



*Journal of
Religion & Society*
Supplement Series

The Kripke Center

Supplement 10 (2014)

The Bible, the Economy, and the Poor

Edited by Ronald A. Simkins and Thomas M. Kelly, Creighton University

5. You Didn't Build That!

A Prophetic View of the Political Economy from the Exile¹

Nicolae Roddy, Creighton University

Introduction

This essay focuses on a single aspect of the cosmic principle governing the narrative world of the Bible at some point shortly after its emergence into history as a collection of Hebrew scrolls produced on the basis of selected edited oral and textual materials, replete with dissonant voices expressed through a variety of genres and generally cohering into a

¹ The title echoes the words of President Barack Obama during a campaign speech delivered in Roanoke, VA, on July 13, 2012. The context of the quote was a rally to increase awareness and support for the role of government in cultivating economic growth within the private sector, but taken out of context, the meme spread quickly throughout the conservative political blogosphere, framed as a presidential insult to business owners. The phrase provides an apt summary of Deuteronomy 8:11-20, which serves as the controlling idea of the present topic.

grand narrative of a people's past.² Inter-textual analysis aided by external evidence from archaeology and other historical sources suggests that the implied editors of this literary enterprise most likely belonged to a late-sixth, early-fifth century BCE community of prophetically influenced priestly scribes, responding to what was, at least from their perspective, the end of their national history. This assertion is based on the combination of a number of factors, each of which insufficient on its own and would take us too far afield to address in full. In short, these include:

1. the transition of the scribal profession from a royal patronage guild to an organ of priestly administration during the Persian period (van der Toorn);
2. the seemingly spontaneous reactions to the historical event of the exile in texts like Psalm 137 and the book of Lamentations, in contrast to "cooler" texts that forge the searing, firsthand experience of displacement and the end of national history into a cultural artifact (e.g., Deuteronomy 30: 1-5; Psalm 103:6-14; Zechariah 9-14), and still later, Persian period texts like Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah, which in their sometimes proud triumphalism hardly seem to recall the trauma and theological crises of the destruction and exile at all (Rogerson; Brueggemann: 340-440);
3. prophetically influenced reassessments of certain social attitudes and institutions, which do not seem to fit monarchic or restoration social contexts, but make sense in a displaced environment. These include ethnically inclusive texts such as one might expect to find growing out of an experience of diverse refugees (e.g., the book of Ruth); scathingly negative attitudes toward Judahite leadership found everywhere throughout the final edition of the Deuteronomistic history; and casual references to the temple as a dispensable institution. By contrast, the books of Haggai and Zechariah, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah appear to evidence a temporal/attitudinal shift back toward xenophobia (e.g., Ezra 10), royal and priestly (messianic) leadership (Haggai 2:20-23), and the centrality of the new temple (Haggai 2:9; Zechariah 1:16-17).

For purposes of this paper it will not matter who these obscure, anonymous scribes were, nor exactly when it was they began collecting and editing materials with this specific project in mind (see van der Toorn). Instead, attention will be focused on biblical texts that in some way appear to be addressing the question of what had gone so terribly wrong in that Jerusalem's palace-temple complex could be destroyed and its elite members of society displaced. Ongoing debate over the so-called "myth of the empty land" notwithstanding (Barstad; Lipschits and Blenkinsopp), it is important here only to acknowledge that the apparent task of making sense of these events reflects the community's own perspective, and that it matters not whether the things these scribes recounted about their past actually happened the way they describe it or not. What matters is what this community may have intended to say to its audience in the face of this perceived dilemma and, in the spirit of this volume, how such insights might inform significant concerns of our day.

² The literary assemblage envisioned here presupposes the Enneateuch (Levin), most of the Latter Prophets, and some of the Writings, especially the Psalms.

