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Wealth - and its Troubled Stewardship, 1937.

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WEALTH - AND ITS TROUBLED STEWARDSHIP  
"Riches profit not in the day of wrath."

By  
Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver

At  
The Temple

On  
Sunday morning, March 14, 1937

3rd in series on PROBLEMS OF HUMAN LIFE REFLECTED IN THE BIBLE



There is a beautiful and profound prayer found in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible, attributed to Agur, son of Jakeh:

"Give me neither poverty nor riches  
Feed me with mine allotted bread  
Lest I be full, and deny and say: Who is God?  
Or lest I be poor, and steal  
And profane the name of my God."

This prayer may be said to sum up the attitude of the authors of the Bible towards wealth and poverty. They feared both. Unlike some thinkers of other great religions, the sages of the Bible never made a virtue of poverty. In the early church, you may remember, poverty was looked upon as a religious virtue. It was part of the general practice of asceticism to which the true believers of the early Christian church resorted in an effort to escape the sins and pitfalls of this world. And in order to prepare themselves for blessedness of the new world - in the second one of the Savior - it was this attitude of asceticism, of escaping from the world, of denying oneself all the things in the world which gave rise, as you will recall, to the old institutions of monasticism, whose central theme was poverty, chastity and obedience. Thus, in imitation of Jesus and his apostles who were poor, St. Francis established the great Franciscan Order whose central tenet was absolute poverty.

But we do not find a single word in praise of poverty in the Bible any more than we find monkery in Judaism. On the contrary, the authors of the Bible know a good deal about the evils of poverty and the degradation to which poverty frequently consigns the human being.



"For the sake of a piece of bread men will commit crime". They know the bitterness of the hearts of the poor men and their suffering and the humiliation to which they are frequently subjected because of their poverty. "Even to his friends, a poor man becomes hateful, while a rich man, because of his riches, has many friends." The poor man has to speak pleadingly, beseechingly, while the rich man, because of his riches, frequently can speak insolently, impudently." The mere want, therefore, of the necessities of life, does not make a man spiritual. On the contrary, it frequently makes him envious, greedy, fills his heart with bitterness because of unsatisfied desires of life. A poor man may be a bad man just as a rich man may be a good man.

Nor do the authors of the Bible denounce wealth as such. It is not wealth and riches which they denounce but their abuses. It is the evil employment of possessions, rather than the possessions themselves which are evil. To be rich, in the eyes of the author, is not an evidence of one's wickedness. When the author of the Book of Genesis points out for example, that Abraham was very rich in cattle and silver and gold, he points that out, not as Abrahams sinfulness but simply as of his material well-being. When the patriarch, Abraham, blesses his son Jacob he says to him: "May God give you of the ~~the~~ dew of heaven and of the fat places of the earth and much corn and wine".

The authors of the Bible envisaged the blessed time when as a result of prevailing justice in the world, all men will have enough of the good things of the earth. "You will all eat your bread without scarceness." They envisaged a day when "every man will



live under his vine and fig-tree in his own heritage of patrimony and there will be none to make him afraid."

Very definitely the sages of our people wrote of an economy of abundance, not an economy of scarcity, but an economy which is within the reach of mankind, which is retarded or delayed by human greed and blindness and cruelty. "And the floors shall be full of corn and the vats shall overflow with wine and with oil."

Although they do not denounce wealth and riches as such, what they do deprecate, these wise men of ancient Israel whose wisdom has become the treasured possession of mankind, was the hankering of men after more and more. They saw the dangers of the abuses of wealth. They counselled men, teaching the wise employment and stewardship of wealth. They stressed the solemn responsibility of wealth.

They are unsparing in their denunciation of greed, that unsatiated thirst, appetite for increased possessions, for things which ground out every nobler interest in life and which disregards every moral scruple in its piracy.

