

Torah Concepts II

containing:

Torah Justice
Economic Independence
Economic Interdependence

by
Dean & Susan Wheelock

So the *Torah* is holy;
That is, the commandment is holy,
Just and good.
Romans 7:12 CJB

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~ Introduction ~

Don't think that I have come to abolish
The *Torah* or the Prophets.
I have come not to abolish but to complete.
Matthew 5:17 CJB



God, the Almighty Creator, maker of heaven and earth, has always made known to mankind the way of life that, if followed, will bring the human inhabitants of the earth into a proper relationship with Him, thereby producing peace and prosperity as an additional benefit. The basic instructions from God are contained in writings known as the *Torah* (*Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*), the first five books of the Bible. These instructions are also spoken about in the records of the *Prophets*, and in what are known in the Hebrew world as the *Writings* (*Psalms, Proverbs, etc.*). These books, taken together with the *Torah*, comprise what is commonly called the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures.

Then *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-shee'-ahkh = Jesus the Messiah) came and lived out His testimony as recorded in the Gospel accounts. He taught the *Torah* instructions in the manner in which God had intended them to be kept. His *Talmidim* (Tahl-mah-deem' = Disciples) further instructed the early Believers on the proper application of the *Torah* (*nomos* or "law" in Greek). Their writings and testimony made up the Greek Scriptures or New Testament and completed the Scriptural record:

"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

³who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ..."

(Heb. 1:1-3)

This booklet contains three articles presenting an introduction to some of the basic principles set forth in the *Written Torah*. They cover instruction about how a large community of Believers can establish righteous rules and procedures that will promote service to God and harmony among men.

These articles (along with four other articles found in the *Torah Concepts I* booklet) were written over a period of years and published in the *Hebrew Roots*® periodical. They represent a variety of thoughts with the unifying thread that all righteousness is based upon concepts and/or commandments which are found in the *Written Torah*. They are being collected here in order to make them available when the last stock of the issues, in which they originally appeared, have been exhausted.

We hope you will find them a blessing in your spiritual walk.

Shalom!

Dean & Susan Wheelock

Beit Shalom,
August, 2012

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Torah Justice ~

You shall not show partiality in judgment;
You shall hear the small as well as the great;
You shall not be afraid in any man's presence,
For the judgment is God's.
Deuteronomy 1:17

During their forty years of wilderness wandering, the children of Israel were instructed, by God, how to properly establish a *Theocratic Federation* form of government (see *Torah Concepts I: Torah Government*). This they did once they were established in the Promised Land under the leadership of *Yehoshua* יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (Yeh-hoe'-shoe-ah = Joshua) and later under the Judges.

Not only did God give the children of Israel the perfect form of government, He also gave them all of the laws which were needed to successfully guide and direct the nation and the society. However, even a perfect form of government, coupled with a perfect set of laws, will not make for a perfect society unless the Justice System is also perfect. That is the purpose of this chapter in the *Torah Concepts* series -- to examine God's form of justice and how He intended that it be administered in ancient Israel and how it will be administered in the *Malchut Shamayim* מְלֻכַּת שָׁמַיִם (Mahl-koot' Shah-mah-eem' = Kingdom of Heaven).

~ Justice ~

Justice is a topic that seems to be on the minds and hearts of many people. We see wrongs occurring in society and desire that 'justice' be brought to the situation. While many desire 'justice,' the simple fact is that people cannot seem to agree as to what actually constitutes 'true justice.' For example, while most agree that premeditated murder is wrong and those who commit such crimes should be punished, the public is divided over what constitutes a 'just' punishment; whether those convicted of murder should receive the death penalty or be held in prison for life, or even less.

In the United States, the courts are crowded with cases needing to be heard and judged according to the law of the land. However, even when cases do come to trial, complaints are often made about how justice is perverted within the system. Many times this is due to the way the laws pertaining to the case have been written by the local government, the state legislature, or Congress. A modern Judge is duly sworn to bring decisions according to the written laws of his jurisdiction, even if such a decision perverts 'true justice.' Unjust laws cannot bring justice to a situation.

A primary objective of God is to bring 'true justice' to all people, for He is the Judge of all the earth and He is committed to doing what is right. It was this attribute that *Avraham* (Ahv'-rah-ham = Abraham) pointed out to God when they met by the terebinth trees of Mamre:

"Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"
(Gen. 18:25)

God's attribute of justice was confirmed by king David in the Psalms:

**"For You have maintained my right and my cause;
You sat on the throne judging in righteousness."**
(Psalm 9:4)

All of the commandments of God are directed towards the establishment of justice in the nation of Israel and ultimately in the entirety of the world:

**"Righteous are You, O LORD [YHVH],
And upright are Your judgments.
Your testimonies, which You have commanded,
Are righteous and very faithful.
My zeal has consumed me,
Because my enemies have forgotten Your words.
Your word is very pure;
Therefore Your servant loves it.
I am small and despised,
Yet I do not forget Your precepts.
Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
And Your law is truth.
Trouble and anguish have overtaken me,
Yet Your commandments are my delights.
The righteousness of Your testimonies is everlasting;
Give me understanding, and I shall live."**
(Psalm 119:137-144)

~ Hebrew Terms for Justice ~

The primary Hebrew term for justice and its related terms are:

- ◆ *Zadak* צָדָק (tsah-dahk') - Strong's #6663. Translated 23 times as 'justify,' 10 times as 'righteous,' 3 times as 'just,' and 2 times as 'justice.'
- ◆ *Zedakkah* צְדָקָה (Zeh-dah-kah') - Strong's #6666. It is translated 15 times as 'justice' and 128 times as 'righteousness' in the KJV.
- ◆ *Mishpat* מִשְׁפָּט (Meesh-paht') - Strong's #4941. It is translated 296 times as 'judgment.'

These terms refer to both human and Divine justice. Human justice is expressed by righteous living; how one relates to God and how one relates to his fellow man:

**"The LORD [YHVH] rewarded me according to my
righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands He has
recompensed me.
For I have kept the ways of the LORD [YHVH],
And have not wickedly departed from my God.
For all His judgments were before me,
And I did not put away His statutes from me.
I was also blameless before Him,
And I kept myself from my iniquity."**

**Therefore the LORD [YHVH] has recompensed me
according to my righteousness,
According to the cleanness of my hands in His sight."**
(Psalm 18:20-24)

Godly justice is expressed in righteous judgment. However, His justice is not always strict, it can be modified by *chesed* חֶסֶד (heh-sehd' = mercy, goodness, kindness):

**"But the mercy [*chesed*] of the LORD [YHVH] is from
everlasting to everlasting
On those who fear Him,
And His righteousness to children's children,
To such as keep His covenant,
And to those who remember His commandments to
do them."**
(Psalm 103:17-18)

Justice, whether it is expressed by God or man, is synonymous with holiness:

**"For I am the LORD [YHVH] who brings you up out of
the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be
holy, for I am holy."**
(Lev. 11:45)

~ Justice Systems ~

All nations and cultures have some type of justice system established within their society. These systems range all the way from the binding decisions of a single tribal elder to the complex system of laws and courts found in modern democracies.

Many a traveler has found, to their dismay, that what passes for justice in their own nation may be totally different than 'justice' as determined by the country in which they find themselves. A number of years ago, a group of European and American Christians found that while it is perfectly legal to pass out Bibles and Christian tracts in their own countries, it was an offense punishable by death in Muslim Afghanistan. Thankfully, they were freed from their imprisonment when the Taliban forces fled Kabul.

~ International Law ~

A phenomenon of the twentieth century was the advent of an identifiable body of International Law and a World Court. With their establishment, nations not only took on the responsibility of rendering 'justice' within their own countries, they also began to form coalitions with other countries and take it upon themselves to police the actions of whomever they choose, no matter where the accused might reside or where the alleged crime was committed. This situation developed as a result of the successful war crimes prosecution of a number of World War II, Nazi Germany leaders.

Belgium now has a law on its books which permits people from other countries to bring charges against anyone in the world whom they feel have committed "crimes against humanity." Both Ariel Sharon, a former Prime Minister of Israel, and Yasser Arafat, a former head of the Palestinian Authority, at one time had cases pending against them in Belgium.

The former leader of Yugoslavia, Slobadon Milosavic, also found himself under arrest in Belgium for alleged war crimes against the ethnic Albanians (Muslims) of Kosovo. The successful arrest and bringing to trial of Milosavic led some to call for similar action against former US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, for his role in helping to establish the bloody Pinochet regime in Chile in 1973.

Where will it all end? Will former President George Bush (the elder) be charged for his role in the Persian Gulf War against Iraq? Will former President George W. Bush be hauled into a Belgium court for ordering the destruction of the Taliban regime? It may sound farfetched, but in this modern world of 'justice,' anything is possible.

~ A Standard for Justice ~

There is a standard for justice which, if it were to be followed by all peoples and nations of the earth, would eliminate squabbles about what constitutes true and righteous justice. That standard can be found in the pages of the Bible, especially in the *Torah* (the first five books,) as well as the *Prophets* and the *Writings* of the Hebrew Scriptures, but also in the teachings of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Yeh-shoe'-ah Hah Mah-she'-akh = Jesus the Messiah).

When the God of *Avraham* אַבְרָהָם (Ahv'-rah-ham = Abraham), *Yitzchak* יִצְחָק (Yeet'-sock = Isaac), and *Ya'acov* יַעֲקֹב (Yah-ah'-cove = Jacob) brought the children of Israel out of Egypt and prepared them to enter the Promised Land, He made the following promise through His servant *Moshe* מֹשֶׁה (Mow-shay' = Moses):

"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD [YHVH] God of your fathers is giving you.

"You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD [YHVH] your God which I command you. ...

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD [YHVH] my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say,

""Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD [YHVH] our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?""

(Deut. 4:1-2, 5-8)

How can this be? The *Torah* contains only 613 laws or commandments. Is it possible for a nation to survive in this modern world with so few laws? The answer to this question is somewhat complex.

First of all, in order to have righteous justice there must be righteous laws. These were given by God to the children of Israel, and we have them in codified form in the *Torah*.

Secondly, there must be a righteous government established to enforce the righteous laws. (These topics are covered in the first booklet in this series: *Torah Concepts I*).

Last, but not least, there must be a righteous system of justice. While the system set forth in the Scriptures has been used as a model by many modern countries, we believe there are significant differences in the Administration of Justice that God gave to the children of Israel as opposed to that which is practiced in the modern world.

All cultures and nations have a form of justice which prevails in their society. However, we cannot use any of them as models when seeking true and righteous justice, for that virtue can come only from our Creator God:

**For the LORD [YHVH] is our Judge,
The LORD [YHVH] is our Lawgiver,
The LORD [YHVH] is our King;
He will save us."** (Isa. 33:22)

Since, without righteous judgment there can be no 'true justice,' we must go to the Word of God in order to gain a proper understanding of righteous judgment, the prerequisite to righteous justice.

~ God's Court System ~

Before exploring what makes a Righteous Judge and what constitutes Righteous Judgment, it is important to review the system of judges that was established by God for the nation of Israel. This material was first covered in the chapter entitled *Torah Government* (see *Torah Concepts I*), The following is a reprint of a section from that chapter.

* The Administration of Judgment *

It was not long after the children of Israel left Egypt when it became apparent that not only Elders were needed to assist *Moshe* in the administration of the nation, but that Judges were also needed to help resolve disputes and interpret the *Torah* laws. This decision was made out of necessity, for *Moshe* had taken it upon himself to hear every matter of disagreement that arose between individual Israelites in order to make a judgment based upon the instructions of God. As word spread throughout the camp that *Moshe* was willing to hear their cases, the line of people desiring judgment no doubt grew long:

"And so it was, on the next day, that Moses sat to judge the people; and the people stood before Moses from morning until evening.

"So when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he did for the people, he said, 'What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit, and all the people stand before you from morning until evening?'

"And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws.'" (Ex. 18:13-16)

Jethro, *Moshe's* father-in-law saw immediately that this situation would be the undoing of both *Moshe* and the people,

for one man could not hear the cases of three million people without becoming totally exhausted. Meanwhile, the people no doubt became frustrated because of the long wait for the resolution of their conflicts:

"So Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'The thing that you do is not good. Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself.'" (Ex. 18:17-18)

Jethro's solution was both simple and wise:

"Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

"If you do this thing, and God *so* commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace." (Ex. 18:19-23)

Moshe immediately saw the wisdom of this plan and implemented it. This was the beginning of the judicial system in Israel, and the pattern established there is believed to have been followed, not just while they were in the wilderness, but after they came into the land as well:

"So Moses heeded the voice of his father-in-law and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people: rulers [*sarim*] of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens.

"So they judged the people at all times; the hard cases they brought to Moses, but they judged every small case themselves." (Ex. 18:24-26)

It is important to note that the passage in Exodus 18 does not actually refer to these men as 'Judges,' but as 'Rulers' or, in Hebrew, *Sarim* שָׂרִים (*sah-reem*, Strong's #8269). In Israel the men who judged the people held enormous power, for they had the power to develop 'case law' based upon the judgments they rendered.

This pattern for Judges is similar to the one used by many nations today. A case is first brought before the lowest level judge. In Israel's case this would have been a judge that had jurisdiction over ten men. If this judge could not resolve the issue it would move up the ladder to a judge over fifty. The case would keep moving up the ladder until it could be resolved properly at one of the upper levels.

Using a round figure of 600,000 men, simple mathematics reveals there would have been 60,000 judges at the lowest level, 12,000 judges at the level of 'fifties,' 6,000 judges of 'hundreds,' and 600 judges of 'thousands.' *Moshe* was not

included in this number, for he stood alone at the very top. Thus, 78,601 men, or 13.1 percent of all male Israelites between the ages of 20 and 60, were judges (or rulers) in Israel during the wilderness wandering.

Moshe functioned as the 'Supreme Court,' since only the most difficult cases would arrive at his door. It was his responsibility to make the final decision on any of the cases that were brought to him. Those he could not decide, given his own understanding of the *Torah*, he would take to God for resolution.

"Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God." (Ex. 18:19)

~ Case Law ~

Based upon the court system which God established for the children of Israel, it seems likely that the Judges of Israel not only based their decisions upon explicit *Torah* commands, they also developed a body of Case Law which could be used as an aid in making future decisions. Case Law is a well established method of aiding judges in making judgments in today's judicial systems. Case Law is so important in the United States judicial system, that it becomes big news when the Supreme Court reverses a decision that was made by a previous Supreme Court.

In Jewish tradition, Case Law has played a major role in the development of *Halacha* (Hah-lah-chah'), the rules and customs by which an Orthodox Jew conducts his life. (Literally, *Halacha* means, "the way one walks.") The *Mishnah* (Meesh'-nah) is the written body of Oral Law which was developed by the Rabbis over many centuries and finally written down in the second century of the common era. About two hundred years later, another group of Rabbis added commentary (called the *Gemarah* [Geh-mah-rah']) to the *Mishnah*. Together, the *Mishnah* and the *Gemarah* make up the *Talmud* (Tahl'-mood). Next to the Scriptures, the *Talmud* is the most authoritative text in Judaism.

~ The Attributes of a Righteous Judge ~

There is no doubt that a properly developed court system is needed if a nation is to have true justice. However, a system of courts is not a substitute for the two most important elements of the justice system; righteous laws and righteous judges. As expected, the *Torah* provides a description of the attributes of a Righteous Judge:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor." (Lev. 19:15)

This passage lays the conceptual groundwork for God's judicial system. The Judges of His people are to refrain from unjust decisions by being impartial to both the poor and the rich. Everyone is to be treated absolutely equal before the Court. The poor are not to be given compensation just because

they are poor and in need, nor are the rich to be favored because they are powerful in the community.

Further instruction concerning both trial judges and witnesses is given in Exodus:

"You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute."

... [on the other hand]

"You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous."

(Ex. 23:1-3, 6-8)

Once again, the Judges are told to be impartial in their judgments. Whether a person is rich or poor must not enter into consideration. Judges must seek to expose the truth and then act upon it accordingly. The Righteous Judge is also admonished against taking a bribe, for that is a most certain way in which justice can be perverted.

One of the attributes that will be extant during the reign of *Y'shua* (Yeh-shoe'-ah = Jesus), the King Messiah, will be His desire and ability to judge the people with equity:

"There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots."

...

And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; ..."

(Isa. 11:1, 3-4)

Often, in our modern court system (and in society at large), the poor and the meek do not receive justice because they are not able to afford it, or they are unwilling to speak up for their lawful rights. This will not be the case in the *Malchut Shamayim* (Kingdom of Heaven), for the Righteous Judge, King Messiah, will see that 'true justice' is administered for all people.

~ Types of Judgment ~

There are two types of judgment found in the Scriptures; strict judgment and merciful judgment. In some cases the penalties are very strict, yet many times a way is made for a merciful judgment to be administered.

In terms of the Festivals, *Yom Teruah* יוֹם תְּרוּעָה (Yohm Teh-rue-ah' = Feast of Trumpets) is considered to be the Day of Strict Judgment, while *Yom Kippur* יוֹם כִּפּוּר (Yohm Key-poor' = Day of Atonement) is a Day of Judgment with Mercy. That is why we approach God on *Yom Kippur* in a state of fasting, imploring Him to forgive us for our sins.

Y'shua expressly showed the merciful side of God's judgment in the matter of the woman who was caught in adultery:

"Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?' This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him.

"But Jesus [*Y'shua*] stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, 'He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.' And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard *it*, being convicted by *their* conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest *even* to the last.

"And Jesus [*Y'shua*] was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus [*Y'shua*] had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, 'Woman, where are those accusers of yours? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to her, 'Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more.'" (John 8:3-11)

All of us have committed sin in our lives. It behooves us to pray that God will not deal with us in strict judgment (death), but with merciful judgment (forgiveness unto life). However, the call is God's, not ours:

"What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.' So then *it is* not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy." (Rom. 9:14-16)

In the end, mercy will triumph, if we have shown mercy to others:

"For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one *point*, he is guilty of all. For He who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment." (James 2:10-13)

It is through the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, *Y'shua HaMashiach* that we are able to obtain mercy from God and forgiveness for our sins:

"Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus [*Y'shua*] the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

(Heb. 4:14-16)

If the Father is willing to forgive us of our sins, we should be willing to forgive one another. In fact, we were directed to pray as follows:

"And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors." (Matt. 6:12)

Y'shua told the following parable to emphasize this point:

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.

"But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took *him* by the throat, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.' And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt.

"So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

"So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses." (Matt. 18:23-35)

~ Jurisdictions ~

In ancient Israel, during the time of the Judges, the Scriptures indicate there were two different administrative jurisdictions. These were the jurisdiction of the *Zekenim* (Zeh-keh-neem') or Elders, and another jurisdiction of the *Kohenim* (Koh-hehn-neem') or Priests. The Priestly jurisdiction also included a procedure by which an important issue could be taken directly to God for resolution through the *Urim* אֲרִיִּם (Oo-reem') and the *Thummim* תִּמְמִים (Thoo-meem').* During the time of the Monarchy a third jurisdiction was established, that of the king.

The *Zekenim* (Elders) were responsible for all disputes that occurred within the community where they had jurisdiction. These men were the heads of their family units and clans and were the leading citizens of their community. They are often identified in Scripture as sitting in the 'gates' of the city. It was there that people brought public charges against those who had wronged them. The *Zekenim* who sat at the gates, heard evidence and made judgments according to the testimony brought before them. For example:

* The *Urim* and *Thummim* was a Priestly device for obtaining a decision from God.

"If any man takes a wife, and goes in to her, and detests her, and charges her with shameful conduct, and brings a bad name on her, and says, 'I took this woman, and when I came to her I found she was not a virgin,' then the father and mother of the young woman shall take and bring out the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate. And the young woman's father shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man as wife, and he detests her. Now he has charged her with shameful conduct, saying, 'I found your daughter was not a virgin,' and yet these are the evidences of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city.

"Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish him; and they shall fine him one hundred *shekels* of silver and give *them* to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name on a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife; he cannot divorce her all his days.

"But if the thing is true, and evidences of virginity are not found for the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done a disgraceful thing in Israel, to play the harlot in her father's house. So you shall put away the evil from among you." (Deut. 22:13-21)

As can be seen from this example, the *Zekenim* had the power to exact just compensation for the victim and also to bring a death penalty judgment; but only within the parameters laid out for them in the *Torah*. It was their job to administer proper justice in all cases brought before them and they were not to deviate from the guidelines of the *Torah*.

If a decision could not be reached at the local level, because of lack of evidence or lack of competent judges, the case could be taken to a higher court:

"If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD [YHVH] your God chooses." (Deut. 17:8)

The "place which the LORD chooses" was always considered to be the place where the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) stood. During the period of the Judges (prior to the monarchy) that would have been in *Shiloh* שִׁילֹה (Shee'low). There, the defendant would be taken to a high level court which consisted of more than just *Zekenim* (Elders):

"And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days, and inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment." (Deut. 17:9)

Thus, when moving to a higher court, Priests and Levites were brought into the matter along with at least one secular Judge. Exactly how this procedure worked is unknown, but it is considered to be the *Torah* basis for the first century *Sanhedrin* (Sahn-he'-drehn = Supreme Court) which was first

established by Ezra as *The Men of the Great Assembly*, when the house of Judah returned from Babylonian captivity.

In practice, it is quite probable that, in addition to the local courts of the *Zekenim* and the *Sanhedrin*, there were also a series of intermediate courts established throughout the various Tribal lands. This would be in keeping with the court structure established by *Moshe* (Ex. 18). Thus, most cases could be resolved without a trip to *Shiloh* where the Tabernacle was located (or later to the Temple in Jerusalem). Since Priests and Levites lived in various cities throughout all the Tribes of Israel, it would seem probable that the litigants would go to an Intermediate Court near their home area. If that court also failed to obtain a decision, they would eventually go to the Supreme Court at the Tabernacle or Temple:

"If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing, then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD [YHVH], before the priests and the judges who serve in those days."

(Deut. 19:16-17)

The use of the plural form for 'judges' seems to imply that more than one location was used for the Intermediate or Appellate Courts (courts of appeal).

Standing before a legally appointed judge was as though one were standing before God:

"Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD [YHVH] your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil from Israel." (Deut. 17:12)

~ Priestly Jurisdiction ~

The role of the Priests in the Administration of Justice was very extensive. First of all, it was their responsibility to teach the *Torah* instructions (laws) to the *Zekenim* (Elders):

"And of Levi he said: ... They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, And Israel Your law." (Deut. 33:8a, 10a)

The Priests were solely responsible for judging certain prescribed areas; in particular those things pertaining to ritual purity and Tabernacle service; decisions that separated the sacred from the profane:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Aaron, saying: 'Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD [YHVH] has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.'

(Lev. 10:8-11)

One of the chief areas of judgment that was given solely to the Priests was determining the ritual status of an individual; whether they were clean or unclean. This is made clear in Leviticus 13 and 14, where the laws of leprosy are given. *Y'shua* (Yeh-shoe'-ah = Jesus) confirmed the Priests responsibility in this area when He instructed a healed leper to appear before a Priest for ritual cleansing:

"And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.' Then Jesus [*Y'shua*] put out *His* hand and touched him, saying, 'I am willing; be cleansed.' Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus [*Y'shua*] said to him, 'See that you tell no one; but go your way, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.'"
(Matt. 8:2-4)

Roland DeVaux, in his book *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, sums up the role of the Priests in the Administration of Justice:

It seems the priests were the authentic interpreters of the law, that they judged all strictly religious matters, ... and intervened in civil cases at least when these involved some religious law or religious procedure." (p. 155)

~ Crimes Against God ~

Israel was unique among the ancient nations in many ways. One thing they had, which no other nation could claim, was a covenant relationship with God. The pagan nations, did not have such a relationship, because their gods were not really gods, but only figments of men's imagination that had been carved into images of wood and stone.

Because, *YHVH* (the LORD, the Sacred Name) was in a covenant relationship with the children of Israel, He was not only closely connected with their religious life, but with their civil life as well. God not only guaranteed the Covenant, He directly participated in it. For this reason, the most severe penalties were reserved for crimes against God, such as idolatry and blasphemy:

"And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD [*YHVH*] shall surely be put to death." (Lev. 24:16)

"If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and serve other gods," which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, of the gods of the people which are all around you, near to you or far off from you, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth, you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him; but you shall surely kill him; your hand shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people.

"And you shall stone him with stones until he dies, because he sought to entice you away from the LORD [*YHVH*] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. So all Israel shall hear and fear, and not again do such wickedness as this among you."
(Deut. 13:6-11)

In addition to these direct affronts to God, any word or action that tarnished the holiness of God, His Sanctuary, or His people was also severely punished. When it came to human action, the kinds of acts which "tarnished the holiness of His people" would be things such as bestiality, sodomy, incest, and adultery:

"Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death."
(Ex. 22:19)

"If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be upon them*."
(Lev. 20:13)

"The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood *shall be upon them*."
(Lev. 20:11)

"The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death."
(Lev. 20:10)

~ Just Compensation ~

In order for justice to prevail in a society, it is important that perpetrators of crimes be properly punished and victims of crimes be justly compensated for their loss.

In our modern criminal justice system, the preferred punishment for criminals, no matter what the crime, is incarceration. A 2003 report stated that 8.75 million people (that's 1 out of every 32 Americans) were under some form of jurisdiction to the criminal justice system. That means they are either in prison, on probation, or otherwise under the supervision of a court of law. Of that number, over 6.6 million were actually incarcerated.

In ancient Israel, prisons were only used as a place to hold people who had been arrested and were suspected of committing a crime, until their trial took place:

"And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation. They put him under guard, because it had not been explained what should be done to him."
(Num. 15:33-34)

Since there were so many judges in Israel, (over 13 percent of the male population) incarceration for the purpose of awaiting trial would have been quite brief, probably only overnight. The long term imprisonment of people for the commission of crimes was not a part of *Torah* justice.

In the United States, if a person is caught stealing, they most often go to jail. In some Islamic countries, the thief might have his hand cut off. The *Torah* had a much different way of dealing with convicted felons; a process most sensible in the way theft was handled, with a remedy of just restitution or compensation:

"If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep."
(Ex. 22:1)

This passage can be applied more widely than just to oxen and sheep. Thus, if a person steals something and it is no longer recoverable, the thief must not only make restitution, he must also give the victim an additional payment. However, if

the item stolen was still in the thief's possession when he was captured, the penalty was less severe:

"If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double."
(Ex. 22:4)

In this case, the thief had to return the stolen item and pay a fine equal to the original amount. This money did not go to the court or the government, it went directly to the victim. In this way the victim was justly compensated for both his loss and his trouble. In our opinion, this is a far better option than putting a thief in jail while the victim absorbs the loss.

In modern terms, such as car theft, if the car is stripped and sold, or wrecked, the thief would have to pay the equivalent of four or five cars. However, if the car were recovered undamaged, the thief would only have to pay the victim for one additional car.

~ Paying the Fine ~

One might argue that if a person had to resort to thievery, he would not have the means to pay a fine of up to five times the value of what he had stolen. The *Torah* has a solution for that problem as well. The person who perpetrated the crime would then be given over to the victim and he could sell the services of the thief in order to obtain the money due him:

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing."
(Ex. 21:2)

In practice, no adult citizen of Israel could be forced into slavery. He could only find himself in such a position because of a court order that resulted from indebtedness or thievery. In either case, his servitude was more like that of an indentured servant than a human slave, and his servitude could only last a maximum of six years. Hopefully, during the time of his servitude, the thief would learn how to work effectively, so that he could earn a living wage once the period of servitude was completed.

~ Acts of Violence ~

The most extreme act of violence is murder, which was punishable by death:

"He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death."
(Ex. 21:12)

However, the murder had to be premeditated. Accidental murder (manslaughter) did not warrant the death penalty, only premeditated murder fell into that category:

"But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die."
(Ex. 21:14)

In cases of manslaughter, the killer was allowed to escape to a city of refuge. This was permitted so that he could not be taken from there by the 'blood avenger' (a family member designated to avenge the murder of his kin, a common practice in the culture of that time) until he had been given a fair trial.