Contextual Background and Thesis

It is neither practical nor necessary here to recap all of the research that has gone into this larger scholarly project over the past few years, aspects of which have been published as chapters in various edited volumes (Roddy 2008; 2010; in press). It may be summed up by saying that the Bible's initial, multi-dimensional response to the question, "What went wrong?" comprises several related aspects of an overall critique of certain Israelite institutions, which the prophetically influenced scribes set over and against a corresponding ideal parallel universe. This negative assessment of the mundane world targets the following Israelite institutions in which Israel had (mis)placed its trust: 1. the monarchy, which had supplanted the notion of God as king (McKenzie); 2. fortified cities, replacing the prophetic word as the only inviolable city of refuge (Roddy 2008); 3. Israel's military defenses, in place of Israel's only impenetrable defense: the line of true biblical prophets stretching from Moses through Elijah-Elisha and culminating in Jeremiah (Roddy forthcoming), symbolized by chariots of fire; and finally, 4. the erroneous understanding of what it means to be a human being created in the image of God, augmented by the flipside of Exodus 3's "I Am," which can only be a resounding, "You're not!" (Roddy 2010: 180-92).

As part of this larger, more comprehensive project, this paper argues that reliance on Judah's political economy was also part of the problem that resulted in the crisis that brought its history to an end, and that what the initial editors of the Bible offer in its place is a transcendent view of the world that should have been and yet might be – a world in which divine providence obtains whenever justice and righteousness (*mishpat ve-tzedakah*) prevail among human beings. As I indicated above, sadly, it is a vision that remains unfulfilled.

Methodology

Operating on the hypothesis that the earliest recognizable semblance of the Bible as defined above is, a response to the sixth century BCE events of destruction and deportation, our methodology will be to identify prophetic scribal discourse that appears to reflect the gravity of these events, even though a description of the period in question is almost completely lacking in the narrative world itself – much the same way that the symmetrical ridge around a meteoric crater, analysis of the soil that surrounds it, and present knowledge of physics combine to relate something about the nature of the void in view. Such discourse permeates the Law and the Prophets, providing a unifying theme for the story of Israel's past, a "continuous unit" (Levin: 127) running from Creation to the destruction of Jerusalem that echoes throughout the Psalms. It is identified through a structural analysis of the parallel universes it creates, which on the one hand is scathingly critical of certain aspects of Judean society that provoked the disaster (the world that is/was), while on the other hand offering corresponding divine alternatives (the world that should have been and yet might be), creating a world that never actually obtains in the mundane realm. This analysis effectively exposes a kind of destruction level in the archaeological strata of the text – ground zero, if you will – in response to which the Bible came to be born as Bible. According to this definition, no discrete embedded textual form or element may rightly be referred to as Bible – neither the putative J source, nor P, nor even the Deuteronomistic History would qualify – only the discordant amalgam of voices and genres that taken all together appear to address the most ultimate of concerns, namely survival as a people, in an overarching, coherent

narrative. As such, this textual stratum witnesses to the most comprehensive and scathingly authentic national self-reflection in history.

The World that Was/Is in the Prophetic Books

As might be expected, the books of the Latter prophets appear to offer the most direct condemnation of the world that was, in which prophetic voices of the sixth century BCE find precedence and support in words attributed to earlier, eighth century BCE prophets like Amos and Hosea, whose scathing critiques of the socioeconomic status quo in light of the retrojected “Mosaic” standard of justice accurately foretold the utter destruction of the nation. Amos, the shepherd of Tekoa, rails against an economy regulated by the king and sanctioned by his priesthood that allows a certain segment of society to gain wealth by crushing the needy and trampling the poor underfoot (Amos 5:11, 8:4). Hosea, too, holds Israel’s leadership responsible for the transgressions of the nation and agrees with his near contemporary that such a nation cannot endure:

Hear this, O priests!
Give heed, O House of Israel!
Listen, O House of the King!
For the judgment pertains to you! (Hosea 5:1).³

Yet another of Hosea’s acerbic taunts calls to mind the people’s appeal for a king in the first place (1 Samuel 8:4-5):

I will destroy you, O Israel;
who can help you?
Where now is your king, that he may save you?
Where in all your cities are your rulers,
of whom you said,
“Give me a king and rulers”?
I gave you a king in my anger,
and I took him away in my wrath (Hosea 13:9-11; emphasis mine).