Story after story is told in the Bible to illustrate the evils wrought by the unsatisfying greed of human-beings. Thus, the story of Achan, the son of \_\_\_\_\_, in the Book of Joshua - the booty taken in war was devoted to the Lord and made it taboo to all people. It was holy, dedicated to the Lord. But Achan was greedy and his greed led to disaster to his people and to the members in his household. He saw among the booty "a goodly mantle and 200 shekels of silver, a wedge of gold and he coveted them." He stole them and hid them in his tent. ~~Whereafter~~ Whereafter the Lord punished the people of Israel because of this act



of desecration and Israel suffered a major defeat in battle, according to the story and Achan's household was punished with death. And the valley in which Achan and his household were buried came to be known as the "valley of trouble".

Greed is the greatest troubling factor in the life of individuals and it attacks not only humble men and common men like Achan, son of , but it attacks equally, kings who have enough of the wealth of the world.

So the Bible tells the story of Ahab, the King, who had vineyards and all his heart's desire. Yet he coveted a vineyard adjoining his which belonged to Naboth, a neighbor. Naboth did not wish to surrender that land even in payment, because it was his patrimony, it was the inheritance of his father and it was all he had of the inheritance of his father. The Bible says: "Ahab went home sullen displeased. He laid him down upon his bed and would eat no bread." And Jezebell, his Queen came to him and said: "I will get that vineyard for you." She had two men bear false witness that Naboth cursed God and the King, a sin punishable with death. And Naboth was put to death and the King went down to Naboth's vineyard to take possession of it. But the word of the Lord came to Elijah: "Go to the vineyard of Naboth where the King has gone, to take possession and say to him 'Have you killed and do you now think that you will take possession?' 'As the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, so will the dogs lick your blood, King of Israel'".

The authors of the Bible, wise and understanding men, warned people against the eye which is never satisfied - the eye



which is never satisfied with wealth. They warned people against that. "The man who is unsatisfied, enthralled, enslaved by money is never satisfied with whatever money he has."

And they wrote into that most sacred Code of Law of Israel - into the Ten Commandments - "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, his man-servant, nor his manservant, or anything that is thy neighbor's. It <sup>is</sup> is that greed, that envy of what/our neighbor's - his house and wealth, his raiment, which fills the mind of people with bitterness, envy, consuming jealousy, hatred, with unworthy ambitions.

The authors of the Bible furthermore admonished people not to spend themselves in a mad, headlong rush after wealth as if that were the supreme good and the source of all happiness. Thus, you read in the Book of Proverbs: "The steady-going man is the man that will enjoy an abundance of blessings, but the man who rushes to get rich will not go unpunished." "He that rushes headlong after wealth is a man with an evil eye - and knoweth not that want shall come upon him ultimately."

"We all find time enough to die, but so many people, unfortunately, do not find time enough to live because of their mad race to grab more and more of the things which they really do not need. "Weary not yourself to get Rich". Why, many people do not even enjoy the vast wealth which they have because of their desire to have more - "to add house to house and field to field", as the prophets say. And when they finally think they have enough and are ready to settle down comfortably upon their accumulated pile, they are ready to die. "And man when he dieth, carryeth nothing away. His wealth does not descend with him into his



grave". And of such wealth they say that "it is a grievous evil." They say that "such riches are kept by the owner to his own hurt." They say, "Rather than have such devastating ambition, better is little with the love of the Lord than great treasures and turmoil with it." Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith than a house full of the sacrifices of strife, condemnation and endless consuming seeking." "There is a man", says the Bible, "Who thinks himself to be very rich but really he has nothing; and there is a poor man who thinks he has nothing but who is really rich."

And against wealth and its troubled stewardship the Bible warns men that wealth very frequently leads to false pride and false pride leads to isolation. There are men who acquire much wealth and come to believe that they are better than their fellow men because they have succeeded in acquiring great wealth. They begin to think that their talent for making money is a virtue, that they have achieved what other men have failed to achieve. "The rich man is always wise in his own eyes." They attribute nothing of their success to fate, fortune or accident but to their own talents. That fills them frequently with an arrogance, with a boastfulness, sinfulness, pride which destroys their social values in society.