However, if he was convicted of manslaughter instead of premeditated murder, he had to stay in that city until the High Priest died. If he left the city before that time, the 'blood avenger' could still take his life:

"Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall appoint cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally may flee there. They shall be cities of refuge for you from the avenger, that the manslayer may not die until he stands before the congregation in judgment.'"
(Num. 35:10-12)

At the trial, circumstantial evidence was not admissible for any capital crime, including adultery. There had to be at least two witnesses to convict:

"Whoever is deserving of death shall be put to death on the testimony of two or three witnesses; he [literally, the 'dead man'] shall not be put to death on the testimony of one witness."
(Deut. 17:6)

This command made it very difficult to obtain a death penalty decision from a court of law. However, because the Hebrew text calls the man "a dead man," the Sages teach that if the court could not obtain a conviction because there were not two or more witnesses, that person was still considered a dead man because God would eventually punish him. (*Stone Chumash Commentary*, p. 1026-27.)

~ Liability ~

Personal and corporate liability makes up one of the major areas of modern litigation. Thousands of attorneys are employed trying to help people seeking redress of their grievances in cases involving negligence and fraud. As expected, the *Torah* addresses this area of litigation.

Unlike manmade legal systems, the *Torah* does not try to cover every minute detail. Rather, it concerns itself with general concepts of law. This is why there are only 613 commandments in the *Torah*, while modern law contains many volumes of laws. When the law tries to address every little aspect of a situation that might arise, it opens the way for unscrupulous people to find ways around the intent of the law. This happens consistently in US tax law. Whenever new tax legislation is passed, in an attempt to close a loophole, intelligent accountants look for new loopholes to aid their clients in reducing taxes.

What the *Torah* does, is set forth general principles which give the Judge deciding the case some leeway when it comes to determining proper compensation or punishment. For example:

"When you build a new house, then you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring guilt of bloodshed on your household if anyone falls from it."
(Deut. 22:8)

The implication of this passage is very clear. If there is something about one's property that is unsafe, and someone becomes injured or dies as a result, the owner may be found to be directly responsible for that person's death or injury. Therefore, he is liable for damages. In the case of death, the

owner would not be liable for the death penalty, since it was not a premeditated act witnessed by two or more people, but was an act of negligence on his part.

The *Torah* does not find it necessary to list all of the possible unsafe conditions for which a property owner might be liable. The principle set forth here is meant to be a guide for the Judge in cases of liability. It is then up to the righteous Judge to decide what damages must be paid, or what other penalty might be appropriate.

Some liability cases could involve the death penalty. However, in Jewish understanding, liability death sentences could only be administered by God Himself. One example would be when an ox that was known to be dangerous, gored a human and killed him:

"If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death."

(Ex. 21: 28-29)

According to the commentary in the *Stone Chumash*:

"... if it [the ox that habitually gored] gets loose and kills, he [the owner] is at fault and he shall die by the hand of God; this is not a court-imposed penalty. Like all Heavenly imposed penalties, God judges the individual in the light of all the circumstances. If, indeed, the owner was not culpable, his punishment will be lessened or eliminated accordingly." (p. 425)

If the ultimate penalty came only from God, then the human Judge also had some leeway in cases such as this. Therefore, if circumstances did not seem to warrant the death penalty, the *Torah* teaches that the owner may be fined instead, for the very next verse states:

"If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him."

(Ex. 21:30)

It must be remembered that this is not a case of premeditated murder, rather it is a case of negligence. The *Stone Chumash* goes on to comment:

"If there are witnesses, the court is required to impose a fine upon him, which, when paid, frees him from the Heavenly death penalty." p. 425)

This is an example of a righteous judgment being made on the basis of *Torah* law.

Further examples are given which cover actions that resulted in the loss of property:

"And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead animal shall be his."

"If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide. Or if it was known that

the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own." (Ex. 21:33-36)

While these examples do not cover every situation, they do provide a framework of principles by which a Judge can make righteous rulings based on *Torah* teachings.

The subject of fraud is addressed in a most general way:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am the LORD." (Lev. 19:35-37)

Yet, the guiding principle of how to deal with fraud is quite clear, even when applied to cases that are not mentioned. This principle can be taken and applied to any business transaction, including, in our opinion, securities and exchange transactions.

~ Just Compensation ~

The principle of just compensation is well expounded in the following example:

"If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine." (Ex. 21:22)

First of all, notice that the Judge is the one who determines the amount of compensation to be given to the victim. In this case, since it involved a premature birth and not the loss of the baby's life, and since the man had not intended to harm the unborn child, a monetary award is made to the father and the mother.

If, however, the act involved other injuries or a fatality (the woman or the unborn child dies) a new situation arose:

"But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe."

(Ex. 21:23-25)

Again this was not a premeditated act against the woman or her unborn child, the death penalty cannot apply, even though the *Torah* says, "...life for life..." Therefore, this passage has always been understood, in Jewish teaching, as establishing the principle of just compensation for the death or injury that has taken place. There was never an understanding that if the woman or the baby lost an eye, that the eye of the perpetrator be physically removed, any more than if the woman or baby lost their life, the life of the perpetrator would be taken, since it was not a premeditated act.

Once again, the *Torah* gives only general guidelines for the deciding of cases which may have similarities, even though the details of a particular case might be quite different.

The principle of 'just compensation' is addressed in the *Torah*, although in a somewhat different manner:

"Now the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them:

""When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to the LORD [YHVH], according to your valuation, if your valuation is of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. If it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels; and if from five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels; and if from a month old up to five years old, then your valuation for a male shall be five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver; and if from sixty years old and above, if it is a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. But if he is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall set a value for him; according to the ability of him who vowed, the priest shall value him.""

(Lev. 27:1-8)

This passage deals with voluntary gifts to the Tabernacle or Temple. Once the vow had been made, the person making the vow was required to follow through with his pledge. In this case, the person making the vow would pledge to give the value of himself (or another person) to the Tabernacle. So that everyone was treated in an equitable manner, the *Torah* gives the exact amount each person was obligated to give under this type of vow.

According to the *Stone Edition Chumash*:

"This vow involves the holiness inherent in the individual Jew, the 'value' of his soul, as it were. Since there is no 'market' that can assess such a value, and no way for human beings to measure it, the Torah assigns the amounts to be paid, based not on the health, strength, earning capacity, or commercial value of the subject, but solely on his or her age and sex." (p. 719)

By referencing this passage, a Judge could also obtain guidelines when it came to assessing 'just compensation' in liability cases.

~ Other Capital Crimes ~

The list of other crimes, for which a person could receive the death penalty, seems somewhat arbitrary by modern standards. However, it must be remembered that God looks at crimes much differently than men do. By their very nature, each one of the capital crimes listed below defile the holy (set-apart) land of Israel. The include:

◆ Kidnapping:

"He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death." (Ex. 21:16)

When *Yoseif* (Yoh-safe' = Joseph) was kidnapped by his brothers and sold into slavery, they were legally under the death penalty for what they had done. However, because God

is a merciful Judge, He did not require that penalty from them, but used the situation to bring about a good result for the children of Israel.

◆ Cursing one's parents:

"And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death." (Ex. 21:17)

◆ Profaning the Sabbath:

"You shall keep the Sabbath, therefore, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people." (Ex. 31:14)

This passage contains two mutually exclusive punishments for desecrating the Sabbath. According to the *Stone Chumash*:

"One who violates the Sabbath despite a warning from witnesses that he is committing a capital offense is liable to the death penalty imposed by the court. But one who does so intentionally, without being warned or witnessed, is punished by God with kareis [karet], i.e., his soul is cut off from the nation." (p. 491)

◆ Offering one's child to a pagan god:

"Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones." (Lev. 20:2)

◆ Practicing witchcraft:

"A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them." (Lev. 20:27)

◆ A prophet or dreamer of dreams who tried to turn God's people away from Him and towards the worship of idols:

"But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn you away from the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD [YHVH] your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst." (Deut. 13:5)

◆ Prostitution by a Priest's daughter:

"The daughter of any priest, if she profanes herself by playing the harlot, she profanes her father. She shall be burned with fire." (Lev. 21:9)

All of these death penalty crimes are more than just crimes against other human beings, they are also crimes against *YHVH*. Since man is made in the express image of God, crimes such as murder, kidnapping, and adultery are understood, in Jewish teaching, to be crimes against *YHVH*:

"Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD [YHVH] your God *am* holy."" (Lev. 19:2)

Roland DeVaux sums it up this way:

"Israelite law limits capital punishment to offenses against the purity of worship, sanctity of life, and the sources of life. This religious motive is usually expressed by the laws." (p. 158)

~ Punishment ~

The vast majority of executions in ancient Israel were performed by stoning. Burning was only used in two cases: prostitution by a Priest's daughter (Lev. 21:9) and a man who married a woman and her mother. (Lev. 20:14)

In the case of stoning, the condemned person was taken out of town, where the accusers had to cast the first stones:

"Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him [Stephen] with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him." (Acts 7:57-58a)

For a person who was exceptionally wicked, the penalty was increased by exposing the dead body to public view. This was a done to set an example and was considered a mark of infamy:

"If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you *as* an inheritance; for he who is hanged *is* accursed of God." (Deut. 21:22-23)

In Jewish understanding, this passage only refers to people who have committed idolatry or blasphemy. However, the body must be taken down before nightfall. The Scripture states that: **"... he who is hanged *is* accursed of God."** Even so, to allow the body to hang overnight is prohibited because, as the *Stone Chumash* states:

"Since a human being is created in the image of God, and God calls Jews His own children, as it were, the hanging body is disgraceful to God Himself. It can be likened to the twin brother of a king, who is a bandit and is hanged for his crimes. People who see the body think it is the king." (p. 1049)

Flogging was also a method of punishment for some lesser crimes. For example the man who unjustly accused his wife of not being a virgin when they married:

"Then the elders of that city shall take that man and punish [*yasar*] him; ..." (Deut. 22:18)

In addition to the one hundred shekels of silver that he had to pay to the father of the bride, the man was also *yasar* יָסַר' (yah-sahr'), or punished. This was understood to be a flogging.

Another case was the son who was disobedient to his parents:

"If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and *who*, when they have chastened [*yasar*] him, will not heed them, ..." (Deut. 21:18)

This verse explains that the son has already been flogged and still does not wish to obey his parents.

Floggings were limited to forty strokes. This was in stark contrast to the pagan nations, who would often beat a man until he died:

"If there is a dispute between men, and they come to court, that the judges may judge them, and they justify the righteous and condemn the wicked, then it shall be, if the wicked man deserves to be beaten, that the judge will cause him to lie down and be beaten in his presence, according to his guilt, with a certain number of blows. Forty blows he may give him and no more, lest he should exceed this and beat him with many blows above these, and your brother be humiliated in your sight." (Deut. 25:1-3)

In actual practice, the Jews put a fence around this law and gave a maximum of thirty-nine stripes. This was to insure that a miscount would not occur and they might, by mistake, give one stripe to many and thereby "humiliate" their brother Israelite.

Bodily mutilation was common in many of the ancient societies, and is still common in some religions today. However, mutilation was forbidden in *Torah* code. In the one instance that follows, at first glance it appears to be an exception:

"If two men fight together, and the wife of one draws near to rescue her husband from the hand of the one attacking him, and puts out her hand and seizes him by the genitals, then you shall cut off her hand; your eye shall not pity her." (Deut. 25:11-12)

However, in Jewish understanding this passage falls into the same category as:

"But if *any* harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex. 21:23-25)

As mentioned previously, this passage was always understood to mean just compensation for the loss of a body part or an accidental death. In the case of the women who grabs the man's genitals, she was to be fined for embarrassing him.

"Since the funds for this payment generally would come from money she had earned by working, it is as if the 'hand' that brought her the money is cut off." (*Stone Chumash*, p. 1065)

~ Court Procedures ~

Specific court procedures can be extrapolated from the Scriptures. In some cases one must go beyond the *Torah* and into the *Prophets* and the *Writings* in order to gain this understanding. Nevertheless, those Scriptures do give us a

glimpse into the actual manner in which court proceedings were conducted. We are indebted to Roland DeVaux's book, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, (pp 155-57) for much of the research into the procedures given here.

- ◆ Local justice was administered in public at the city gate. (Deut. 21:19)
- ◆ Generally, the action was brought by a private party. (Deut. 25:7)
- ◆ The person bringing the charge appears as the plaintiff. (Deut. 27:8)
- ◆ In some cases, the court would pre-investigate a case based upon information received from certain individuals. (Deut. 17:2-5)
- ◆ During the courtroom arguments, the Judge was seated. (Isa. 16:5; Dan. 7:9-10)
- ◆ The Judge would stand to pronounce the sentence. (Isa. 3:13)
- ◆ During the trial, both plaintiff and defendant would remain standing. (Deut. 19:17; Isa. 50:8)
- ◆ The accuser, or adversary (*Satan* in Hebrew), stood to the right of the accused. (Psalm 109:6)
- ◆ The defender also stood to the right of the accused. However, he was not an advocate, as no such word exists in Hebrew. (Psalm 109:31)
- ◆ The accused party was given ample opportunity to state his defense. (Deut. 17:4; Job 13:22)
- ◆ Both parties could call witnesses. (I Kings 21:10, 13)
- ◆ A death sentence charge required two witnesses. (Num. 35:30)
- ◆ If the accused was found guilty of a death penalty charge, the witnesses against him had to cast the first stones. (Deut. 13:9)
- ◆ All evidence had to be verified by the Judges. Anyone found giving false testimony would receive the punishment that would have been the defendant's, had he been found guilty. (Deut. 19:18-19)
- ◆ Proofs of fact had to be produced. (Deut. 22:13-17)
- ◆ The court pronounced the defendant either guilty or just. (Deut. 25:1)

According to DeVaux,

"The role of the judge was not so much to impose a sentence as to settle a dispute while respecting justice. He was more a defender of right than a punisher of crime. He was a just arbitrator." (p. 157)

True *Torah* justice required a fair hearing of all involved in the matter. It was the responsibility of the Judge to see that the hearing was fair and that all the facts were presented so a proper judgment could be made.