The books of Amos and Hosea, integrated as they are with the Deuteronomistic worldview for which justice is foundational, serve as compelling precedents for later Judahite prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah in proclaiming that the national leadership is especially vulnerable to the consequences of divine judgment. Although representing conflicting priesthoods and different social and economic backgrounds, Jeremiah and Ezekiel stand united in their condemnation of the unjust economic structures sustained by the monarchy, which invite certain destruction upon the nation. Ezekiel, a deported Aaronid priest, is separated from his altar, the center of his livelihood; Jeremiah, son of a Levitical priest from Anathoth, faces persecution from the royal house and is occasionally incarcerated for proclaiming the demise of his own nation. Each interprets the impending calamity from a different vantage point in the language of his own unique experience; yet both assert the inevitability of Jerusalem’s destruction. It is not by chance that the books attributed to them stand linked together like a unifying diptych near the heart of the Tanak.

³ All Bible translations are from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Jeremiah responds to the question “what went wrong” by identifying elements of Jerusalem society who prey on the poor and disadvantaged:

For scoundrels are found among my people;
they take over the goods of others.
Like fowlers they set a trap;
they catch human beings.
Like a cage full of birds,
their houses are full of treachery;
therefore they have become great and rich,
they have grown fat and sleek.
They know no limits in deeds of wickedness,
they do not judge with justice
the cause of the orphan, to make it prosper,
and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
Shall I not punish for these things? says the LORD.
and shall I not bring retribution
on a nation such as this? (Jeremiah 5:26-29).

In a passage reminiscent of the Samuel’s stern warning in 1 Samuel 8 about what asking for a king will cost, Jeremiah’s scribe writes of Shallum (King Jehoiahaz, son of Josiah):

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness,
and his upper rooms by injustice;
Who makes his neighbors work for nothing
and does not give them their wages (Jeremiah 22:13).

Ezekiel, too, views the system as having been corrupted by the lack of justice and righteousness (*mishpat ve-tzedakah*) among the wealthy and the powerful. They are described as thirsty for blood. They extort the resident alien (*ger*) and neglect the plight of orphans and the widows. Last but not least, they practice usury and unjust gain by demanding both advance interest and accrued interest (22:6-12). In short, they are accused of acquiring the best of everything for themselves, without restoring or replenishing the assets of those whose lives they diminish (34:3-4). According to the prophetic word, the wealthy and powerful will be scattered among the nations as the house of Israel and all its former wealth melts away as dross to the Lord (22:18-20).

In the Former Prophets, the so-called Deuteronomistic History, Israel’s misplaced trust on the political economy is illustrated in an *ex eventu* warning placed on the lips of Moses. This passage is especially significant for our purposes in light of the book of Deuteronomy’s role in linking together the Torah and the Nevi’im, a relationship that until recently has puzzled most modern scholars (Schmid), but also because this passage sums up *in nuce* the very crux of the problem, serving as an integral part of the response to the fundamental question our prophetic priestly scribes sought to answer:

[When you enter the land . . .] Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep his commandments, his ordinances, and his statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have

built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrible wilderness . . . Do not say to yourself, “My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.” But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today. If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 8:11-20).