Against that attitude, the authors of the Bible remind us as Ecclesiastes sought to remind: "I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not always to the swift, that the battle is not always to the strong, that the bread is not always to the wise and that the rich<sup>es</sup> are not always to the smart, but chance and accident attack them all."



How much of a man's success is to be attributed to birth, accident, environment, opportunity! So, our Biblical sages admonished men who have acquired wealth to guard themselves against the danger of losing the common touch and of isolating themselves more and more as they get richer and richer, of coming to think that they can not move with common folks, or be with them in the same neighborhood, or belong to the same society, or sit with them in the same church, or share with them in the common tasks of life. "The rich and the poor - why they will meet. God made them both." And they also warned against allowing oneself to be surfeited to super-abundance, - destroys "even the eating of too much honey surfeits the palate and/the capacity for tasting other good things in life." And so Ecclesiastes who permitted himself to be surfeited with indulgences made possible by his wealth, comes to the end of his days with a sad and tragic philosophy: "Vanity of vanities - always vanity." It is good to want for certain things and never to be satisfied.

Lastly, the authors of the Bible admonished people not to put their trust in wealth. No man shall come to say that "wealth is my fortress!" "No evil can overtake me!" "I am secure!" "The man who puts his trust in his wealth - he will fall." And we have all seen with our own eyes how tragically men do fall - men who have put all their faith, their whole hopes and desires upon wealth. When that wealth is taken from them, by the accidents of fortune, by universal economic depression - you and I have seen what happens to those men. They fall. They collapse. They break because they have builded for themselves in life no other fortress, no other fortress into which to retire when one material fortress laid low, destroyed.



What holds true of individuals holds true also of nations. Nations which put trust in prosperity, in wealth - sooner or later come upon disaster and catastrophe. "Wealth availeth not in the day of wrath." We have seen prosperous nations, nations blessed with plenty and abundance suddenly brought to the very brink of economic disaster - not through Providence who provided the necessary things of life but through the unwise management, through the unwise administration of that abundance of wealth which God gave unto them. So we have depression and unemployment and conflict and civil war and disaster. "It is through justice alone that a nation may be delivered from economic death and destruction."

The stability of a nation is dependent not upon material wealth but upon a system of laws, upon the standard of social ethics, upon the quality of spiritual life. That is why the Bible so often warns against the oppression of the masses, the exploitation of masses, unselfishness, of legislation for the protection of the poor, the weak, the slave, the debtor, the stranger, the orphan.

Of course, the economic order for which the legislators of the Bible provided was a very simple economic order, largely agricultural. It was long before industrial revolutions and long before the era of depressions, long before revolution inculcated this civilization of ours.

There is no literature in ancient or modern times, my friends, which abounds so much in social awareness, in social sensitiveness, which is so passionate in championing the cause of the denied, the poor, the weak, which denounces so much



exploiters of the poor as does the prophetic literature of the Bible. of the books of  
All the bitter invectives are poured out in the pages/of Isaiah, Ezekiel  
and others for those "who sell the righteous for silver", "and the  
needy for a pair of shoes"; "who pant after the dust of the earth on the  
head of the poor". How much have they to say about the "blood city"  
"wherein the powerful have dealt by oppression with the stranger, and  
wronged the fatherless and the widow;" how much have they to say  
of the "rich in whose houses are the spoil of the poor, and who grind the  
faces of the poor, who pervert justice, who take usury, and pamper  
themselves with all the good things and are at ease in Zion, while  
the poor groan because of their oppressions."

