

Israel as a Monarchy (1100 – 930 BCE)

Economic Well-being

Readings: *Proverbs*

By Topic:

Economic Well-being:

- Wealth and Poverty – 3:9-10; 10:15; 11:4, 28; 13:8; 14:20; 15:16; 17:16; 18:11, 23; 19:4, 6-7; 22:2, 7; 23:4-5; 27:7; 28:6, 8, 11, 20-22
- Benevolence and Generosity – 3:27-28; 11:24-26; 13:22; 14:21; 18:16; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 25:14; 28:27
- Oppression of the Poor – 13:23; 14:31; 15:15; 16:8; 22:16; 22:22-23; 29:7, 13
- Industriousness – 6:6-11; 10:4-5, 26; 12:11, 24, 27; 13:4; 14:4, 23; 15:19; 16:26; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 20:4; 20:13; 21:17; 21:25-26; 22:29; 24:27, 30-34; 26:14-15; 27:18, 23-27; 28:19
- Conservation – 21:20
- Surety for Another – 6:1-5; 11:15; 17:18; 20:16; 22:26-27; 27:13

Reflections:

- This section starts off with the promise of God’s blessing if you tithe the first fruits of all you have. (Prov. 3:9-10). This promise given throughout Scripture is one of the significant practical lessons God gives to his people about trusting him. It takes faith to give away the first and in most cases the best of what you receive. Right from Cain and Abel, God was looking for this kind of faith where people would give to him their best and their first portions rather than give him what was left-over. When we step out to trust God and live by faith, he promises to bless us with abundance that blows us away.

- The teaching on wealth and poverty is fascinating in that Solomon points out that having wealth is both a good thing and a bad thing. It can help protect you but also bring harm on you. It can give a person many friends but can not make God their friend. Those who are poor are vulnerable but also may be in a better position to experience God's grace. In many ways the whole narrative of Scripture, and here echoed again by Solomon, is counter-intuitive to what the world tends to believe. Life with God is about compassion, not comfort, service and not self-indulgence. It is about trust and faith in him and not self-made security. And so we can see how in many ways, wealth naturally works against spiritual growth unless the person heeds the teachings of Jesus and gives themselves over to radical generosity and serving those in need.
- The proverbs that deal with benevolence and generosity make it clear that by giving to the poor we are giving to God. It is striking that Jesus teaches this same thing but clearly states that by serving the poor they are serving him! (Matt. 25:31-40). In fact, Jesus in his parable of the sheep and the goats make generosity to the poor the distinguishing mark of those who receive eternal life versus those who do not receive eternal life.
- Again we see a deep concern for the poor and giving them justice. This is no surprise as it's a key theme of the Biblical narrative and the heart of God.
- There is a long list of proverbs against being lazy. Although God desires those that have to share with those that don't (for us to carry each other's burdens), he also wants each to have a vision to carry their own load and be able to one day be in a position to be generous. Ephesians 4:28 states, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need." Galatians 6:2-4 echoes this principle, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, for each one should carry his own load."
- This section ends with a caution against getting into a position where you have put something you own up for security against a loan or you have struck your hands in a pledge. Within the Old Testament the value and economic system was based on personal ownership with laws that worked against long term mortgages or interest rates. This enabled a broad level of personal security and wealth that could be passed from generation to generation. It is too bad today we don't have a nation based on the same principles as people are presently so heavily debt-leveraged that they will likely be in bondage to interest payments almost their entire life.