The warning here is clear, aimed at a people exalting itself in pride over its own accomplishments and good fortune. For the biblical writer, the national economy was an illusory and therefore impermanent system in that real economic security and wealth come exclusively from God. The summative reference to idolatry in the passage suggests that this concept has much broader application beyond the simple “gods made with hands.” Throughout prophetic literature, the term that appears most frequently in referring to idolatry is *zanab* (literally, committing adultery or “whoredom”), understood as placing one’s trust in (i.e., “having intercourse with”) any human artifice perceived to carry some promise of security, including, in addition to idols proper, the monarchy, fortified cities, and military armaments. All of these, viewed with the 20/20 acuity of hindsight, witness to a system of failed, illusory bulwarks for Israel’s deliverance, held together by a political economy that by design favors those with the ability to manipulate the material environment for their own personal gain, at the onerous expense of the ordinary, less advantaged inhabitants of the land. Whether the cause is interpreted as divinely ordered or naturally occurring, such inherent inequality carries within itself the seeds of inevitable national decay and destruction of the status quo.

Perhaps the greatest prophetic indictment of “the way things are/were” is again described in *ex eventu* fashion in connection with the institution of the monarchy. In 1 Samuel 8, the naïve reason the Bible writer attributes to the people for desiring the founding the monarchy – that Israel might “be like other nations” – is met with divine condescension and Samuel’s stern and realistic warning concerning what it is Israel stands to gain from their foolish rejection of the divine King:

And he [Samuel] said, “This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them unto himself, for his chariots and to be his horsemen and they shall run before his chariots. . . and to plow his ground and to reap his harvest and to make his instruments of war and his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take your fields and your vineyards and your olive yards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. And he will take your male and female servants and your best young men and your asses and put them to his work. He will take the tenth

of your flocks and ye shall be his servants. And you shall cry out on that day because of your king whom you have chosen; but the LORD will not answer you on that day (1 Samuel 8:11-18).

The Hebrew text of this passage does not actually repeat the verb *laqach*, “to take,” as often as it appears here, but the staccato repetition of the *ve-eth* construction that precedes each object in the litany of things the king will snatch from his subjects is equally effective in making the point that this anguished people will eventually cry out because of the excessive economic demands of their king in satisfying his own desires at their expense; yet, says the prophet, the LORD will not answer them in that day. The fact that the earthly king “takes” what he wants because he can, reminiscent of Mel Brooks’ portrayal of Louis XIV in *History of the World, Part I* (1981), who proclaims, “It’s good to be the king!” stands in stark contrast to the heavenly King who gives abundantly, ruling with steadfast loving kindness (*hesed*) manifested in justice and righteousness (*mishpat ve-tzedakah*).

Economy in the Exile

Turning now from the prophetic view of the root cause of the end of history we move to its view of the world that “should have been and might now be.” The Judahite economy, which was already burdened by its obligations to its neo-Babylonian overlords, had collapsed for the deportees and the remaining population alike. While the latter seems to have relied on a localized agrarian subsistence economy with some production of wine and oil for imperial export and impost (Faust: 33-72), there is circumstantial evidence that the exiled community managed to graft itself into the Babylonian economy, even if only in some form of land tenancy. Unfortunately, there is very little that can really be said about this period; however some later texts from the Persian period provide a glimmer of insight into the socioeconomic lives of the exilic community. The Murashu documents, for example, recovered from the excavations at Nippur, contain banking transactions that bear Judahite names, which indicates at least some level of economic viability and would seem to evidence fulfillment of Jeremiah’s admonition to adapt:

Build houses for yourself and dwell in them, and plant gardens and eat the fruit of them; take wives for yourself and give birth to sons and daughters; take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and be not diminished. And seek the peace of the city to which I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray to the LORD for it, for in the peace thereof, you shall have peace (Jeremiah 29:6-7).

