all facts. The death of a dear friend, wife, brother, lover, which seemed nothing but privation, somewhat later assumes the aspect of a guide or genius; for it commonly operates revolutions in our way of life, terminates an epoch of infancy or of youth which was waiting to be closed, breaks up a wonted occupation, or a household, or style of living, and allows the formation of new ones more friendly to the growth of character. It permits or ~~XXXXXX~~ constrains the formation of new acquaintances and the reception of new influences that prove of the first importance to the next years; and the man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden flower, with no room for its roots and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls and the neglect of the gardener, is made the banian of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighborhoods of men."

And lastly, my friends, perhaps the truest wisdom spoken in the Bible on this subject of riches and poverty, depression and adversity, is:

"Two things have I asked of Thee, Oh God,
Deny me them not before I die
Give me neither poverty nor riches
Feed me with mine allotted bread
Lest I be full, and deny, and say,
Who is the Lord?
Or lest I be poor, and steal
And profane the name of my God"

"Give me neither poverty nor riches."

I sometimes think that the sturdy civilizations of mankind are those when a people enjoyed neither riches nor suffered from poverty. We were rich as a people and we 'denied and we asked who is the Lord.'

Our prosperity made us imperialistic, sunk into material possessions of life, proud and arrogant of our own powers, our own greatness. Our moral standards are lower, we became a people given to loose ways of living and thinking and self indulgence. - 'Lest I be full, and deny, and say who is the Lord?'

I believe that America will be a better and finer country after it will have passed through some discipline, some want. We need to be, I believe, as a people, less rich. And when we become less rich, we will become more sound and more sober and more thoughtful and more hard-working and more concerned with the real and enduring values of life.

These are some of the wisdom of the Bible, my friends, for our time of depression, - ancient wisdom, precipitates of thousands of years of experience. Let's take them to heart.

1. Why do people turn to the Bible in every situation?

What ~~has~~ makes the B. the deathless book that it is?

What keeps those ancient pages perennially fresh and "timely"?

It's a Book of Life - The whole of Life is mirrored in it - Every mood -

It's a far cry -

It is not propaganda. Except ~~it~~ in that saturated with a moral passion, and a consciousness of fulfillment - as God's ^{own} history

and all human experience. - But it does not avoid emphatic detours around the brother, troubled, the weary of life - Every heart

speaks burden and its song - the saint, the murderer, the scuffer, the cytic, the man, faith & the man, doubt, the embittered and

the disillusioned, the tried and the troubled. Not stagnant, changed to the very end

Its style is simple, vivid, impressive, swift - moving - with the prophet it is perpetual, unfading; with the practical - under and dear and

with the law-giver powerful, sharp-edged; with the lover - rich in the color & spice of the Orient; with the gay - color and unhurried like slow-moving waves that renew the faith.

2. Only 2 peoples in Antiquity ^{Knew how to write} created great literature: Jews - Greeks.

- ① China - Confucius - founder - 500 B.C. little to compare
- ② India - Vedas of the Brahmins - Sanscrit -
Pitakas of Buddah - Pali - late - Buddah 500 B.C.
- ③ Egyptians - Book, the dead - ritual - placed in tombs. Precepts of Ptah - Hotep
- ④ Babyl. Assyria - scraps - of broken clay tablet - bus. transactions,
laws - records, campaigns - but no literature
- ⑤ When among them do you find a Psalm - a Book, Tor - an Ecc.
or a Ruth -
- ⑥ Equally so, Persian lit. - Its pre-Moh. accounts of inscriptions
having historical but no lit. value. The Achaemenian edicts - Yodan
from c. 500 B.C.
- ⑦ Literature of Rome, of any value, i.e. Cicero, Horace, Virgil, Ovid.
Inventions - 10. B.C. -

Jews knew how to write great literature - like Greeks.

3. Characteristics of great literature - Forever True - Timeless - applicable.

G.K. Liker has over and over again started new movements of
thought and style in Europ. civilizations. It has been Enlightenment.
So has the Hebrews of the Bible. The study of speech has started the Renaissance -
Hebrew = Reformation.

① A dramatist like O'Neill - ~~Shakespeare~~ - "Manning becomes Election"
A novelist like Roth - Job -

② For Human nature changes little - and human experiences
are more or less the same under little skies or under the stars
of the England - in the hills, & judges upon the steps;
Pennsylvania -

"Ode on a Grecian Urn
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed
For ever panting, and for ever young" John Keats

4. Had so in our Depression - turn to the wisdom, The Bible - they "who
saw life steadily and saw it whole."

What lessons can we learn from our sad Experiences. What they
had learned before - and had advised us of -

① Unemployment Unemployment - Twist me - Joseph -
Cycles of fertility and drought - 7 lean years - Build
store-houses -
We too have our Cycles - But we lacked ^{his} wisdom, Joseph
so that in our lean years - we have want - misery -

5. Bible warns of uncertainty of riches and instability of earthly fortunes
 ה' מלך אלהים ואלהים אלהינו
World is חול ה' —

In our country - more accustomed to פרנסה וחסד - "the poor boy who becomes rich" In Old World the חסד is more frequent ופרנסה -

6. So that a man should not pin ~~to~~ his entire life's happiness on prosperity & remaining permanently affluent. No trust too much in their possessions.