That is why in the Torah, in the Five Books of Moses - the basic  
Law of Israel, there are so many mandates, injunctions to protect the  
poor against the exploitation of the rich. "Thou shalt not wrest  
the judgment of the poor in his cause". Thou shalt not oppress  
thy neighbor nor rob him, the wages of a hired servant shall not  
abide with thee all night until the morning." "Ye shall do no  
unrighteousness in judgment, in meter, yard, in weight, or in measure. Just  
balance, just weights a just and a just, shall ye have."  
"And if thy brother be waxen poor, and his means fail, then thou shalt  
uphold him. Take thou no interest of him or increase, but fear thy God."  
"Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether  
he be of thy brethren or of the strangers that are in thy land."  
Gleanings in the field must be left for the poor, the widow and the  
orphan as their right.

And so throughout the Bible there is emphasis, a reverence  
for the life and personality of every human being. Every human being  
has a right to live and a right to his measure of happiness in



in the world. "He who oppresses a poor man blasphemes his Maker." Think of that! The employer who robs his employee of his just wages, who sweats his labor, who takes a little child and grinds him on the wheels of industry - these who oppress the poor - blaspheme our Maker, God, because they bring God's image in which all men are created into the dust. They desecrate that which should be divinely beautiful and noble. And the duty of establishing a juster society which should be free of this brutality and desecration of human personality is the first charge upon those who have. It is for them, because they have the power to reconstruct society so that life will be more peaceable and more noble. And that - the Bible takes the pain over and over again to point out - that is religion.

That is religion - the striving after justice, the seeking of the nobler order of society the helping of the poor and needy.

The greatest good, my friends, according to the wisdom of these wise men - the greatest good in life is not the possession of wealth. And Solomon, the wise King, we are told in the Bible, at the beginning of his reign, had a dream and in his dream the Lord happened to come unto him and asked him: "Solomon, ask for something and I will grant it unto you." And Solomon said: "Great Lord, I have been called upon to judge over a great people. Of all the things I should like to have - Give me, God, a wise understanding to judge my people." And the Lord was pleased because King Solomon had asked not for long life, not for victory



over his enemies but for wisdom, understanding. And that, my friends, is the lesson which our teachers have always sought to impress upon us - to acquire wisdom, wisdom about life, wisdom about mankind, wisdom in our relationships with our fellow men. "To acquire wisdom is better than to acquire wealth for to acquire wealth somehow means to acquire contention, strife and the ill will of our neighbor but to acquire wisdom means to acquire friendship, esteem and the love and honor of our neighbors."

And to make the remaining days of our life blessed and happy we must have a good name. "A good name is more to be desired than great wealth and more than silver and more than gold for the good opinion of our fellow men" - the grace which we find in the eyes of our fellow men. Look around you and see who are the truly happy people in your circle, in your community. Are they the men of wealth? Or are they the men who have acquired a good name which their children and families are proud of - a name which they will be able to pass down to their children proudly when their days are over. They are men who have found grace and favor in the eyes of their fellow men. That is far more important than the material things that men are striving for on the face of the earth.



1. Beautiful - profound prayer - Agur the son of Jakkoh:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי

"Give me neither poverty nor riches.

"Feed me with unice allotted bread.

"Lest I be full, and deny, and say: Who is God?

"Or lest I be poor, and steal,

"And profane the name of my God.

2. This may be said to sum up attitude of B. to wealth & poverty. They feared both. Unlike some thinkers of other religions they made no virtue out of poverty. In the early church e.g. poverty was regarded as a religious virtue. It was part of the general practice of asceticism adopted by the true believers, as a way of escaping <sup>from</sup> the sins and pitfalls of this world and of preparing oneself for that other world of blessedness which the return, the second world usher in. It this attitude gave rise to monasticism, whose essential disciplines were poverty, charity and obedience. Thus in imitation, the poverty of Christ and his apostles, St. Francis built his great religious order on the tenet of absolute poverty. Monasticism was a common sight in Western Europe.