Part of the task of economic recovery involves making sense of how the disaster came about in the first place, that is, thinking seriously about its causes. This is something that obtains for human beings generally, as we saw in the aftermath of 9/11 or the financial crisis of 2007–2008, so how much less for the entire destruction of a nation? For Ezekiel, the national collapse is divinely ordered, so that the Judahites will “know that I am God,” a phrase that recurs several times throughout the book. In asserting that every person will be responsible for his or her own deeds and that only the soul that commits the iniquities shall die (18:3-4), Ezekiel insists that one’s personal responsibilities include extending economic

justice to one's fellows. Note that the failure to do so, as suggested earlier, is tied to idolatry and that right worship is integrated with right social and political economy:

If a man be just and perform that which is just and right and does not eat upon the hills nor lifts his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel . . . and wrongs no one, but restores collateral for a debt, does not rob, but gives bread to the hungry and clothes the naked; does not lend money with interest, nor take any increase, who withdraws his hand from iniquity and executes true justice between persons, who walks in my statutes and keeps my ordinances to deal truly and is just, *he* shall surely live, says the LORD (Ezekiel 18:15-17).

The writer certainly must have known that the righteous and just suffer untimely deaths about as often as any other segment of the population, including the “wicked.” Whether one understands this assertion in terms of some anachronistic early Jewish notion of vindication in the afterlife, or something akin to Plato’s observation that nothing bad can happen to a truly good person, the prophetic world envisioned here seems to equate a life of justice and righteousness (*mishpat ve-tzedakah*) with having achieved the highest state of human existence.

Justice and Righteousness (*mishpat ve-tzedakah*)

All too often justice (*mishpat*) seems to be treated as some abstract concept in biblical scholarship, somehow unconnected to the real world of the ancients. However, Hebrew is a very concrete language expressing a concrete world. Even though the rich vocabulary of English may nuance the rendering of the term in a variety of ways, the Hebrew Bible employs *mishpat* in a pragmatic, usually socioeconomic sense with its roots in the fabric of creation itself; thus justice, right judgment, etc., is expected to conform to divine standards. But as Ezekiel laments, God’s brand of justice goes unrecognized (18:25, 29).

The word *tzedakah* is just as concrete, but equally malleable. Like *mishpat*, *tzedakah* is rooted in the principle of justice a universal concept that all human beings have an innate ability to recognize, as Plato observes in the *Phaedo* (74a–75a). When the words *mishpat* and *tzedakah* are paired, as so often occurs in the Bible (especially in the book of Isaiah), they form a synonymous parallelism, often translated as a hendiadys, which opens up a semantic range beyond anything these terms bear independently on their own.

These terms are perhaps the most significant and oft-used attributes of God in the prophetic corpus and the psalms. As Lord and King of all creation, the biblical God is the supreme Judge of the world, establishing the very foundation and standard of justice, bringing it to fruition in righteousness among all the peoples, as Psalm 99 affirms:

The LORD is king; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The LORD is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name.
Holy is he!
Mighty king, lover of justice,
you have established equity;

you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
Extol the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he! (Psalm 99:1-5).

Similarly, Psalm 97 associates justice and righteousness with God's sovereign majesty:

The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;
let the many coastlands be glad!
Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne (Psalm 97:1-2).

According to Jeremiah, these divine attributes are to exist together and be practiced by those who enjoy power and authority over others:

Thus says the Lord: Do not let the wise boast in their wisdom, do not let the mighty boast in their might, do not let the wealthy boast in their wealth; but let those who boast in this, that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord; I act with steadfast love (*hesed*), justice, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, says the Lord (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

The fact that God has established justice in the universe and judges with righteousness from his throne makes it incumbent upon that kings and judges of the earth to do likewise:

Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king's son.
May he judge your people with righteousness,
and your poor with justice (Psalm 72:1-2).

The obligation for the royal house to administer justice and righteousness is expected to filter down into other levels of society, much the same way that their lack of justice and righteousness filtered down and resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem. Thus justice and righteousness is something expected of all persons in position of responsibility. As R. W. L. Moberly observes, instances of the pairing *mishpat ve-tzedakah* "consistently refer to those qualities which God seeks in humanity in general and in Israel in particular" (59). To be sure, these terms require pairing on the human plane and must mutually co-arise for righteousness without justice (i.e., "right judgment") can perilously overstep into self-righteousness (e.g., Job and Jonah), while justice without righteousness carries the potential for lacking mercy.