Race of Millinanes - כו' לא אצאק ח'קו לאק יי'י' ל'לו' ב'ר
- צו'ט'ח' צ'ס'ל'ו' ה'ל'א' ו'פ'ו'

7. Nor should a man exhaust himself—

וְלֹא יִשְׁתָּכַח לְבָבוֹ - Ps.

"Wear not thyself to be rich..."

"Wilt thou set thine eyes upon it - it is gone!

"For riches certainly make themselves wings,

"like an eagle that plucketh toward heaven" —

And the fowling of air.

"There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun -
riches kept by the owner to his hurt,

And those riches perish by evil adventure (stock speculations)

And if he hath begotten a son, there is nothing in hand,
As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he go back as
he came, and shall take nothing for his labor... and what profit
hath he that he laboureth for the wind?

76 "All his days he eateth in darkness, and he hath much vexation and restlessness and wrath"

① What a perfect description of many American bus. men.

They struggle, "eat in darkness" - vexation - to acquire wealth
for their children - Lose all - evil adventures -
and they have lost life!

② "Will" for children - improving training - character - how to conduct -
When you are about to die - you can bequeath
your children very little indeed!

g. Rebels Landmen & Rich -

כחם מלך / כלל דור - אצל חזון וחקירה

We have idolized Rich - Supermen - "blepees"

Senator Johnson. (Just)

g. Then are other Blessings - more durable -

22. חן בליון - ב' פיל דורן ב'

① Work - honest toil. Even the cynical Eccl.

"Sweet is the sleep of a laboring man
whether he eat little or much.

But the satiety of the rich will not
suffer him to sleep" Pr. 5.

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Work and industry praised

עבודת ה' נחלת חיים.

Save on standard.

- "Panem et circenses"

② Character

- עבודת ה' נחלת חיים

עבודת ה' נחלת חיים

Money is no test of human worth Service-Achievement.

③ Love and elevation in Home,

① I met a woman -

עבודת ה' נחלת חיים

The lessons of
Adversity are the
way of life.

Emerson

10). Perhaps the Jewest is some spoken

"Two things have I asked, these
Many are there not before I die
Give me neither poverty nor riches
Feed me with mine allotted bread;
Lest I be full, and deny, and say, Who is the Lord?
Or lest I be poor, and steal
And profane the name of my God."

① America will be a better country - less rich!

less rich, more sound, more sober, more thoughtful, more
god-fearing -

with only \$5,000,000 or \$6,000,000, \$8,000,000, or \$10,000,000. They did all the whining during that period.

I see the same psychological reflex in the United States to-day. I see those with whom I have had a lifetime of friendship and of affectionate intimacy without repining, striving to build again in the few years that are left to them, but never whining, thanking God they have lived their lives and have had the little things that have made life comfortable, that have made life worth living, carrying on and looking forward to the end, looking forward to a different and more circumscribed life with their heads up and smiling. The only people who are crying and whining and howling and raising Cain to-day and endeavoring to justify themselves by prating of their own extraordinary acuteness and talents are those who may have had \$100,000,000 or \$200,000,000, \$50,000,000 or \$60,000,000, \$20,000,000 or \$30,000,000, and find themselves with only \$1,000,000 or \$2,000,000 left now upon which to subsist.

As I have listened to distinguished bankers who testified before the Finance Committee and as I heard their statements—statements uttered with a prescience of wisdom that it is impossible for me to describe, uttered when we sat at their feet to drink in their words as if they were inspired—I looked at those gentlemen and I thought that this day, this time, this hour, we are liquidating something else than the debts which Europe owes us. We liquidated at the treaty of Versailles the statesmanship of the world. The statesmanship of the world in the making of the treaty of Versailles showed itself to be absolutely bankrupt. It left us this horrid legacy which during the years since that treaty was executed has led to many difficulties, and that statesmanship of which we used to boast wrote for the world not a treaty of peace but an irritant for war.

Since October, 1929, we have been liquidating the wisdom and the omniscience of our great banking institutions and of those masters of finance who were supposed to be supermen before that time and who have been shown since that time to be very, very common clay.

We have been liquidating not only their unwisdom but we have demonstrated beyond the possibility of a doubt that those men who were thought to be financiers who by the slightest legerdemain could conjure up success and who could guide any movement wherein there were dollars were, after all, just as astute as we are and no more so, and we, some of us, belong to the debtor class still. They have demonstrated that there are no supermen financially in the United States; no supermen who could deal with great financial problems and solve them for a people.

To-day, realizing that we have liquidated our statesmanship in the treaty of Versailles and find it to be bankrupt

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