~ The Judgment of God ~

When no decision could be made in any of the courts of Israel, there was one last resort. The case could be determined by an oath. This process was first disclosed by God in the book of Exodus:

"If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, then an oath of the LORD [YHVH] shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good." (Ex. 22:10-11)

The second example involves the discovery of a dead body lying in the countryside. The physical evidence indicates that the person had been murdered, but there are no witnesses. In order to expiate the sin of murder that defiles the land, the *Zekenim* from the nearest town are required to perform a ritual:

"And it shall be that the elders of the city nearest to the slain man will take a heifer which has not been worked and which has not pulled with a yoke. The elders of that city shall bring the heifer down to a valley with flowing water, which is neither plowed nor sown, and they shall break the heifer's neck there in the valley."

"Then the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near, for the LORD [YHVH] your God has chosen them to minister to Him and to bless in the name of the LORD; by their word every controversy and every assault shall be settled."

"And all the elders of that city nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley. Then they shall answer and say, 'Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Provide atonement, O LORD [YHVH], for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, and do not lay innocent blood to the charge of Your people Israel.' And atonement shall be provided on their behalf for the blood."

"So you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you when you do what is right in the sight of the LORD [YHVH]." (Deut. 21:3-9)

The oath itself was often considered to be an ordeal which only the innocent would be willing to take, because to swear a false oath would place the person in even greater jeopardy with God than confessing to the crime. This is clear from the *Sotah* (soh-tah') ceremony placed upon the wife of the jealous husband. If she confesses, she could not be given the death penalty (since there were not two witnesses). The Rabbis teach that the only option the husband had at that juncture was to forgive her and stay married or write her a *get*, a bill of divorce:

"And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, 'If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you' -- then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman -- 'the LORD [YHVH] make you

a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD [YHVH] makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot." Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

"Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water. And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her to become bitter.

"Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the LORD [YHVH], and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.

"When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children."

(Num. 5:19-28)

As can be seen from this passage, the actual taking of the oath may be only one small part of a much larger ritual. In the oath ritual, the Priest acts in the capacity of a minister rather than a judge. In the case of the *Sotah* ceremony, it is understood in Jewish teaching that the phrase "...her belly will swell, her thigh will rot..." means she would not be able to conceive and bear children. This understanding is extrapolated from the last sentence: "But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children."

Being unable to bear children was considered to be the greatest of curses for a women of that period.

~ Casting Lots ~

Another way in which God's will could be determined in a case was through the casting of lots:

**"The first one to plead his cause seems right,
Until his neighbor comes and examines him.
Casting lots causes contentions to cease,
And keeps the mighty apart."** (Prov. 18:17-18)

The casting of lots was practiced during the time of Joshua:

"Get up, sanctify the people, and say, "Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, because thus says the LORD [YHVH] God of Israel: *There is an accursed thing in your midst, O Israel; you cannot stand before your enemies until you take away the accursed thing from among you.*" In the morning therefore you shall be brought according to your tribes. And it shall be *that* the tribe which the LORD [YHVH] takes shall come according to families; and the family which the LORD [YHVH] takes shall come by

households; and the household which the LORD [YHVH] takes shall come man by man.'" (Joshua 7:13-14)

A positive example of the casting of lots occurred among the disciples of *Y'shua*, after His resurrection:

"And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen to take part in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.' And they cast their lots, and the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles." (Acts 1:23-26)

~ Summary ~

Everyone wants justice. However, it is very difficult to obtain a consensus as to what constitutes 'true justice.' It is our belief that God has given us the basic guidelines for Righteous Justice through His instructions in the *Torah*, which will be the standard for justice in the world to come.

In the pages of the *Torah*, God gave the children of Israel all they needed in order to establish a proper court system. It was to function from the bottom up, with the *Zekenim* (Elders) being the ones who would hear the majority of cases in their local communities. Only those cases which were beyond their experience would be taken to a higher court. Ultimately, if none of the courts of Israel could resolve the case, it could be taken directly to God through the High Priest who held the *Urim* and *Thummim*, or by the casting of lots.

In addition to the jurisdiction of the *Zekenim* (Elders), the *Kohenim* (Priests) had jurisdiction over matters that related to the Tabernacle, ritual purity, and worship. They were also included in higher court decisions as a matter of course.

The death penalty was to be administered for acts of violence, but also for certain acts which profaned the sanctity of the people. Such acts included idolatry, blasphemy, and witchcraft (among others). Nevertheless, there were very strict guidelines that had to be observed before the death penalty could be administered. Specifically, at least two witnesses had to have seen the offense and testified to it.

Just compensation was central to the justice system of Israel. Principles of liability were given in the *Torah* and the Judges were expected to assess fines that were appropriate to the injury sustained. These fines did not go to the government, they were to be handed over to the victim as compensation for his loss of property, for injury, or loss of time.

Those who were unable to pay the imposed fine, were sold into servitude. However, the law was merciful here as well, for no one could be held in servitude for more than six years without his consent.

Prisons were used only as holding areas for criminals who were awaiting trial. Since the vast majority of trials were held locally (in the gates of the city), the trials were speedy.

In the end, however, all judgment belongs to God. As Believers, we are under His judgment today:

"Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake

of Christ's [Messiah's] sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ [Messiah], blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

"Now

**"If the righteous one is scarcely saved,
Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"**

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." (I Pet. 4:12-19)

Let us pray that God will bring justice to the earth, but that it will be coupled with mercy and not with the strict judgment reserved for those who practice lawlessness:

"Therefore the LORD [YHVH] will wait, that He may be gracious to you;

And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you.

For the LORD [YHVH] is a God of justice;

Blessed are all those who wait for Him." (Isa. 30:18)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Economic Independence ~

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days...
Everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree,
And no one shall make them afraid;
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.
Micah 4:1, 4



The Torah makes it clear that God wanted His people to experience a government which guaranteed its citizens true freedom. It may well have been for this reason that He allowed the children of Israel to languish in slavery for so many years; so they would experience the sharp contrast between slavery and freedom and thereby come to truly understand what it means to be free and what they must do to remain free.

God continually reminded the children of Israel of their former estate (as slaves), so they would be ever thankful for their God-given freedom. Yet, this freedom was not the right to "do their own thing," rather it was a liberty that could only be experienced by following the law, or instruction book, called the Torah:

"When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgments which the LORD [YHVH] our God has commanded you?' ²¹ then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the LORD [YHVH] brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; ²² and the LORD [YHVH] showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. ²³ Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD [YHVH] commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the LORD [YHVH] our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day. ²⁵ Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'"

(Deut. 6:20-25)

~ Torah Concepts ~

So far, in this Torah Concepts series, four topics have been covered: Torah Government, Ancient Torah Standards, Torah Law, and Torah Justice. In writing these articles, we have discovered that God intended for the children of Israel to have a form of government that was ultimately governed by Him, but which functioned, from the bottom up, on a day to day basis, and, therefore, would not need His regular, direct intervention.

To accomplish this end, God had the children of Israel establish a special group of people called the זִקְנֵי Zekanim (Zeh-kah-neem' = Elders). They were given the primary responsibility for the administration of the government in the local communities, including the administration of justice. Only when a matter was too difficult for the Zekenim to solve

did it go up the ladder to higher authorities. After the time of *Moshe* (Mow-shay' = Moses), the highest rung on the ladder became that of the High Priest, who could take a matter directly to God for resolution through the *Urim* אֲרֻרִים (Oo-reem') and *Thummim* (Toom-meem') contained in the Breastplate. We have termed this form of God's Government a *Theocratic Federation*. It was ruled by God, but administered by a loose federation of men. (For more information see *Torah Government in Torah Concepts I*).

In addition to a proper form of government, God also gave the children of Israel a full set of righteous laws by which they were to order their lives. (See *Ancient Torah Standards* and *Torah Law in Torah Concepts I*.) Those laws were intended to be administered through a system of Righteous Judges so that justice could be practiced in the land. (See the previous chapter, *Torah Justice*.)

~ Completing Freedom ~

There is yet one more piece that must be entered before the puzzle is completed. While a good governmental structure, coupled with righteous laws and righteous Judges, goes a long way toward granting citizens their freedom, the people can still be in bondage if they are not free economically.

While no government on earth today is perfect and many problems exist in all branches of government, it still can be said that many millions of people do live in relative freedom. Many countries have democratically elected governments with basically good laws (even though some are specifically designed to favor certain groups of people), and their justice systems usually (but not always) make an attempt to administer those laws in a just manner.

Yet, many people are still not free because they have entered economic bondage. Back in the 1950's, there was a hit song called *Sixteen Tons*. The chorus went something like this:

*"You load sixteen tons and wha-da ya get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
St. Peter don't call me for I can't go,
I owe my soul to the company store."*

Many people today could identify with this song if "credit card banks" were substituted for "company store."

~ Economic Bondage ~

In today's society we find that many people have been brought into economic bondage by falling victim to an economic system that seems to be rigged against them. The advertisers play on human nature by creating a desire for products (that is their job), the banks give out easy credit (that is their job), the stores stock an abundance of items (that is their job), and all one has to do is sign on the dotted line in order to buy merchandise. Add to the average family's credit card debt, the mortgage, the automobile loans, and the payback on college loans, and we find that many Americans (as well as people in other 'modern' countries) have an enormous amount of debt. As a result of all this easy credit, people just keep accumulating more and more stuff, much of which they really do not need. Sooner or later much of it ends up in storage boxes or at the local Goodwill Store.

Life does not have to be this way, but most people who fall into the credit trap, do so before they realize what is happening. Once ensnared in the easy credit system, it is very difficult to extricate oneself.

~ Materialism ~

The hook which entices people into economic bondage is called *Materialism*. According to the dictionary, materialism is a doctrine which holds that:

"... the highest values or objectives [*in life*] lie in material well-being and in the furtherance of material progress. ... [*It is*] a preoccupation with or stress upon material rather than intellectual or spiritual things." (*CD-ROM Version - Encyclopedia Britannica Dictionary*)

This certainly describes Western civilization today. When people place so much of their personal worth upon the things they own and the size of their bank accounts, they tend to neglect the most important part of their life, the Spiritual:

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:19-21)

At the other end of the spectrum are people (especially those in 'third world' countries) who barely have the means to support life, much less the money necessary to accumulate a lot of 'stuff.' Thus, the earth has become a world of the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' Poverty is an even worse kind of economic bondage, for it can lead to a person's destruction:

**"The rich man's wealth is his strong city;
The destruction of the poor is their poverty."** (Prov. 10:15)

~ Competing Philosophies ~

In the twentieth century, the world saw two competing philosophies vying for control of the world. They were, of course, Communism and Capitalism. According to current popular opinion, Capitalism has won that war. Even staunch Communist countries like Red China are now wading into the Capitalistic system in an effort to improve the economic lot of their country and their people while still maintaining a totalitarian government. What most people fail to realize is that Communism and Capitalism, as they occur in our modern world, are merely two heads of the same beast; the beast called Materialism. Their philosophies differ in the way material goods are to be distributed, whether through overt government control, or through a free market economy.

Please do not get us wrong, we are not saying that God is opposed to free enterprise, for it is clear from Scripture that He is not, as long as free enterprise is not used as a way to become rich while, at the same time, oppressing the widow, the orphan, and the poor among us. Free enterprise, rightly practiced, can bring prosperity to the people who engage in it, and provide good living wages to those who work for the entrepreneurs. On the other hand, Scripture teaches that we are not to take free

enterprise to such an extreme that we fail to provide for those, in our society, who truly are in need. Unfortunately, this is what is happening in much of the world.

With these thoughts in mind, let us begin to pursue the type of economic system God established for His people, the children of Israel, a system that had all the potential to grant true freedom and independence to those who practiced it properly. It is our belief that this will be the very system which *Y'shua* will establish in the Messianic Kingdom.

~ Owning Land ~

The most striking thing about God's economic system for Israel, was the fact that every Israelite family owned land. First of all, the land was divided, by lot, among the twelve tribes. The tribe of *Levi* did not receive a land inheritance because they were to dedicate their lives to Tabernacle service. (They received their support from the agricultural tithes of the other tribes.) The tribe of *Yoseif* (Yoh-safe' = Joseph) received a double portion, one for Ephraim and one for Manassah, bringing the total of landed tribes back to the number twelve:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: ⁵³ 'To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. ⁵⁴ To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. ⁵⁵ But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. ⁵⁶ According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller.'" (Num. 26:52-56)

It is interesting to note that in the Messianic Kingdom, the land will again be distributed by lot:

"²² 'It shall be that you will divide it by lot as an inheritance for yourselves, and for the strangers who dwell among you and who bear children among you. They shall be to you as native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. ²³ And it shall be that in whatever tribe the stranger dwells, there you shall give him his inheritance,' says the Lord GOD." (Ezek. 47:22-23)

Each tribal family then received a portion of land within the tribal territory:

"'And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers.'" (Num. 33:54)

The land assignments were so important to God that He gave them repeated instructions to make sure the boundaries of each assigned portion be perpetually secure:

"¹⁴ 'You shall not remove your neighbor's landmark, which the men of old have set, in your inheritance which you will inherit in the land that the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you to possess.'" (Deut. 19:14)

"'Cursed is the one who moves his neighbor's landmark.'" (Deut. 27:17)

~ Land in Egypt ~

Private ownership of land by the Israelites was in sharp contrast to what happened in Egypt, where the common people were all sharecroppers, for all of the land in Egypt was owned either by the Pharaoh or the Temple Priests.

It is most interesting to note that the Egyptian system of land ownership came about as the result of an Israelite; none other than *Yoseif* (Joseph), the favorite son of the Patriarch *Ya'acov* (Jacob). The Pharaoh's land acquisition occurred during the seven years of famine which came upon the world after the seven years of plentiful harvests.