Finally, there is the proverb, "To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3), which is no better illustrated than in this oft-quoted passage in Amos, which voices God's disdain for the empty offerings of animal and song in a land where justice and righteousness are lacking:

I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals

I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.
But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:21-24; cf. Micah 6:6-8).

In sum, the implications of *mishpat ve-tzedakah* for examining the prophetically influenced priestly scribal perspective on the economy cannot be overstated. Their pairing not only gives insight into this community's idealized experience of God, but helps delimit right socioeconomic relationships among human beings. This is tied to the concept of the divine image in Genesis 1 and what it means to be created in the *imago Dei*. According to this perspective, if the deity is revealed to be a god of steadfast loving kindness manifested through justice and righteousness who establishes this model for proper human behavior, then intercourse with any other god would necessarily affirm some other sort of paradigm. By rejecting idols along with their alternative moral and ethical frameworks, one is faced with the demands of *mishpat ve-tzedakah* and the necessary balance required of their pairing.

Such is the model that informs the socio-economic vision of the world that might be. The literary fulcrum that marks the historical turning point of fortune for our scribal community, is found in Isaiah:

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, and that she has received from the LORD'S hand double for all her sins (Isaiah 40:1-2).

In visionary words that appear to be directed to those who remained in the land as well as those who might return, Isaiah assures Israel of the promise of divine providence that seems to ignore the need for a monetary economy:

The poor and needy seek water and there is none. And their tongue fails for thirst; I the LORD will answer them. I, the God of Israel will not forsake them (Isaiah 41:17).

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. And you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Isaiah 55:1).

At that time, Isaiah writes:

. . . justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places (Isaiah 32:16-18).

Jeremiah, too, proclaims a return to sound economic transactions, but it will not be business as usual: Men shall purchase fields with money and subscribe deeds and seal them and call witnesses in the land of Benjamin and around Jerusalem and elsewhere, but the transactions will be just and open to scrutiny (32:42-44). In Ezekiel's vision of a restored nation, all unjust

exactions from others are abolished (45:9-12) and the aristocracy will no longer give property acquired from debt satisfaction to their heirs as if it were their own to give (46:18).

Postscript

As the Judean economy began to rebuild and adjust to Persian rule, the restored community's hope for a new Zion, complete with a new temple, comes to be incorporated into the literature of the prophetically influenced priestly scribes – especially among the Writings (*Kethuvim*), but ironically in later prophetic texts like Haggai and Zechariah 1–8 as well – forming a distinctly different layer of development. Some of the prophetic lessons learned from God's putative chastisement of Israel for its socioeconomic sins, as well as the prophets' resultant hope, came to be enshrined in a number of Psalms; but the harsh realities of famine, the Persian empire's increasing demand for taxes, and the costs of constructing a new temple precluded any chance for establishing the unlikely alternative universe envisioned by prophets like Jeremiah (and the Deuteronomistic school) who witnessed the end of the monarchy and the potential for reestablishing the sovereignty of God in a kingless, temple-less age. Meanwhile, a more pragmatic prophetic vision (Hanson) comes to associate the sign of real prosperity not with the administration of social justice by direct divine rule, but through the reconstruction of the temple, as the book of Haggai affirms:

For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts. The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts (Haggai 2:6-9).

But now, consider what will come to pass from this day on. Before a stone was placed upon a stone in the LORD's temple, how did you fare? When one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were but ten; when one came to the wine vat to draw fifty measures, there were but twenty. I struck you and all the products of your toil with blight and mildew and hail; yet you did not return to me, says the LORD. Consider from this day on, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month. Since the day that the foundation of the LORD's temple was laid, consider: Is there any seed left in the barn? Do the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree still yield nothing? From this day on I will bless you (Haggai 2:15-19).