3. We find no word in plain, poverty in the Bible, just as we find no word in modern in modern on the contrary - the authors know, the evils of poverty and its degradation of human life. They know the latter, the poor man's lot - his suffering - and his frequent humiliations.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי  
"Even by his friends is the poor man hated" - But the rich hath many friends.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלִי  
"The poor man must speak pleadingly" - but the rich answereth impudently.

The mere want of the necessaries of life does not make a man spiritual. As often as not, it makes him envious, greedy, obsessed with the latter, unsatisfied desires. "A poor man may be



bad, just as a rich man may be good."

3/ Nor did they denounce wealth as such. To be rich was not by them regarded as prima facie evidence of wickedness. When they describe the rich as "very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold" - it was not to establish his iniquity - only his material well-being. Isaac blessed Jacob. riches for the righteous

They envisage the blessed time, when, as a result of prevailing justice and peace among men, all men will enjoy it abundantly, the good things of the earth - riches for all people - each man under his vine and fig tree - riches for all people.

Just definitely they visioned an economy of abundance for mankind - which human greed, blindness and cruelty were tragically delaying. "And the floors shall be full of corn, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil."

4/ But they deprecated the hankering after wealth. They knew the dangers and abuses of wealth. They counselled a wise employment of time and stewardship of wealth. They threw the blame upon the iniquity of wealth.

5. They exposed the greed! - the unslaked desire for increased possessions of things which crowds out all other noble interests from one's life and which spoils every virtue in its greivous hunger. - Story after story  
1- Josiah - had consecrated body - to the Lord. It became a devoted thing - taken unto all men -  
But Achan the son of Carmi - was greedy -



and his greed led to disaster. He saw "a costly mantle  
imported from Babylon, & 200 shekels of silver, and a wedge of  
gold & 50 shekels weight, and he coveted them & took them  
and hid them in his tent! Israel paid for the sin with  
a major defeat in battle - and Achan and all his household  
with death" "וְיָסֹף פָּרָס" "The Valley of Troubling"

(2) Greed is the sin not only of common men but of  
kings as well. Ahab - Naboth - hard by, Palace -  
"in her house, his father" - Sullen & displeased - laid him down  
upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no  
bread" Jezebel - "I will get thee the vineyard & N.  
2 base fellows - false witnesses - Cursed God and the King  
stoned to death. Elijah - go down to meet the King  
& Israel! - in vineyard / also part 10300 -  
dogs licked!

6. They warn against "the eye which is not satisfied with  
riches" וְעֵינִי לֹא שָׂבָה  
כֶּסֶף וְעֵינִי לֹא שָׂבָה כֶּסֶף .. will not be satisfied with  
Silver -

Into the most needed Code - וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח -

7. They warn men against the mad, headlong rush after  
wealth - as tho that were the supreme good of life, and  
the surest source of happiness.

וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח - וְהָיָה כִּי יִשְׁכַּח

"The steady-going man shall be blessed abundantly  
"But he that is in a hurry to get rich - shall not go  
unpunished"



And again they say:

וְעַתָּה יֵשׁוּעָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

"He that rushes headlong after wealth - is a man with an evil eye - and knoweth not that want shall come upon him."

We all find time <sup>enough</sup> to die! but all too few find time enough to live, because they are racing so madly to grab all they can of the things they can really do without. "Weary not thyself to be rich: For riches certainly make <sup>themselves</sup> wings" Most people do not even enjoy the wealth they have, for they are consumed in the foam of getting more, more than their neighboring house and when they are finally ready to settle down on their comfort, their accumulated pile, they die. "And man, when he dieth, carryeth nothing away. His wealth does not descend after him."

8. Of rich wealth - the B. say: - "grievous evil."

לֵי יָדָיו וְלֵבָבוֹ יִשְׁתָּחֲוֶה

"Riches kept by the owner thereof to his own hurt"

Rather than such devastating ambitions -

יֵשׁוּעָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

"Better is little with the love of the Lord  
than great treasures and trouble therewith"

Rather - יֵשׁוּעָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

"Better is a dry morsel and quietness therewith  
than a house full of sacrifices & strife"



Truly: .27 חיל עליהם - כי לא ידעו ל.

