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 Rector's Forum
 Finding your Treasure
 Deuteronomy, Part 2
 (Brueggemann, Money and Possessions, 39-54)

Finding Your Treasure: Money and Possessions in the Bible and in your Christian Life

Part 1: Key terms and Concepts

1. **Recap:** As we have seen, Brueggeman sees a larger contrast operating in the Scriptures between “**Economies of Extraction**, whereby concentrated power serves to extract wealth from vulnerable people in order to transfer it to the more powerful,” and an “**Economy of Restoration** that pivots on debt cancellation” (xx). Deuteronomy speaks about this economy of restoration in three ways:
2. **Sabbath:** The first is the refiguring of the Sabbath as indicating not only “rest” but “freedom” and liberation in the form of “exodus emancipation.” We can see this by looking at two passages that speak about the Sabbath commandment:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. ⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
 (Genesis 2:1-4)

¹² Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁴ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.
 (Deuteronomy 5:12-15)

3. **Year of Release:** This is a provision that follows a Sabbath rhythm and calls for a remission of all debts on the seventh year. The implication is that “debt does not have an ultimate role to play in the economy” (44). It also makes a strong connection between forgiveness and restitution. The key passage is here:

Every seventh year you shall grant a remission (*shemittah* - “a letting drop”) of debts. ² And this is the manner of the remission: every creditor shall remit the claim that is held against a neighbor, not exacting it of a neighbor who is a member of the community, because the Lord’s remission has been proclaimed. ³ Of a foreigner you may exact it, but you must remit your claim on whatever any member of your community owes you. ⁴ There will, however, be no one in need among you, because the Lord is sure to bless you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession to occupy, ⁵ if only you will obey the Lord your God by diligently observing this entire commandment that I command you today. ⁶ When the Lord your God has blessed you, as he promised you, you will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow; you will rule over many nations, but they will not rule over you.

⁷ If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community in any of your towns within the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. ⁸ You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be. ⁹ Be careful that you do not entertain a mean thought, thinking, “The seventh year, the year of remission, is near,” and therefore view your needy neighbor with hostility and give nothing; your neighbor might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt. ¹⁰ Give liberally and be ungrudging when you do so, for on this account the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. ¹¹ Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, “Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land.”

¹² If a member of your community, whether a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and works for you six years, in the seventh year you shall set that person free. ¹³ And when you send a male slave out from you a free person, you shall not send him out empty-handed. ¹⁴ Provide liberally out of your flock, your threshing floor, and your wine press, thus giving to him some of the bounty with which the Lord your God has blessed you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; for this reason I lay this command upon you today.

(Deuteronomy 15:1-18)

4. **Jubilee:** Closely aligned with this passage in Deuteronomy is provision for a fifty-year cycle of restoration known as the “Jubilee.” Brueggemann sees this as the culminating event that the weekly Sabbath and the seven-year “Year of Release” point towards. It calls not only for a cancellation of debts, but a full restoration of property. The key passage is not in Deuteronomy, but in Leviticus:

⁸ You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. ⁹ Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land.

¹⁰ And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family.

¹¹ That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. ¹² For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

¹³ In this year of jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.

¹⁴ When you make a sale to your neighbor or buy from your neighbor, you shall not cheat one another. ¹⁵ When you buy from your neighbor, you shall pay only for the number of years since the jubilee; the seller shall charge you only for the remaining crop years. ¹⁶ If the years are more, you shall increase the price, and if the years are fewer, you shall diminish the price; for it is a certain number of harvests that are being sold to you. ¹⁷ You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God.

¹⁸ You shall observe my statutes and faithfully keep my ordinances, so that you may live on the land securely. ¹⁹ The land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live on it securely. ²⁰ Should you ask, “What shall we eat in the seventh year, if we may not sow or gather in our crop?” ²¹ I will order my blessing for you in the sixth year, so that it will yield a crop for three years.

²² When you sow in the eighth year, you will be eating from the old crop; until the ninth year, when its produce comes in, you shall eat the old. ²³ The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants. ²⁴ Throughout the land that you hold, you shall provide for the redemption of the land. (Leviticus 25:8-24)

5. **Tithe:** This concerns instructions regarding the giving of a “tenth” (*asar*). This custom was not peculiar to the Mosaic Law, but was commonly practiced. Here, in Deuteronomy, it has three components: 1) The best of the agricultural produce is to be brought to the sanctuary and eaten. This is, as Brueggemann notes, a way of recognizing the sovereignty of God, that God is the one who has given rather than merely the farmer who has gained. 2) The offering may be transferred into money, but only if the distance is too far away to travel without the offering spoiling. 3) In the third year, the tithe is not offered in the Sanctuary, but in the village to be shared with the vulnerable.