Zechariah also foretells a return to prosperity tied to the new temple, although the divine "measuring line" remains in force:

Therefore, thus says the Lord, I have returned to Jerusalem with compassion; my house shall be built in it, says the Lord of hosts, and the measuring line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem. Proclaim further: Thus says the Lord of hosts: My cities shall again overflow with prosperity; the Lord will again comfort Zion and again choose Jerusalem (Zechariah 1:16-17).

Conclusion

With the biblical measuring line of justice and righteousness stretched over the global landscape, the question remains whether or not any political economy that neglects the fundamental biblical principles of compassion and action on behalf of the poor is in any way sustainable. From a biblical perspective, a social economy that supports a wealthy elite whose resources facilitate ongoing manipulation of the system at the expense of its socioeconomic base sows the seeds of its own deserved demise. In secular terms, even if the language and timetable are different the result is inevitably the same. In societies for which the Bible still remains relevant, reading or hearing its words through the lens of prophetic ultimate concerns is essential. New Testament scholars interested in engaging themselves in this enterprise will have to work out their own paradigms, but I suspect that a proper understanding of the gospel is not incompatible with what has been presented here. For the Hebrew Bible, this understanding lies at the core of its very reason for being. In response to a question raised by one Symposium presenter concerning how to actualize the biblical perspective in the contemporary world, it is clear that the dominant prophetic call for justice and righteousness must resound in Bible studies and in homilies, rising above the triumphalist jubilation of a restored community (e.g., the books of Chronicles or Ezra-Nehemiah), or the lauds of Israel's (in)glorious kings and questionable heroes.

Bibliography

Barstad, Hans M.

- 1996 *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the "Exilic" Period.* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Brueggemann, Walter

- 1997 *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy.* Minneapolis: Fortress.

Dozeman, Thomas, T. Römer, and K. Schmid, editors

- 2011 *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis Through Kings.* Leiden: Brill.

Faust, Avraham

- 2012 *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation.* Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Hanson, Paul D.

- 1979 *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology.* Minneapolis: Fortress.

Levin, Christoph

- 2011 "On the Cohesion and Separation of Books within the Enneateuch." Pp. 127–54 in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis Through Kings.* Edited by T. Dozeman, T. Römer, and K. Schmid. Leiden: Brill.

Lipschitz, Oded, and Joseph Blenkinsopp, editors

- 2003 *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period.* Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

McKenzie, Steven.

- 1991 *The Trouble with Kings: The Composition of the Book of Kings in the Deuteronomistic History*. Leiden: Brill.

Moberly, R. W. L.

- 2001 "Whose Justice? Which Righteousness? The Interpretation of Isaiah 5:18." *Vetus Testamentum* 51: 55-68.

Roddy, Nicolae

- 2008 "Landscape of Shadows: The Image of City in the Hebrew Bible." Pp. 11-21 in *Cities Through the Looking Glass*. Edited by R. Arav. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- 2010 "In Search of a Genuine Biblical Anthropology: Two Case Studies" ("În căutarea unei antropologii scripturistice autentice: două studii de caz."). Pp. 180-92 in *Biserica Ortodoxă și Drepturile Omului: Paradigme, fundamente, implicații (The Orthodox Church and the Rights of Man: Paradigms, Foundations, and Implications)*. Edited by N. Răzvan Stan. Bucharest: Universul Juridic.
- In Press "Chariots of Fire, Unassailable Cities, and the One True King: The Prophetically Influenced Scribal Perspective on War." *War and Peace: Orthodox Views*. Edited by P. Hamalis and V. Karras. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.

Rogerson, John W.

- 2010 *A Theology of the Old Testament: Cultural Memory, Communication, and Being Human*. Minneapolis: Fortress.

Schmid, Konrad

- 2011 "The Emergence and Disappearance of the Separation between the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History in Biblical Studies." Pp. 11-24 in *Pentateuch, Hexateuch, or Enneateuch? Identifying Literary Works in Genesis Through Kings*. Edited by T. Dozeman, T. Römer, and K. Schmid. Leiden: Brill.

van der Toorn, Karel

- 2007 *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.