"There is a man who thinks himself rich and has nothing. There is a man who thinks himself poor and has Every thing"

אולי לית ליה פסוק

9. Pride - isolate - Better to "My hand..." - chance -

Ecclesiastes: "I returned and saw under the sun that the race <sup>swift</sup> the battle <sup>stray</sup> bread to the wise... riches to the smart... but time and chance happens to them all....

The chance of birth, environment, opportunity,

the common touch - <sup>church - Synagogue</sup> א' ב' ג' ד' - ה' ו' ז' ח' ט'

"The rich and the poor ~~as~~ meet together,

"God is the maker, there all"

9B. - Surfeit - א' ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ז' ח' ט' - Kohut - Good to want

10. Trust - no evil can overtake us - My fortress - of men and nations - א' ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ז' ח' ט'

① Men in depression - collapsed. No other supports!

② Nations - Prosperity - Have all we need - And yet - א' ב' ג' ד' ה' ו' ז' ח' ט'

③ Only thru Justice - equitable distribution - save from death - Civil War - World Crisis!  
Stability

11). Hence B. warned against oppression of masses - exploitation of poor - Attacked selfishness of the calloused and unheeding rich - and legislated for the protection



of the poor - the debtor - the slave - the orphan - the widow - the  
stranger - all the weak, the handicraft, the Earth.

- Simple Economy

(a) No letter in whole range... abounds in so much  
of social awareness - passionate championing, the voice  
of the down-trodden - and sharp denunciation of exploiters  
- prophetic like of Bible.

(b) What bitter revulsion is poured out on those  
"who sell the righteous for silver,

"And the needy for a pair of shoes

"Who pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor"

On the p. 1473 218 "the bloody city" wherein the powerful  
have dealt by oppression with the stranger, and wronged the  
fatherless and the widow...

On the rich in whose houses are the spoil of the poor,  
and who grind the faces of the poor - who pervert justice -  
who talk unlawfully - and perpetrate themselves with all  
the good things and are at ease in Zion, while  
the poor groan because of their oppressions.

12/. J. Law, the 118 abounds with mandates & regulations  
touching the relat. bet. rich and poor.

(1) "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of the poor in his cause"

(2) "Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor nor rob him, the  
wages of a hired servant shall not abide with thee all night  
until the morning.

(3) "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in measure,  
in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a  
just epha, and a just hin, shall ye have"



(4) "And if thy brother be waxen poor, and his means fail, then thou shalt uphold him... Take thou no interest of him or increase, but fear thy God.

(5) "Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of the strangers that are in thy land -

(6) וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְבָבְךָ אֶת הַדָּלוּ - וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְבָבְךָ אֶת הַדָּלוּ

(7) And so thou shalt... reverence for other men's lives and personalities! They too are children of God! Right to life - to happiness! וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְבָבְךָ אֶת הַדָּלוּ

(8) This is Religion! - וְלֹא יִשְׁכַּח לְבָבְךָ אֶת הַדָּלוּ - Much The Duty to bring all -

13/ The greatest good - according to B - is not Wealth - but a wise and understanding heart

(1) Solomon "All what I shall give thee?"

"I am but a little child - know not how to go out in counsel in - ... a great people... Give thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and evil..."

God pleased - not life, wealth, victory...

14/ כֹּסֶם טוֹב מִכֶּסֶד זָהָב - כִּי יָבִיא לְרֵעִים - for it leads to friendship, esteem - Good Name.

"כֹּסֶם טוֹב מִכֶּסֶד זָהָב - כִּי יָבִיא לְרֵעִים

A good Name is better than great riches

And the worker's good opinion - than silver and gold"