Yoseif had been given the position of chief administrator over all the land of Egypt following his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream:

"And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.'" (Gen. 41:41)

Yoseif proceeded to buy up all of the grain during the seven years of plenty and store it in huge warehouses. When the seven years of famine began, the people had to come to *Yoseif* in order to obtain foodstuff:

"So when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Then Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, 'Go to Joseph; whatever he says to you, do.' ⁵⁶ The famine was over all the face of the earth, and Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians. And the famine became severe in the land of Egypt." (Gen. 41:55-56)

When the Egyptian people ran out of money, they had to trade their cattle for food:

"So when the money failed in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, 'Give us bread, for why should we die in your presence? For the money has failed.' ¹⁶ Then Joseph said, 'Give your livestock, and I will give you bread for your livestock, if the money is gone.'" (Gen. 47:15-16)

~ Giving Up Freedom for Food ~

Once their livestock was gone, all the Egyptians had left to sell were themselves and their land. This led to the final deal which they struck with *Yoseif* in order to buy the grain needed to avoid starvation:

"When that year had ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, 'We will not hide from my lord that our money is gone; my lord also has our herds of livestock. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our lands. ¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants of Pharaoh; give us seed, that we may live and not die, that the land may not be desolate.' ²⁰ Then Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for every man of the Egyptians sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. So the land became Pharaoh's." (Gen. 47:18-20)

The people were then removed from the land which they had sold to Pharaoh and were forced to dwell in cities. There, they became sharecroppers of the land which they had once owned outright:

"And as for the people, he moved them into the cities, from one end of the borders of Egypt to the other end. ²³Then Joseph said to the people, 'Indeed I have bought you and your land this day for Pharaoh. Look, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴ And it shall come to pass in the harvest that you shall give one-fifth to Pharaoh. Four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and for your food, for those of your households and as food for your little ones.'" (Gen. 47:21, 23-24)

This was the manner in which the Egyptians lost their land and their freedom to the Pharaoh. Only the priests were allowed to retain land:

"Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had rations allotted to them by Pharaoh, and they ate their rations which Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their lands." (Gen. 47:22)

While sharecropping is not the same as full slavery, it did represent a great diminishing of freedom for the people of Egypt. For now they had to rent their farmland for a full twenty percent of their increase. That meant that each year they were in debt to Pharaoh for one-fifth of their increase.

Today, many people are in mortgage debt to the tune of about one-fifth or more of their annual income. The one difference between today's mortgage and the Egyptian system is that a mortgage can eventually be paid off, thereby making the owner debt free. The people of Egypt could not anticipate that possibility, for their sharecropping debt was perpetual. However, on the other hand, the actual amount of annual debt varied for the Egyptian, depending upon the amount of increase the crop produced that year, while a modern mortgage payment usually remains constant no matter what might be the family's financial circumstance in any particular year.

The question might be asked: Why did God use *Yoseif* to create a system of economic slavery for the Egyptian people? We believe it is because God wanted to contrast the natural human inclination to accumulate possessions to themselves with the nature of God, which is to share what He has created with His people, the children of Israel.

~ Land and Freedom ~

Today, owning land does not necessarily assist a person in their quest for freedom. In fact, sometimes land ownership represents a burden because of high interest mortgage payments and high property taxes. The land that most people own today consists of a small lot with a house and is not the type of land that would enable a person to make a living from working it. When a modern homeowner loses his job, his land and home may also be at risk. However, in ancient Israel, ownership of land represented inherent and perpetual wealth, because the land was not a financial liability but a financial asset.

One of the reasons the Israelite's land was not a liability was because, as far as we can tell from Scripture, there were no

confiscatory property taxes that had to be paid to either the local or national government. Today, a landowner must not only pay a high price to purchase the property from the previous owner, they must then buy it back year after year from the government in the form of property taxes which are not determined by negotiation, but by government officials. The property owner has virtually no say in the assessment value or tax rate.

Not only did the ancient Israelites not have to pay taxes on their property, what they owned was intended to be of sufficient size and fertility to enable the entire family to grow crops and/or raise animals for both food and sale, or, if it was woodland, selectively log the timber which could be sold and the profits used to support the family. Once the land was cleared, it could then be used for agricultural purposes.

This afforded the average Israelite family a high degree of freedom. If some members of the family were skilled artisans, they could ply their trade and earn additional money. However, in times of economic depression, they always had the family land which could support them during hard times.

~ Inheritance ~

The ownership of land in Israel, especially if it had income potential, was a great blessing to the person owning it. However, land is of no value to one's descendants unless the law of the nation permits it to be transferred to the heirs. If the land (or a substantial portion of it) reverts to the government, or has to be sold, because of exorbitant inheritance tax laws, then the incentive to retain land is diminished, especially as the head of the family gets older and is not physically able to continue working it. Thus, the inheritance of land without penalty was very important to the economic well being of the Israelite family.

The *Torah* makes it explicit that ownership of the land was to perpetually remain within the family without penalty:

"If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, ¹⁶ then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn. ¹⁷ But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his." (Deut. 21:15-17)

This passage establishes a number of important points:

- ◆ The man is able to give his heirs "all that he has." (v. 17)
- ◆ The dying man gave certain verbal instructions about the distribution of his estate. (v. 16)
- ◆ The firstborn son of a man retained that status regardless of whether his mother was loved or unloved. (v. 16)

- ◆ The firstborn received a double portion of the inheritance. (v. 17).
- ◆ Only sons had a right to the inheritance. (v. 16)

But what if a man died and had no sons to inherit the property? This very question was brought to *Moshe* for resolution. This particular situation occurred when the daughters of a man named Zelophehad came to *Moshe* and asked for a decision in their case, for their father had died in the wilderness without a male heir:

"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad ... from the families of Manasseh ... ² And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: ³ 'Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD [YHVH], in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. ⁴ Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers.'" (Num. 27:1-4)

God gave the daughters of Zelophehad a positive answer to their question:

"So Moses brought their case before the LORD [YHVH]. ⁶ And the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Moses, saying: ⁷ 'The daughters of Zelophehad speak *what is right*; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. ⁸ And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: "If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. ⁹ If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. ¹⁰ If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. ¹¹ And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest him in his family, and he shall possess it.'" And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD [YHVH] commanded Moses." (Num. 27:5-11)

This passage relates the succession of inheritance when there are no sons:

- ◆ Daughters of the deceased.
- ◆ Brothers of the deceased.
- ◆ Uncles of the deceased on his father's side.
- ◆ The closest living relative if not found in any of the above.

There was one other rule which applied to the daughters inheriting their father's estate; they had to marry within their own tribe:

"⁶ 'This *is what the LORD [YHVH] commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, "Let them marry whom they think best, but they may marry only within the family of their father's tribe."* ⁷ So the inheritance of the children of Israel shall not change hands from tribe to tribe, for every one of the children of Israel

shall keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. ⁸ And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be the wife of one of the family of her father's tribe, so that the children of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. ⁹ Thus no inheritance shall change hands from *one* tribe to another, but every tribe of the children of Israel shall keep its own inheritance.'" (Num. 36:6-9)

The laws of land inheritance will be in effect once again during the Millennial reign of *Y'shua*:

"Thus says the Lord GOD: "If the prince gives a gift of some of his inheritance to any of his sons, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance. ¹⁷ But if he gives a gift of some of his inheritance to one of his servants, it shall be his until the year of liberty, after which it shall return to the prince. But his inheritance shall belong to his sons; it shall become theirs. ¹⁸ Moreover the prince shall not take any of the people's inheritance by evicting them from their property; he shall provide an inheritance for his sons from his own property, so that none of My people may be scattered from his property."'" (Ezek. 46:16-18)

~ Inheritance Questions ~

The Scriptures do not directly address the question of how the land was divided in an inheritance situation. Was the land itself left solely to the firstborn, or was it divided equally among the sons with the firstborn getting a double portion, or was the land allotment held intact for the use and profit of the entire family? All three scenarios present some problems.

~ Individual Estates? ~

One possible scenario would be the inheritance of the entire parcel of land by the eldest son, while the other sons would receive only a portion of the moveable chattel (non real estate belongings such as money, precious gems, personal belongings, etc.). This does not seem to fit the Scriptural model at all, for if that were the custom it would mean a speedy disenfranchisement of the younger sons, for they would have to find some other kind of work in order to make a living. In such an inheritance system, within two generations all of the tribal land would be owned by only a few men who were fortunate enough to be of firstborn lineage. Everyone else would be seeking to make a living as craftsmen, merchants, day laborers, or servants.

In a sense, this is similar to what is happening today. The family farm is quickly disappearing from the American countryside because much of the best agricultural land (which is capable of producing profitable crops) is held by a few very large agribusiness corporations.

In the early years of our Republic, most families earned their living by working a small family farm. Today, most Americans earn their living working for someone else. Unless they are small businessmen, most Americans are not self-sufficient either as individuals or families. Interestingly enough, a large segment of the American economy is made up of jobs in the 'service' sector. While most people who work in

'service' jobs probably do not think of themselves as 'servants,' that is precisely the kind of work they are doing. There is nothing at all wrong with 'service' work, it just does not afford a person the kind of freedom the children of Israel were supposed to experience in the Promised Land.

~ Private Land for Everyone? ~

Initially, the tribal land was distributed to each family by lot. A large family received a larger parcel than a small family. Acreage was determined by the size of the family:

"And you shall divide the land by lot as an inheritance among your families; to the larger you shall give a larger inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give a smaller inheritance; there everyone's inheritance shall be whatever falls to him by lot. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers." (Num. 33:54)

Let us now examine what would have happened if the land was divided equally among all of the sons, with the firstborn getting a double portion.

For our example, let us say that the original allotment of land received by a family, upon their entrance into the Promised Land, was the equivalent of 100 acres. This is a reasonably large portion of land and, if it was fertile, could have easily supported a family. Let us also say (for the sake of argument) that the head of such a family had nine sons (not an unreasonable number given the practice of the times). Since the eldest son was to receive a double portion, the inheritance would be divided into ten parts with the eldest receiving two portions, or twenty acres. Each of the other eight sons would receive ten acres.

Let us go on to say that the youngest son (who had received ten acres) also had nine sons. When he died the eldest of his sons would receive two acres while the other eight would each receive one acre. If the land was very fertile, one acre still might have been enough to raise sufficient food for a family.

However, in the next generation (again assuming nine sons), the eight younger sons would only receive one-tenth of an acre, and in the generation following each would receive only one-twentieth of an acre.

An acre of land contains 43,560 square feet. One-tenth of an acre is 4,356 sq. ft. and one-twentieth is only 2,178 sq. ft., the size of many American homes. Thus, within a mere five generations, the inheritance of the younger sons (assuming large families) could have become so minuscule as to be hardly worth keeping. About all one could do with a lot that size would be to build a small house on it.

If this were the inheritance system a family could easily lose their inheritance, for it could no longer support a family. It could also mean that everyone in the family would be building houses on very small lots so that, eventually, nearly all of the land might become a city. This would change the inheritance rules, for a single house on a very small lot could not be divided among several sons. In addition, according to the *Torah*, houses within a city could be sold and not redeemed after one year had passed. After that time the house became the permanent possession of the purchaser and would not be eligible for return to the family in the year of the Jubilee:

"If a man sells a house in a walled city, then he may redeem it within a whole year after it is sold; *within a full year he may redeem it.* ³⁰ But if it is not redeemed within the space of a full year, then the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to him who bought it, throughout his generations. It shall not be released in the Jubilee."

(Lev. 25:29-30)

It could be argued that our figure of 100 acres is too small. However, if it were 1000 acres the same result could conceivably occur in just six generations, and if it were a large tract, such as 10,000 acres, it would take only seven generations for the disintegration of the original estate to occur.

It seems obvious to us that this was not what was intended, for such a system would negate the very idea of land ownership being a source of economic freedom. The probable outcome of such a system would have been the selling of these small pieces of property to men who had both the money to buy them and the entrepreneurial and business skills to manage real estate. As already noted, such a system would have led to the disenfranchisement of the vast majority of the children of Israel. It would have created a nation of a few very rich people and many very poor people; exactly what is found in so many nations of the world today.

It both of the above examples the disruption to society would have been immense. The only difference between the two would have been the amount of time necessary for this disintegration of the land system to occur.

~ Family Estates ~

In our opinion, a more likely solution to the problem would have been that the entire piece of land would have been held as a family estate. If this were the case, then the double portion spoken of in the *Torah* may have been applicable only to moveable chattel (non real estate belongings such as money, precious gems, personal belongings, etc.), with the land itself coming under the control of the Elders of the family. The eldest son of each generation would become the family Patriarch who had the primary say in how the land was to be used, since he had a double portion or (one might say) a double vote in establishing how the land was to be used. Thus, these firstborn family inheritors would not only inherit the land along with their brethren, they would also inherit the responsibility to be a General Manager whose duty it was to manage the estate in such a way that the entire extended family might receive at least a portion of their support from its increase. This could account for the following Scripture which speaks of "brothers dwell[ing] together:"

"If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, the widow of the dead man shall not be married to a stranger outside the family; her husband's brother shall go in to her, take her as his wife, and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. ⁶ And it shall be that the firstborn son which she bears will succeed to the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out of Israel." (Deut. 25:5-6)

Since this passage begins with the word 'if,' the implication is that some of the younger brothers might choose not to dwell on or near the family estate, but move to a city and become craftsmen, merchants, or laborers. In such cases the *Torah* is silent as to whether they would continue to profit from the increase of the estate or if another family member might buy out their portion. Another possibility would be for the sold portion to be divided equally among the other family members with a firstborn getting a double portion. This may have been a matter that was left to the family elders to decide on a case by case basis.

~ Living Near the Land ~

It is obvious from Scripture that most Israelites lived in cities rather than directly on their country land. This practice would have been primarily for protection, since there was a much higher degree of safety within a walled city than having a house in a relatively uninhabited country.

If this were the case, the family estate would probably have been used entirely for agricultural purposes. The family members, and their hired workers or slaves, would have gone out of the city each morning to work the fields; returning at night when the gates to the city would be closed. If an enemy approached during the day an alarm could be sounded and all the workers could make a hasty retreat to the city for protection and possibly to fight for the community.