²² Set apart a tithe (*asar* - a tenth) of all the yield of your seed that is brought in yearly from the field. ²³ In the presence of the Lord your God, in the place that he will choose as a dwelling for his name, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, your wine, and your oil, as well as the firstlings of your herd and flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always. ²⁴ But if, when the Lord your God has blessed you, the distance is so great that you are unable to transport it, because the place where the Lord your God will choose to set his name is too far away from you, ²⁵ then you may turn it into money. With the money secure in hand, go to the place that the Lord your God will choose;

²⁶ spend the money for whatever you wish—oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever you desire. And you shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your household rejoicing together. ²⁷ As for the Levites resident in your towns, do not neglect them, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you.

²⁸ Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; ²⁹ the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their fill so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.

(Deuteronomy 14:22-29)

We can compare this to the first mention of tithing in the Bible in Genesis:

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). ¹⁸ And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. ¹⁹ He blessed him and said,

“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
 maker of heaven and earth;
²⁰ and blessed be God Most High,
 who has delivered your enemies into your hand!”

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:17-20)

6. **Festival of Weeks/Booths:** Deuteronomy also offers other ways to give to the poor and vulnerable in the form of a “free-will offering”:

Festival of Weeks (*Shavuot*):

⁹ You shall count seven weeks; begin to count the seven weeks from the time the sickle is first put to the standing grain. ¹⁰ Then you shall keep the festival of weeks to the Lord your God, contributing a freewill offering (*nedabah* - freewill offering) in proportion to the blessing that you have received from the Lord your God. ¹¹ Rejoice before the Lord your God—you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, the Levites resident in your towns, as well as the strangers, the orphans, and the widows who are among you—at the place that the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his name.

¹² Remember that you were a slave in Egypt, and diligently observe these statutes.

(Deuteronomy 16:9-12)

Festival of Booths (*Sukkot*):

¹³ You shall keep the festival of booths for seven days, when you have gathered in the produce from your threshing floor and your wine press. ¹⁴ Rejoice during your festival, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female slaves, as well as the Levites, the strangers, the orphans, and the widows resident in your towns. ¹⁵ Seven days you shall keep the festival to the Lord your God at the place that the Lord will choose; for the Lord your God will

bless you in all your produce and in all your undertakings, and you shall surely celebrate.

¹⁶ Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before the Lord empty-handed (*reqam* - empty handed) ; ¹⁷ all shall give as they are able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God that he has given you. (Deuteronomy 16:13-17)

Part Two: Why Deuteronomy Matters

1. **Cultural Reform:** Brueggemann notes that there are three possible time periods from which we can read the book of Deuteronomy: A) as it falls in the canon and describes itself as the final sermons and instructions of Moses before he dies and the Israelites enter the promised land under Joshua's leadership. B) As originating during a period of reform under King Josiah (641-609 BC) which culminated in Israel being conquered by Assyria in 722 BC. Or C) As reaching its final form after the fall of the Kingdom of Judah by Babylon in 586 BC. Taken together, we can look at all of these suggesting that the text's purpose is cultural reform - it seeks to challenge the way we think about the role of God in our lives, the day-to-day faithfulness we observe and the wider social values around us.

If so, then we need to ask ourselves what implications this book has for our own thinking about our treasure. Brueggemann is very concerned with the way debt works in our presentday economy, and he notes that the practice of debt-cancellation and the economy of restoration speaks volumes to our present-day practices.

However, I think that what is equally important to note here is the role of generosity that is implied in the tithes and the free-will offerings.

In light of both, it is worth asking the following questions from the perspective of the "economy of restoration:"

Who taught you about money?

What difference has money made in your life?

If you were to think about all the money you have, earn, and spend, what would this money say about you. What would be revealed as your greatest desire? Your guiding purpose?

2. **Decisiveness:** Many people see the culminating point in Deuteronomy being that of decision. Brueggemann likes to quote the following passage from Deuteronomy:

¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. (Deuteronomy 30:15-20)

In doing so, he follows a long-standing tradition. One of the earliest Christian writings known, the Didache (Greek for “teaching”) written before 100 AD begins the following way:

There are two ways, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you. And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect. If someone impresses you for one mile, go with him two. If someone takes your cloak, give him also your coat. If someone takes from you what is yours, ask it not back, for indeed you are not able. Give to everyone who asks you, and ask it not back; for the Father wills that to all should be given of our own blessings (free gifts). Happy is he who gives according to the commandment, for he is guiltless. Woe to him who receives; for if one receives who has need, he is guiltless; but he who receives not having need shall pay the penalty, why he received and for what. And coming into confinement, he shall be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he shall not escape from there until he pays back the last penny. And also concerning this, it has been said, let your alms sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give. (Chapter 1)

3. **Grace and Mercy:** At the same time, I see an enormous amount of grace and Mercy in Deuteronomy. If it is indeed the case that the text was written and shaped by repeated failures, the text itself is a testimony to the fact that God is always willing to extend to God’s people another opportunity to participate

in an economy of restoration. For this reason, I find the following passage at least as important as what proceeds after it:

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, ² and return to the Lord your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, ³ then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. ⁴ Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵ The Lord your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. (Deuteronomy 30: 1-5)