



THE ECONOMICS OF KING DAVID

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KING DAVID was one of the most popular and powerful kings of ancient Israel. During his reign of forty years, he brought unity to a divided nation and established Jerusalem as the mightiest capital of the ancient world. He was a soldier king who made his coffers rich by conquest as was the custom of oriental potentates of that day. Yet, we have a hint in his 144th Psalm that he disliked the ways of battle and longed for the sound economy of a healthy agricultural prosperity. "Rescue me from the cruel sword, and deliver me from the hand of aliens, whose mouth speaks lies, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. May our sons in their youth be like plants full grown, our daughters like corner pillars cut for the structure of a palace; may our garner be full, providing all manner of store; may our sheep bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields; may our cattle be heavy

with young, suffering no mischance or failure in bearing; may there be no cry of distress in our streets! Happy the people to whom such blessings fall! Happy the people whose God is the Lord!"

In spite of the riches he accumulated, we see a healthy lack of the materialistic philosophy that delights in things that money can buy. Psalm 62:10 gives this advice: "If riches increase, set not your heart on them."

But it is in Psalm 128:2 that we discover a rare gem. I call it a "gem" because, like so many truths in the Bible, you have to pick them up, polish them, and give them a proper setting before they become valuable to you.

Here is the quotation: "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be happy and it shall be well with you."

Shall we begin the polishing process?

To labor with "your hands" is a figure of speech, for we know that it is possible to work with our feet, our tongues, our brains, or with

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other parts of our body. But "hands" are personal things. The words show that it is our own labor that is intended and not another's.

"Labor" is work — accomplishment as a result of energy expended. This must mean constructive, creative, or helpful work. It is unthinkable that the Bible would advocate work that is detrimental to one's fellow man. Therefore, any work that one is able to do that does not injure society is acceptable. We realize that it is possible to accumulate energy in the form of capital or tools that enable one to work more effectively than he could otherwise. But it is still the labor of our "hands" in that it took creative energy on our part to administer it or to put it to use after it was stored up. The gem is beginning to shine.

The next facet we work on is that word "fruit." The fruit of our labor is the net result of the labor of our hands. If I am a farmer, the fruit may be literal fruit that is good to eat. But what difference if I eat it or trade it for another kind of fruit? Or perhaps I might sell it and buy another kind of fruit from my neighbor, a kind that I might not have the ability to grow and yet a kind that I need and want very much.

These other fruits that I might want could be *pieces of art*, the

fruit of labor of the artist; or *instruction*, the fruit of labor of the teacher; or *administration*, the fruit of those with organizational and leadership ability. These fruits could be listed ad infinitum, a tremendous storehouse or granary to hold the many fruits of labor of mankind — a lovely facet of our jewel.

The word "eat" is the next facet to tackle.

It is necessary for me to eat in order to live. The plan in the quotation unfolds . . . work . . . reap fruit . . . eat . . . live. It is a workable circle that perpetuates itself. It is life itself in its barest outline. If I don't work, I will not reap, I will not eat, and soon I will not live. On the other hand, I may work a lot, reap a lot, eat a lot, and have some left over to give away, and some to sell or to store up in order that more work may be done.

It is this possibility of putting more energy to work to produce more fruit that makes an efficient system of economics possible. There are some who cannot work because of sickness, either mental or physical. Their fruit will not sustain them. Therefore, it will be the privilege of those who can and do produce more than they need to put another Bible precept into practice: "Happy is he who is kind to the poor," (Proverbs 14:21) and also, "It is more

blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35) There is no law involved here — no law voted in by men, that is. But shall we call it a higher principle? It is the principle which says, "Do this, if you wish, and you will receive the reward that goes with it." This is much stronger than man-made laws which say, "Do this or else."

Now look at our shining jewel. It is a valuable one because it teaches valuable lessons in economics, and they are principles, by the way, which have stood the test of time.

First of all, it utterly outshines the socialistic imitation which says, "The state shall take the fruit of your labor and administer it equally to all men." It outshines it because of one important element. It is the element of *happiness* which is missing in all socialistic paste imitations. In every one of the verses cited in this study, happiness is the result. And I am not referring to the emotion that comes from having your physical needs met. This is satisfaction for the moment, but happiness is deeper and more valuable. It comes as a result of freedom. Here's how it works. If I am free to work as much as I please, to reap as much as I please, to dispense with my fruit as I please, to enjoy the fruit of my own labors, to give to my neighbor in want, then I will en-

joy the result . . . a happy life.

A happy life, then, will be a giving life. This meets the needs of my unfortunate neighbor and makes my own life overflow with the warm kind of joy that is the product of such giving. Will you pardon me if I cannot become enthusiastic over socialistic programs that involve compulsory "giving" in the form of high tax. to pressure groups that never fully meet the wants of those who cry for help? Thank you, but I have found a better plan.

This plan, which I learn from King David, and believe to be God's plan, is vibrant with the heart-warming values of the good life He is trying to teach. Of course, I have to fight greed and selfishness, but that puts iron in the soul and makes life worth the living when we taste a bit of victory now and then. May I look for the injured traveler along life's road. May I stop, bind up his wounds, care for his needs, and pay the bill out of the surplus I have been able to accumulate as the result of the labor of my own hands. Then only will I feel the glow of satisfaction that results from learning God's lessons in economics which form for me a pattern of life that gives me an incentive to labor that much the harder. . . .

A PROJECT IN LEARNING

IN TWO of the pieces collected in this latest FREEMAN anthology, *Essays on Liberty*, Volume VI (Foundation for Economic Education, 448 pp., clothbound \$3.00, paperbound \$2.00), Leonard E. Read deals with some of the prevalent criticisms of the work being done by FEE in general and THE FREEMAN in particular. To those who contend that the state of the nation cannot wait on leisurely processes of education, and that political action is needed *right now*, Mr. Read makes the pertinent observation that politicians are usually nothing more than the echoes of their supporting publics. If these publics are prevailing interventionist in their thoughts and emotions, then any political action they encourage is bound to be deleterious.

The job, then, is to change the intellectual climate so that political "leadership" will act on libertarian clues. Does this mean that whole "masses" must be converted at once? To this question Mr. Read

gives a firm "no." It is influential people who must be reached — i.e., people who have depth of understanding, strength of conviction, and the power of attractive exposition. Such people, as Mr. Read well knows, are not to be converted by easy blandishments or by the bulldozing tactics of the sloganeer. They respond best to the attraction of minds that work to promote a spirit of inquiry. In other words, the libertarian who is visibly working at his task of perfecting his own understanding of basic principles makes the best "reformer" of others. And he does his "reforming," not by shouting or buttonholing or trying to sneak things over, but by the quiet force of his own example.

This, as Mr. Read notes, is not being "practical" as the modern world tends to interpret "practicality." To be "practical" in the contemporary intellectual climate is to evince a willingness to meet socialists half-way. Such "practicality," approaching collectivism