In some cases, there would be no walls around the city. According to the *Torah* such communities would be considered the same as country property and could be redeemed at any time by the original owners:

"However the houses of villages which have no wall around them shall be counted as the fields of the country. They may be redeemed, and they shall be released in the Jubilee."
(Lev. 25:31)

If the family land was primarily suited for the raising of cattle, the families may have lived in nearby villages or in moveable tents, much as the Bedouins of the Middle East still do today.

~ Prosperity For All ~

If the children of Israel had managed to achieve and maintain the ideal society, living according to the precepts of the *Torah*, there would have been perpetual prosperity for everyone. Roland DeVaux, in his book, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, makes the following observation:

"In the early days of settlement, all the Israelites enjoyed more or less the same standard of living. Wealth came from the land, and the land had been shared out between the families, each of whom guarded its property jealously. Commerce, and the buying and selling of real estate for profit, were as yet unimportant factors in economic life. There were, of course, exceptions. ...

"Excavations in Israelite towns bear witness to this equality in standards of living. At Tirsah, the modern Tell el-Farah near Nablus, the houses of the tenth century BC are all of the same size and arrangement. Each represents

the dwelling of a family which lived in the same way as its neighbours. The contrast is striking when we pass to the eighth century houses on the same site: the rich houses are bigger and better built and in a different quarter from that where the poor houses are huddled together.

"Between these two centuries, a social revolution had taken place. The monarchical institutions produced, as we saw, a class of officials who drew a profit from their posts and the favours granted them by the king. Others, by hard work or good luck, made vast profits from their lands. Prosperity was the order of the day. ...

"On the other side we have the weak, the small men, the poor, who suffered from these burdens. The prophets took their cause in hand and the law too protected them. ...

"The rich were found mostly among the influential people, and many passages in the Prophets condemn the two together. But the poor did not form a separate social class in contrast with them: the poor were individuals, and precisely because they were isolated, they were defenceless." (pp. 72-73)

In light of the above quote, it is interesting to note that both Saul and David did not come from rich families. Both of them spent time herding livestock, hardly the occupation of someone who was rich and pampered. Saul was herding his livestock just prior to being crowned king by the people:

"Now there was Saul, coming behind the herd from the field; ..."
(I Sam. 11:5)

David was considered the least of Jesse's sons, for he was not even called before Samuel when he came to anoint a new king, David was in the fields watching the sheep:

"And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are all the young men here?' Then he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.'"
(I Sam. 16:11)

However, things changed, for it was during the time of the kings when the rich found ways to acquire the land of their less fortunate brethren:

**"Woe to those who devise iniquity,
And work out evil on their beds!
At morning light they practice it,
Because it is in the power of their hand.
² They covet fields and take them by violence,
Also houses, and seize them.
So they oppress a man and his house,
A man and his inheritance."**
(Micah 2:1-2)

The Prophets took the side of the poor, railing against those among the rich who refused to help them:

**"The LORD [YHWH] stands up to plead,
And stands to judge the people.
¹⁴ The LORD [YHWH] will enter into judgment
With the elders of His people
And His princes:
'For you have eaten up the vineyard;
The plunder of the poor is in your houses.
¹⁵ What do you mean by crushing My people
And grinding the faces of the poor?'
Says the Lord GOD of hosts."**
(Isa. 3:13-15)

(This subject will be covered more fully in the following chapter, *Economic Interdependence*.)

~ Losing the Land ~

The children of Israel did not have an ideal society, because (as is clearly evident from Scripture) many of them refused to live according to the precepts of God. As a result, some of the Israelite families lost their inheritance. This should have come as no surprise to them, for God had told them ahead of time what would happen if they, as a nation, did not obey Him:

"But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ¹⁶ Cursed *shall you be* in the city, and cursed *shall you be* in the country. ¹⁷ Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ¹⁸ Cursed *shall be* the fruit of your body and the produce of your land, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. ¹⁹ Cursed *shall you be* when you come in, and cursed *shall you be* when you go out." (Deut. 28:15-19)

Not everyone who suffered loss of property was necessarily a sinner, nor did those who remained prosperous always follow the dictates of God. However, it can be said that the overall prosperity of the nation of Israel suffered whenever sin (especially idolatry or greed) gained an upper hand in society.

~ Losing Freedom ~

Becoming disenfranchised from the land did not automatically take away one's freedom, for many men turned to other occupations for income. These small businessmen provided a wide range of needed goods and services to the community at large. However, when economic times became tough, some inevitably fell into debt. Such conditions sometimes forced a man to sell the services of his children to others.

In the case of a daughter, the eventual outcome of such a matter was usually the marriage of the girl to either the man, or his son, who purchased her services. This was considered to be a type of betrothal (marriages were arranged in those days) with the bride price being paid to the father up front. Certain safeguards were written into the *Torah* so that a girl, who found herself in such a position either attained marriage (the desirable outcome for any young girl in that society) or was eligible to be redeemed by a family member, or, under certain conditions was set free:

"And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. ⁸ If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. ⁹ And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. ¹⁰ If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her

clothing, and her marriage rights. ¹¹ And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money." (Ex. 21:7-11)

~ Regaining Freedom ~

Hebrew men, who sold themselves into slavery because of debt, could only be required to serve for a maximum of six years. They were to be released from their servitude and set free in the seventh year. This is generally understood to be the seventh year of their servitude and it did not necessarily correspond to the seventh year land Sabbath. The master was to let the slave go with adequate severance pay, so that he might reestablish himself in society as a freeman:

"If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. ¹³ And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; ¹⁴ you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the LORD [YHVH] has blessed you with, you shall give to him. ¹⁵ You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today." (Deut. 15:12-15)

No Israelite was to remain in servitude beyond the six years unless it was by their own choice:

"And if it happens that he says to you, "I will not go away from you," because he loves you and your house, since he prospers with you, ¹⁷ then you shall take an awl and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise." (Deut. 15:16-17)

Even the Hebrew slave, who had his ear pierced and sworn fidelity to his master, was not allowed to remain a slave once the *Yovel* יוֹבֵל (Yoh-vehl') or Jubilee had arrived:

"And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. ⁴⁰ As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee." (Lev. 25:39-40)

~ Regaining the Land ~

The holding of productive land is so important, that God made it possible for families to regain their land even if they had sold it many years before. Thus, an Israelite family could not irrevocably sell the allotment of land which had been given to their original ancestor. The restoration of family land occurred every fifty years, in the year of *Yovel* or Jubilee:

"And you shall count seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years; and the time of the seven sabbaths of years shall be to you forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land. ¹⁰ And you shall consecrate the fiftieth year, and

proclaim liberty throughout *all* the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; and each of you shall return to his possession, and each of you shall return to his family." (Lev. 25:8-10)

The principle behind this most unusual command (unusual in the eyes of men, that is) is that God is the one who really owns the land and He gives it to whomever He pleases. It pleases God to restore the land to the family which was first assigned it when the children of Israel entered the Promised Land:

"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you *are* strangers and sojourners with Me." (Lev. 25:23)

When you stop to think, it really is impossible for human beings to own land because man is a transient creature; here on earth for only a short period of time. God, however, is eternal, and it is His pleasure to make sure that the descendants of the children of Israel always have a piece of productive land on which to live.

Because the land could not be sold in perpetuity, when an individual or family fell on hard times, and had to dispose of their property in order to clear their debt, what they really were doing was leasing out the land for a specific period of time. The amount of money they would receive for the land would depend not on the value of the land, but on the number of crops which the buyer could expect to receive until it had to be returned in the *Yovel* (Jubilee):

"And if you sell anything to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor's hand, you shall not oppress one another. ¹⁵ According to the number of years after the Jubilee you shall buy from your neighbor, and according to the number of years of crops he shall sell to you. ¹⁶ According to the multitude of years you shall increase its price, and according to the fewer number of years you shall diminish its price; for he sells to you *according to the number of the years of the crops.* ¹⁷ Therefore you shall not oppress one another, but you shall fear your God; for I *am* the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Lev. 25:14-17)

~ Redeeming the Land ~

Fifty years is a long time in the life of a man. Therefore, God also made a way for the land to be redeemed, thereby returning it to the original family prior to the *Yovel*. What this meant was that if a family member could come up with the money needed to buy back the lease, the person who had purchased the lease was required to sell it back:

"The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine; for you *are* strangers and sojourners with Me. ²⁴ And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land. ²⁵ If one of your brethren becomes poor, and has sold *some* of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold." (Lev. 25:23-25)

If there was no family member willing or able to redeem the land, the man who sold the property could also buy it back if he became able to do so:

"Or if the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, ²⁷ then let him count the years since its sale, and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. ²⁸ But if he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the Year of Jubilee; and in the Jubilee it shall be released, and he shall return to his possession." (Lev. 25:26-28)

As can be seen, it was extremely important to God that the land never permanently depart from the original family that owned it. Owning productive land was an economic blessing in ancient Israel.

~ Classes of People ~

As already noted, various 'classes' of people began to develop once the *Theocratic Federation* gave way to the Monarchy. Originally there were only two classes of people in ancient Israel: the Levitical Priesthood and the people of the land. The Levites did not receive estates as the other tribal families did. Rather, they were supported by the tithes of the people of the land:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] said to Aaron: 'You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I *am* your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel. ²¹ Behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work which they perform, the work of the tabernacle of meeting.'" (Num. 18:20-21)

In addition to the tithes, the Levites were given forty-eight cities (Num. 35:7) in which to reside, along with a certain amount of land surrounding each city that was available to them for light agricultural use:

"Command the children of Israel that they give the Levites cities to dwell in from the inheritance of their possession, and you shall *also* give the Levites common-land around the cities. ³ They shall have the cities to dwell in; and their common-land shall be for their cattle, for their herds, and for all their animals." (Num. 35:2-3)

Unlike the houses which were sold in other cities, those which belonged to the Levites could be redeemed at any time. If redemption did not take place, the houses were returned to the original owners during the *Yovel*. The common land around the city could never be sold, for it belonged to all the Levites who lived in that city:

"Nevertheless the cities of the Levites, *and* the houses in the cities of their possession, the Levites may redeem at any time. ³³ And if a man purchases a house from the Levites, then the house that was sold in the city of his possession shall be released in the Jubilee; for the houses in the cities of the Levites *are* their possession among the children of Israel. ³⁴ But the field of the common-land of

their cities may not be sold, for it is their perpetual possession."
(Lev. 25:32-34)

This instruction freed the Levites from farm labor so they could attend to their duties of service in the Tabernacle and serve as teachers in the local community:

"Then the LORD [YHVH] spoke to Aaron, saying: 'Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, ¹⁰ that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean, ¹¹ and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD [YHVH] has spoken to them by the hand of Moses.'"
(Lev. 10:8-11)

Other than these two divisions of men, ancient Israel was basically a classless society.

~ Freedom Gained, Freedom Lost ~

When God told the children of Israel that He was bringing them out of slavery and into freedom, He meant what He said. To often, in today's world, the people of a nation may come out from under the yoke of a dictator only to find themselves without land, totally impoverished, and unable to find adequate work to support themselves and their families. This was not the case with the children of Israel, for God provided for them every step of the way.

When the children of Israel finally arrived in the Promised Land, each family was given a piece of property of sufficient size to provide support for their entire family. Certainly, they had to work hard. They also had to drive out the people who were already living there. But the ultimate rewards were very great indeed. Peace and prosperity were within the grasp of the children of Israel, all they had to do was follow the instructions of the *Torah* and God would take care of all the rest.

Sadly, they could not bring themselves to live up to the standard set by God and little by little they began to lose the freedoms that God had provided for them, eventually being taken into captivity.

~ Summary ~

It is our understanding that the ownership of land capable of providing adequate food and income (without the burden of property and inheritance taxes) was the key to the economic

independence of the children of Israel. This, joined with a set of totally righteous laws (the *Torah*), a system of righteous judges, and a government that was primarily controlled at the local level, gave the children of Israel what every man on earth yearns for, true freedom.

Freedom does not mean being able to "do one's own thing" no matter what. True freedom means being out from under the thumb of other people, while living within the parameters of the *Torah*. The later requirement proved to be the downfall of the children of Israel, as they rebelled and turned from being ruled by God, despite the fact that His rule is righteous and affords the most freedom available anywhere.

Today, none of us live in a country which allows its citizens the kind of freedom that God originally gave to the children of Israel. Yet, when we Believe that God exists, and that He takes care of those who love Him and keep His commandments. When we accept the atoning blood of *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah) as our Passover sacrifice, thereby receiving forgiveness for our sins, then we too can experience a degree of the freedom which God gave the children of Israel, and which will one day be available for all men in the world to come:

"Do not put your trust in princes,

Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.

⁴ His spirit departs, he returns to his earth;

In that very day his plans perish.

⁵ Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,

Whose hope is in the LORD [YHVH] his God,

⁶ Who made heaven and earth,

The sea, and all that is in them;

Who keeps truth forever,

⁷ Who executes justice for the oppressed,

Who gives food to the hungry.

The LORD [YHVH] gives freedom to the prisoners.

⁸ The LORD [YHVH] opens the eyes of the blind;

The LORD [YHVH] raises those who are bowed down;

The LORD [YHVH] loves the righteous.

⁹ The LORD [YHVH] watches over the strangers;

He relieves the fatherless and widow;

But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

¹⁰ The LORD [YHVH] shall reign forever --

Your God, O Zion, to all generations.

Praise the LORD [YHVH]!" (Psalm 146:3-10)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

~ Economic Interdependence ~

For the LORD your God *is* God of gods and Lord of lords,
The great God, mighty and awesome,
Who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe.
He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow,
And loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing.
Therefore love the stranger,
For you were strangers in the land of Egypt.
Deuteronomy 10:17-19



Freedom and independence are wonderful things. They are what every man on earth aspires to attain. But freedom and independence which comes at the expense of other people are not really freedom and independence, they are exploitation. God wanted the children of Israel to know that their freedom and independence came with a price. A part of that price was being willing to meet the needs of those brethren who had fallen on hard times. Therefore, along with Economic Independence came Economic Interdependence.

~ Slavery ~

God made it very clear to *Avraham* that his descendants would be oppressed for four hundred years, after which they would be released from their bondage and given much wealth:

"Then He said to Abram: 'Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. ¹⁴ And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions.'"
(Gen. 15:13-14)

This prophecy was completed during the time when the children of Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt:

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, 'Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; ¹⁰ come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.'

"¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel. ¹³ So the Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. ¹⁴ And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage -- in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor."
(Ex. 1:8-14)

The question arises; If God was going to bless *Avraham* with a son and make him the progenitor of nations, why would

He require slavery of a future generation? That seems more like a curse than a blessing.

The Scriptures teach that trials, such as the Egyptian slavery, may be a blessing in disguise because of the lessons that can be learned while going through the trial that would not otherwise be realized if the trial had not occurred. It was for this reason that *Ya'acov* (Jacob or James), the brother of *Y'shua*, wrote the following:

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

(James 1:2-4)

~ Learning from Slavery ~

One of the purposes for the children of Israel going into slavery was so that all future generations would be able to look back to that time and realize that, as a people, they were once slaves in Egypt and they should never allow themselves to be placed in that position again:

"I am the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves; I have broken the bands of your yoke and made you walk upright."
(Lev. 26:13)

Each year, during the Passover *Seder* (Say'-dehr = Set Order), the story of the children of Israel coming out of Egyptian slavery is retold so that all generations of Israelites will never forget their origins. The children of Israel were instructed by God to always show kindness to the strangers who lived among them, because they had experienced harsh oppression in Egypt themselves and they knew what it was like:

"Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers [ger] in the land of Egypt."
(Ex. 23:9)

The English word 'strangers' is *ger* גֵּר (gehr) in Hebrew. It means: "1) sojourner 1a) a temporary inhabitant, a newcomer lacking inherited rights 1b) of foreigners in Israel, though conceded rights." The *gerim* גֵּרִים (pl. form) living among the children of Israel were to be held accountable under the same set of laws as the Israelites. There was to be no favoritism or oppression:

"And if a stranger [ger] dwells with you, or whoever is among you throughout your generations, and would present an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD [YHVH], just as you do, so shall he do. ¹⁵ One ordinance shall be for you of the assembly and for the stranger [ger] who dwells with you, an ordinance forever throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the stranger [ger] be before the LORD [YHVH]. ¹⁶ One law and one custom shall be for you and for the stranger [ger] who dwells with you."
(Num. 15:14-16)

A major lesson the children of Israel were supposed to learn from the slavery experience was not to subject others to the same fate, but to include them as an interdependent part of society.

~ Caring for Others ~

In the Scriptures, the principle of caring for others applied not just to the *ger* (stranger) who lived among the Israelites, but also to those from among their own people who had fallen on hard times. Poverty can stem from many different causes. It is true that sometimes poverty is the result of laziness or bad habits:

"How long will you slumber, O sluggard?

When will you rise from your sleep?

¹⁰ **A little sleep, a little slumber,**

A little folding of the hands to sleep --

¹¹ **So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,**

And your need like an armed man." (Prov. 6:9-11)

Poverty can also stem from unfortunate circumstances, such as a woman with several children being widowed. These were the poor God was most concerned about, for they were essentially helpless. The *Torah* constantly mentions the need to help the widow and the orphan:

"You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²² You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴ and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless." (Ex. 22:21-24)

What is especially loathsome to God is when someone with power or authority deals unscrupulously with people, forcing them to buy goods at exorbitant prices or acquiring their money through deception:

**"He who oppresses the poor to increase his riches,
And he who gives to the rich, will surely come
to poverty."** (Prov. 22:16)

One sometimes hears criticism of the poor. Successful people often feel that poor people are getting what they deserve because they are either lazy, or stupid, or both. Some feel that the poor should "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps" and become successful. People often feel this way because they themselves have worked hard to obtain their status in life -- they believe others should be able to do the same.

However, many people are raised in poverty through no fault of their own. Often, such people never learn how to be successful in life, nor do they have the kind of role models which might help them overcome their poverty or lack of training. Poverty tends to breed more poverty and a low socioeconomic status tends to produce people who just do not know how to escape their poverty and become successful in the 'dog eat dog' world around them.

Whatever the cause of a person's poverty, the *Torah* teaches that those who have an abundance should assist those who are in need. How one attempts to do this requires wisdom. First, it is necessary to discern the character of the individual needing help. For example, if a poor person tends to be lazy, it is important to teach them how to work effectively before entrusting them with significant sums of money. Those who

tend to waste their money on frivolous things, or on excess meat and drink, must learn how to control their desires. Until they have made progress on their problems, they are probably not ready to handle significant amounts of money.

However, despite an individual person's weaknesses, one should never let a person go hungry or without adequate clothing. Over and over again, *Y'shua HaMashiach* (Jesus the Messiah) taught His disciples to have compassion on the poor:

"So when Jesus [*Y'shua*] heard these things, He said to him, 'You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.'" (Luke 18:22)

"Then He also said to him who invited Him, 'When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.'"

(Luke 14:12-14)

~ Assisting the Poor ~

God gave the children of Israel clear instruction concerning their obligation to help the poor.

"If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you." (Lev. 25:35)

Those with abundance were supposed to help the poor, in whatever way they could, to get back on their feet. One way of doing this was to lend them what they needed. A loan to a poor person was considered to be a good deed, however, that did not mean that the debtor was allowed to take advantage of the lender by not making a real effort to repay the debt:

**"The wicked borrows and does not repay,
But the righteous shows mercy and gives."**

(Psalm 37:21)

However, if the lender saw fit to forgive the debt, thereby making it easier for the debtor to get himself reestablished, that was a *mitzvah* מִצְוָה (meets'-vah = commandment or good deed).

An additional instruction says that the lender must be liberal in making loans to the poor, whether it was a loan of money or other necessities of life:

"If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD [*YHVH*] your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs."

(Deut. 15:7-8)

~ Loan Instructions ~

There are two rules in the *Torah* about lending to a fellow Israelite. First of all, it was not permitted to charge them interest (usury):

"If one of your brethren becomes poor, and falls into poverty among you, then you shall help him, like a stranger or a sojourner, that he may live with you. ³⁶ Take no usury or interest from him; but fear your God, that your brother may live with you. ³⁷ You shall not lend him your money for usury, nor lend him your food at a profit. ³⁸ I am the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God." (Lev. 24:35-38)

The second rule stated that if the person had not been able to repay the debt by the time the seventh year Land Sabbath came around, his debt was to be forgiven:

"At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release of debts. ² And this is the form of the release: Every creditor who has lent anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not require it of his neighbor or his brother, because it is called the LORD's [YHVH] release. ³ Of a foreigner you may require it; but you shall give up your claim to what is owed by your brother, ⁴ except when there may be no poor among you; for the LORD [YHVH] will greatly bless you in the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you to possess as an inheritance -- ⁵ only if you carefully obey the voice of the LORD [YHVH] your God, to observe with care all these commandments which I command you today" (Deut. 15:1-5)

The danger in this system was that when it came close to the year of release, people with money might be reluctant to issue loans because it would be likely the borrower could not pay it back before the year of release arrived and the creditor would be out his money. God specifically said this issue was not to be a factor when a poor person needed a loan:

"If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, ⁸ but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs. ⁹ Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand,' and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD against you, and it become sin among you. ¹⁰ You shall surely give to him, and your heart should not be grieved when you give to him, because for this thing the LORD your God will bless you in all your works and in all to which you put your hand. ¹¹ For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, 'You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.'" (Deut. 15:7-11)

As *Shaul* שָׁאוּל (Shaw-ool' = Saul or Paul) said:

"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus [Y'shua], that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35)

~ Pledges ~

It was common, in the ancient world, for a person who borrowed from another to give the lender some personal object as a pledge. The pledge represented a promise that the debtor would repay the loan, at which time the pledge would be returned. Today it is called collateral. The value of a pledge would vary, depending upon the size of the loan and the circumstances of the borrower.

Probably the most famous pledge in Scripture is the one *Y'hudah* יְהוּדָה (Yeh-who'-dah = Judah) gave to his daughter-in-law *Tamar* תָּמָר (Tah-mahr') for her sexual services, when he thought she was a prostitute. *Y'hudah* promised *Tamar* a kid of the goats in payment for her services, but he did not have one with him to give her. Therefore, she asked him for a pledge, which she promised to return to him when he sent the animal in payment:

"Then he said, 'What pledge shall I give you?' So she said, 'Your signet and cord, and your staff that is in your hand.' Then he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him." (Gen. 38:18)

Tamar was pretending to be a harlot in order to obtain her right to bear children from *Y'hudah's* line. Scripture does not say if she ever returned the pledged items but our guess is she did not, for they were all symbols of *Y'hudah's* position and authority and, as such, *Tamar* probably passed them on to their rightful heir, *Perez* פֶּרֶץ (Peh-rehtz' = Perez) the oldest of her twin sons; the one who became a progenitor in the line of the Messiah. Since she never received the kid of the goat in payment, she was entitled to keep the pledge.

There are specific instructions in the *Torah* concerning pledges. First of all, the pledge had to be returned when the debt was paid. Only an unrighteous man would keep a person's pledge once he had received payment for the debt:

**"But if a man is just
And does what is lawful and right;**

...

**⁷ If he has not oppressed anyone,
But has restored to the debtor his pledge; ..."**

(Ezek. 18:5, 7a)

The creditor could not enter the debtor's house to take the pledge himself, it had to be handed to him outside in public. That way, everyone would know that the pledge had not been inappropriately seized, but was willingly handed over by the debtor:

"When you lend your brother anything, you shall not go into his house to get his pledge. ¹¹ You shall stand outside, and the man to whom you lend shall bring the pledge out to you." (Deut. 24:10-11)

If the person giving the pledge was poor, the lender was not allowed to keep it overnight, especially if it was an article of clothing that he might need in order to keep warm at night:

"And if the man is poor, you shall not keep his pledge overnight. ¹³ You shall in any case return the pledge to him again when the sun goes down, that he may sleep in his own garment and bless you; and it shall be righteousness to you before the LORD [YHWH] your God." (Deut. 24:12-13)

Presumably, the pledge would again be handed over to the lender the next morning if the lender so required, and then returned again that evening. The pledge was really a symbolic instrument, indicating that the debtor acknowledged his debt. Today that function is replaced by the signing of a contract or note.

It was strictly forbidden to take the garment of a widow as a pledge, even during the day:

"You shall not pervert justice due the stranger or the fatherless, nor take a widow's garment as a pledge. ¹⁸ But you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and the LORD [YHWH] your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this thing."

(Deut. 24:17-18)

It was also forbidden to take an object in pledge that a person needed in order to earn his living:

"No man shall take the lower or the upper millstone in pledge, for he takes one's living in pledge." (Deut. 24:6)

~ Working Off Debt ~

One way a poor person could pay off their debt was to place themselves in servitude to their creditor, or to find another person who was willing to pay the lender in order to obtain the services of the debtor. In either case, the debtor could not be held in servitude beyond a six year period, no matter how great the debt:

"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing. ³ If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him."

(Ex. 21:2-3)

An Israelite who was in servitude to another Israelite was not to be treated as a slave, but as a hired worker:

"And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. ⁴⁰ As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, ..." (Lev. 25:39-40a)

There were conditions whereby the Israelite servant could remain with his master beyond the six year period, but it was solely at the discretion of the servant, not the master:

"If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. ⁵ But if the servant plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ⁶ then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the

door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever." (Ex. 21:4-6)

In a case such as this, forever meant until the great year of release, the *Yovel*, in the fiftieth year. At that time the servant and his family would be set free so they could go back to the land that had been originally allotted to his family:

"As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. ⁴¹ And then he shall depart from you -- he and his children with him -- and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. ⁴² For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. ⁴³ You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God." (Lev. 25:40-43)

~ Redemption ~

It is important to remember that the children of Israel belonged to God, for He is the One who brought them out of the land of Egypt:

"For the children of Israel are servants to Me; they are My servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD [YHWH] your God." (Lev. 25:55)

Because the children of Israel belonged to God, they could not be held in perpetual slavery. We have already examined the instructions pertaining to the servitude of an Israelite to another Israelite and how they could not be forced to serve longer than six years. God also gave instructions concerning the service of an Israelite to a foreigner:

"Now if a sojourner or stranger close to you becomes rich, and one of your brethren who dwells by him becomes poor, and sells himself to the stranger or sojourner close to you, or to a member of the stranger's family, ⁴⁸ after he is sold he may be redeemed again." (Lev. 25:47-48a)

It was never God's intention for a free Israelite to become a slave to a 'stranger.' Thus, God provided a way by which a Hebrew, who found himself in such a situation, could obtain release from his bondage. However, in order to do so required the cooperation of one of his family members:

"One of his brothers may redeem him; ⁴⁹ or his uncle or his uncle's son may redeem him; or anyone who is near of kin to him in his family may redeem him; or if he is able he may redeem himself." (Lev. 25:48b-49)

God is fair and He made sure the 'stranger' who had purchased the Israelite was adequately compensated for his enforced loss:

"Thus he shall reckon with him who bought him: The price of his release shall be according to the number of years, from the year that he was sold to him until the Year of Jubilee; it shall be according to the time of a hired servant for him. ⁵¹ If there are still many years remaining, according to them he shall repay the price of his redemption from the money with which he was bought. ⁵² And if there remain but a few years until the Year of

Jubilee, then he shall reckon with him, and according to his years he shall repay him the price of his redemption."

(Lev. 25:50-52)

During the time in which the Israelite served the 'stranger,' he was to be treated as a hired servant, not as a slave. If an Israelite was mistreated by a 'stranger,' it was the responsibility of his fellow Israelites to take action against the 'stranger.'

"He shall be with him as a yearly hired servant, and he shall not rule with rigor over him in your sight."

(Lev. 25:53)

If no one in the servant's family was willing or able to pay the redemption price, then he would serve until he was set free in the *Yovel* (Jubilee year):

"And if he is not redeemed in these years, then he shall be released in the Year of Jubilee -- he and his children with him."

(Lev. 25:54)

This same principle of redemption also applied to land that had been sold. Either the original seller, or a family member (a kinsman redeemer) could pay the redemption price and so the land could be returned to the rightful owner. (See the previous chapter.)

~ Laziness ~

All of these instructions of the *Torah*, concerning people being sold into slavery and then being redeemed by a relative, assume that the debtor really wanted to work to pay off his debt. Scripture does not have much sympathy for those who refuse to work to support themselves when they are able:

**"The hand of the diligent will rule,
But the lazy man will be put to forced labor."**

(Prov. 12:24)

**"The soul of a lazy man desires, and has nothing;
But the soul of the diligent shall be made rich."**

(Prov. 13:4)

**"I went by the field of the lazy man,
And by the vineyard of the man devoid of
understanding;**

³¹ **And there it was, all overgrown with thorns;
Its surface was covered with nettles;
Its stone wall was broken down.**

³² **When I saw it, I considered it well;
I looked on it and received instruction:**

³³ **A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest;
³⁴ So shall your poverty come like a prowler,
And your want like an armed man."**

(Prov. 24:30-34)

This instruction is confirmed in the New Testament:

**"For even when we were with you, we commanded you
this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."**

(II Thess. 3:10)

~ Social Welfare ~

Some of the people in every society are permanently poor, not because they are unwilling to work but because of extenuating circumstances:

"For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always."

(Matt. 26:11)

In ancient Israel the poor were often spoken of as the "widows and the fatherless." In general, the 'strangers' who lived in Israel were also poor because they did not have a permanent land inheritance. If a 'stranger' did become prosperous enough to purchase land, it could only be held on a temporary lease until the *Yovel* year.

God did not want any of the people living in Israel to go hungry, whether they were home born or strangers. Therefore, He instituted a social welfare system that would provide for those who were in need, whether on a temporary or permanent basis. The primary social welfare instruction was to always be generous to someone in need:

**"For the poor will never cease from the land;
therefore I command you, saying, "You shall open your
hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in
your land.""**

(Deut. 15:11)

It is interesting to note, that one of the benefits of the Land Sabbath was to assist the poor. During the seventh year, the poor had free reign to harvest whatever grew up in the fields of itself:

**"Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its
produce, ¹¹ but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie
fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they
leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you
shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove."**

(Ex. 23:10-11)

~ Gleaning ~

However, the produce from one year in seven is not enough to carry a person for the following six years, so God also instituted instructions concerning gleaning:

**"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall
not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you
gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not
glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of
your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the
stranger: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God."**

(Lev. 19:9-10)

Not only were gleanings to be left in the fields, if a sheaf of grain were missed when the workers picked them up, they were forbidden to go back and fetch it. Also, the olive trees and grape vines were to be picked only once in a season. Everything that was left after that first picking was reserved specifically for those who were poor:

**"When you reap your harvest in your field, and forget
a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be
for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that the**

LORD [YHVH] your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

"²⁰ 'When you beat your olive trees, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

"²¹ 'When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not glean *it* afterward; it shall be for the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow. ²² And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I command you to do this thing.'" (Deut. 24:19-22)

The land owner was to learn a lesson from God's social welfare system; that their ancestors had once been slaves in Egypt and were dealt with in a very harsh manner. For this reason, the children of Israel were to extend mercy upon the poor in their society.

~ Three Eyes ~

The practice of leaving the corners of the field and the gleanings for the poor led to the use of a typical Hebraic idiomatic expression:

"'Beware lest there be a wicked thought in your heart, saying, "The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand," and your eye be evil against your poor brother and you give him nothing, and he cry out to the LORD [YHVH] against you, and it become sin among you.'" (Deut. 15:9)

In this verse, the term "eye be evil" (or 'evil eye') is directly related to a man who is stingy and hard hearted. There were three expressions in Hebrew that had to do with the eye:

- ◆ A man with a 'good eye' left large corners in his field for the poor to glean. He was considered to be a generous man.
- ◆ A man with a 'middling eye' left a good amount in the corners, but not as much as the man with a 'good eye.'
- ◆ A man with an 'evil eye' left very small corners for gleanings. He was considered to be a stingy man.

These expressions were still common in the first century when *Y'shua* used the terms in teaching His disciples about different men's general character:

"'The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad [*evil*], your body also is full of darkness.'" (Luke 11:34)

A generous man with a 'good eye' is a light to those around him in his community. However, a stingy man with an 'evil eye' is often not the type of person others wish to be around. The man with the 'evil eye' may think that he is being thrifty and that his stinginess will eventual cause him to become rich. However, the Scriptures teach just the opposite:

"A man with an evil eye hastens after riches, And does not consider that poverty will come upon him." (Prov. 28:22)

~ Hospitality ~

Not only was the farmer to leave gleanings for the poor, he was also commanded to allow those passing by to eat of the ripe grain in order to satisfy their hunger:

"'When you come into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes at your pleasure, but you shall not put *any* in your container. ²⁵ When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the heads with your hand, but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain'" (Deut. 23:24-25)

A person in this situation was only allowed to pick what they needed to eat at that particular time. They were not allowed 'take-home boxes.' This practice was still in effect during the first century:

"At that time Jesus [*Y'shua*] went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat."

(Matt. 12:1)

The Pharisees had a problem with the disciples doing this, not because they were 'stealing' grain (it was specifically permitted by the *Torah*, so they definitely were not stealing), but because they were 'harvesting' on the Sabbath:

"And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!'" (Matt. 12:2)

Y'shua pointed out to them the error of their teaching:

"But He said to them, 'Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: ⁴ how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? ⁵ Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? ⁶ Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple. ⁷ But if you had known what *this* means, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," you would not have condemned the guiltless. ⁸ For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.'" (Matt. 12:2-8)

In other words, *Y'shua* was instructing them that their prohibition against picking grain and eating it on the Sabbath was a 'fence' they placed around the law which put an unnecessary burden upon the people, causing some to go hungry on the Sabbath. Today, the Rabbis teach that there is a hierarchy of commands, and that the saving and sustaining of life takes precedence over all others, even that of the Sabbath.

Y'shua used the example of how David directly disobeyed one of the *Torah* commands when he and his men were hungry and ate the showbread, which was commanded to be reserved only for the Priests. Yet he and his men were held guiltless because they needed sustenance and apparently the showbread was all that was available for them on such short notice.

~ The Pilgrimage of the Poor ~

The *Torah* commands that three times each year all the men were to present themselves before God, at the Tabernacle, to celebrate the Pilgrimage Festivals:

""Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD [YHVH] your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD [YHVH] empty-handed. ¹⁷ Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD [YHVH] your God which He has given you.""

(Deut. 16:16-17)

In order for the children of Israel to have the means to make these pilgrimages, God commanded that they reserve a tithe of their increase each year to be used solely for the purpose of attending the festivals:

""You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. ²³ And you shall eat before the LORD [YHVH] your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD [YHVH] your God always.""

(Deut. 14:22-23)

This is not the same tithe that was to be given to the Levites for their personal support (Num. 18). This was a 'second tithe' that was separate and distinct from that one, for it was strictly forbidden to personally use the 'first tithe' that was reserved for the Levites. This 'second tithe' was specifically commanded to be consumed by the man and his household. It was a way of providing them with the means to celebrate the Festivals.

If the family lived too far from the Tabernacle to take the tithed goods with them, they were allowed to sell the 'second tithe' and take the money to the Festival where they would buy what they needed to celebrate:

""But if the journey is too long for you, so that you are not able to carry the tithe, or if the place where the LORD [YHVH] your God chooses to put His name is too far from you, when the LORD [YHVH] your God has blessed you, ²⁵ then you shall exchange it for money, take the money in your hand, and go to the place which the LORD [YHVH] your God chooses.""

(Deut. 14:24-25)

The money obtained in this manner could be used to purchase whatever the family needed to assist in their celebration:

""And you shall spend that money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen or sheep, for wine or similar drink, for whatever your heart desires; you shall eat there before the LORD [YHVH] your God, and you shall rejoice, you and your household.""

(Deut. 14:26)

But what about the Levites, who did not have an increase of agricultural crops but had to live off of the tithes that were

given to them each year? And what about the widows and the orphans; the poor of society who lived on gleanings and never had the means to celebrate the Festivals at the Tabernacle/Temple?

Well, God also made a way for them to celebrate. Every third year, each family was commanded to take the 'second tithe' they normally set aside for festival use, and give it to those who did not have the means to attend:

""At the end of every third year you shall bring out the tithe of your produce of that year and store it up within your gates. ²⁹ And the Levite, because he has no portion nor inheritance with you, and the stranger and the fatherless and the widow who are within your gates, may come and eat and be satisfied, that the LORD [YHVH] your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do.""

(Deut. 14:28-29)

In ancient Jewish practice, this 'second tithe' was administered as follows:

"After the *terumah*, or the Kohen's portion, and the Levite's tithe have been removed from a harvested crop, the owner must separate the second *tithe*, ... It is taken in the first, second, fourth, and fifth years of the seven year *Shemittah* cycle. During the third and sixth years, a tithe is taken instead for distribution to the poor. During the seventh year, no tithes of any sort are taken." (*The Chumash, Stone Edition*, p.1013.)

Since the average person reserved a 'second tithe' for himself in only four out of every seven years, it would seem to have made it impossible for them to attend the Festivals each year as commanded. Using this interpretation, the Levites and the poor would only be able to attend two times every seven years.

However, it is possible that not all of a family's second tithe was used in the year it was gathered, but that the family had sufficient tithe in the four years they gathered it for themselves, to fund the other three years.

In like manner, the 'second tithe' of the two years out of seven that was set aside for the Levites and the poor, might have been sufficient to fund all seven years for all of those people as well. This is assuming that there was a significantly larger group of people saving the 'second tithe' than there were receiving it.

~ Fairness ~

A big part of being economically interdependent is to have a system of fair weights and measures. This helps to assure that people are getting what they paid for and are not being taken advantage of by unscrupulous men. God commanded the children of Israel to be honest in their dealings with one another:

""You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. ³⁶ You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD [YHVH] your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷ Therefore you shall observe

all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am the LORD [YHVH]." (Lev. 19:35-37)

It is evident from the context of this passage that God places great importance upon fair weights and measures, for the passage also contains an exhortation for justice:

"You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor."

(Lev. 19:15)

According to *The Stone Edition Chumash*:

"Thus, the Torah likens a person doing business to a judge, and someone who falsifies weights and measures is like a judge who perverts judgment." (p. 665)

The book of Deuteronomy tells how men might accomplish thievery through unjust weights and measures:

"You shall not have in your bag differing weights, a heavy and a light. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house differing measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the LORD [YHVH] your God is giving you. ¹⁶ For all who do such things, all who behave unrighteously, are an abomination to the LORD [YHVH] your God." (Deut. 25:13-16)

"Diverse weights and diverse measures, They are both alike, an abomination to the LORD [YHVH]." (Prov. 20:10)

It appears from passages in the Prophets, that the people who were usually defrauded by unjust weights and measures were the very ones who could least afford it -- the poor:

**"Hear this, you who swallow up the needy,
And make the poor of the land fail,
⁵ Saying: 'When will the New Moon be past,
That we may sell grain?
And the Sabbath,
That we may trade wheat?
Making the ephah small and the shekel large,
Falsifying the scales by deceit,
⁶ That we may buy the poor for silver,
And the needy for a pair of sandals --
Even sell the bad wheat?'
⁷ The LORD [YHVH] has sworn by the pride of Jacob:
'Surely I will never forget any of their works.'"** (Amos 8:4-7)

YHVH is a God of justice and His weights and measures are totally honest. He wants ours to be the same:

**"Honest weights and scales are the LORD's [YHVH];
All the weights in the bag are His work."** (Prov. 16:11)

~ Summary ~

The children of Israel were granted their independence when they came out of Egypt and entered the Promised Land. While their government was ultimately ruled by God in heaven,

the day to day decisions were made at the local level by the *Zekenim* (the Elders of the community).

Despite their independence, God made it very clear, in the *Torah*, that they were to also be interdependent. Every member of society was important and God wanted none of them left behind.

Apparently, in the early days of the nation of Israel, while they lived under the *Theocratic Federation* (prior to the monarchy of Saul), they practiced interdependence. Archaeological excavations have found that prior to the monarchy, most Israelites had similar standards of living. But once the monarchy developed, and certain people gained special privileges from the royal court, Israel began to be like all the other nations; divided between the rich and the poor.

God knew this would happen, and He instructed them in the *Torah* to be very careful how they dealt with the poor people in their society. The widow, the orphan, and the stranger were all to be given special consideration so they would not become paupers.

Instructions were given on the proper way to handle loans, how debts could be worked off if they could not be repaid on time, and how family members were responsible to redeem their brethren who had fallen on hard times. However, these instructions were not designed to be an excuse for laziness. Those who would not work (when they were able and work was available) were considered an abomination before God.

Even the poor people who had no jobs were still required to work for their food through the gleaning of fields. It was the responsibility of the landowners to make sure adequate amounts of the harvest were left for the poor.

God so loves His people that He also made a special way for the poor of Israel to be able to celebrate the Festivals at the Tabernacle/Temple as He had commanded.

The bottom line, when it came to the interdependence of the people, was that those who had the least in society were to be taken care of by those who had the most. If the rich refused to perform acts of charity, then God promised to afflict them just as they afflicted the poor:

"²² 'You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. ²³ If you afflict them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; ²⁴ and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.'" (Ex. 22:22-24)

¹⁷ "For the LORD [YHVH] your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. ¹⁸ He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing. ¹⁹ Therefore love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Deut. 10:17-19)

We can all learn charity from the instructions of the *Torah*.

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Torah Concepts I

The *Torah* is for all ages. It was given directly by God to *Moshe* and formed the initial Constitution for the nation of Israel. It is the standard by which all Messianic Believers should live today, and upon which the government of the Kingdom of Heaven will be established when Messiah *Y'shua* returns.

Which Law?

There were two sets of laws practiced in first century Pharisaic Judaism; the *Written Torah* (instruction/law) and the *Oral Torah* (traditional interpretation). Which law was Paul speaking about when he made some of his "anti-law" comments?

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