

*Possible World Workbooks*

# Reading the Bible Economically

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*A Sampler containing the Table of Contents and Session 2*

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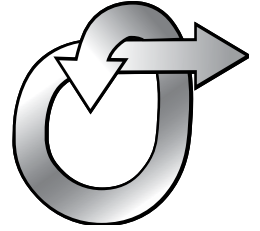
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## Session 2

### *How Much Is Enough? Reframing Security*

#### **Text: Exodus 16:1-36 (compare John 6)**

*Priestly writing from Babylon as Persia and Emperor Cyrus became the successor empire to Babylon in the 6th century B.C.E.*



#### **Purposes**

##### **Biblical –**

1. To understand why the exodus from Egypt is a dangerous memory
2. To assimilate the economic dimensions of Sabbath, especially the significance of enough for all

##### **Economic –**

1. To contrast the understandings of security (enough) in the paradigm of empire with the paradigm of covenant community
2. To grasp the value of rest and Sabbath in the economic paradigm of covenant community

#### **Preparation**

1. Read the biblical text for this Session (see above) and the “Comments on the Biblical Text” (below).
2. Get to know the “Readings – Relevant and Brief” as your companions for Session 2 (see below).
3. Complete the personal journaling (below).
4. Bring a small sample of the food of empires.

#### **Comments on the Biblical Text**

We must not overlook that the bible, as we know it today, is divided into what is called the Old Testament (Covenant) and the New Testament (Covenant), or, the older formations of covenant and the newer formations of covenant. In our economic reading of the bible, then, we open our eyes to see the economics of community, or covenant economics. This economic meaning of covenant gives us guidance to reshape our lives and institutions within the contexts of

*See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.*

*Exodus 16:29*

contemporary imperial powers and economics. This guidance, as unpacked through this Workbook, has added credibility because it has been field-tested in empires from Egypt to Greece in the Old Testament (Covenant), and then was re-invoked during the empire of Rome by Jesus and those who followed him, both Jew and Greek.

### **Historical Setting of Exodus 16**

Exodus 16, as we read it today, came together among priests whose task was to help reconstruct life in the Judean region after people were able to leave Babylon. Years before, they had been force-marched by the military of the Babylonian empire to Babylon, the empire's central city. The time for this particular re-narration of the story was sometime after 525 B.C.E. when the empire of Babylon fell to Persia. While Persia brought greater tolerance for cultural diversity, the model of governance and economics was still that of empire. When Emperor Cyrus granted leave for the Hebrews to re-establish themselves as a people in the region of Judea, the people were so grateful they called him Messiah. Think of it! A Gentile emperor being called "Messiah"!

At the same time, the task before the Hebrews was enormous, namely, how could life be reconstructed? What kind of values would they seek to express in this opportunity to construct their community anew? The priests recognized that their situation was analogous to another story in their collective history – the story they celebrated annually in the Passover. Once before they had lived under empire, been liberated, and creatively struggled to reconstruct life. When? In 1200 B.C.E. when they were able to leave Egypt. So from their sources and collective memories, the priests compiled the story we now read as Exodus 16. They would teach that story as the story by which to shape their new history. They intended to make that story, their story. The new temple would not belong to the king again (see Ezekiel 40-46) as it had in the monarchies of the past that paid tribute to dominators, for example, Assyrian and Babylonian empires. They were involved now in creating a new people and society in a somewhat protected corner of the Persian Empire. To do so, they would draw on the economics in the creation stories of Genesis 1 and Exodus 16. Such was the hermeneutical challenge and achievement of the priests of that time.

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### **Readings – Relevant and Brief**

#### **“The Project for a New American Empire”**

Duane Shank's article under this title in the September-October 2003 *Sojourners Magazine* lays out the plans for the “Project for a New American Century” going back to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. The emergence of the U.S. as the sole superpower set the stage for a circle of right-wing intellectuals to formulate a series of proposals that are tantamount to an imperial vision that attracted little attention until Richard Cheney became the vice presidential candidate and then was placed in charge of the transition to the administration of George W. Bush.

In June 1997 the Project posed this question: “Does the United States have the resolve to shape a new century favorable to American principles and interests?” In January 1998 its exponents (Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz, John Bolton, Elliott Abrams, and Richard Armitage) urged President Clinton to remove Saddam Hussein from power. In September 2000 they released their grand design

for the future: “The United States is the world’s only superpower, combining preeminent military power, global technological leadership, and the world’s largest economy. . . . America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible.” They even used the term *Pax Americana* to describe their dream of global domination, i.e., a new American empire.

Decisive for the implementation of that vision was the “catastrophic and catalyzing event” of September 11, 2001, which was “the best thing that could have happened,” according to Shank’s analysis of the Project’s intentions. It provided the rationale for an atmosphere for war (the so-called war on terrorism), an unprecedented military build-up in peacetime, the invasion of Iraq, the threats to “an axis of evil” and other rogue countries beyond Iraq, Iran, and North Korea, the proposal of a permanent role in the Gulf and a reshaping of the Muslim world, a radical shift to unilateralism in foreign affairs and preemptive military action, the nullification of previous nuclear arms agreements and the proposal of new nuclear arms development, and the expansion of U.S. military bases around the world. Already the U.S. has troops in 130 countries, including 40 permanent bases, and it continues to add basing rights, as Defense Secretary Rumsfeld indicates, “preparing U.S. forces for a future that could involve lots of small, dirty fights in remote and dangerous places.”

Shank argues that “militarization and pre-emptive war is not the path to real security. . . there is an alternative to empire and endless war.” “We must advance the vision of a world where international institutions are strengthened rather than destroyed, where global poverty is seriously addressed, where all countries, including the U.S., are disarming their weapons of mass destruction, and where human rights are taken seriously.”

– Kinsler, Ross and Gloria, unpublished *Jubilee Workbook #5*, article entitled “The Project for a New American Empire” from their “Today’s World” section.

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### **Sabbath Rest**

*Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. . . . For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. (Ex. 20:8-11)*

*Observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy. . . . 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. (Deut. 5:12-15)*

In his critical study, *Sabbath and Jubilee* (Chalice Press, 2000), Richard Lowery writes (106): “The Sabbath law occupies a pivotal position in both versions of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments), standing at the crux of theology and ethics. The verses before the Sabbath law address Israel’s relationship with God, and the laws that follow regulate social relationships within and between households. Sabbath grounds all those relationships in the identity of God as creator of the world and liberator of Israel.” The seventh day is to be kept holy by rest to protect and restore the life of all the household, from sons and daughters to male and female slaves, all the animals, and resident aliens. This mandate is so serious that its violation could, according to Ex. 35:2-3, merit the death penalty.

Tragically, Israel itself reduced the Sabbath mandate to ritualistic legalism to be used not for the poor, not for justice, but the contrary.

*Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, "When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the Sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practice deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat." (Amos 8:4-6)*

Lowery summarizes his exposition of "Sabbath and Household Hospitality": "Sabbath justice begins in the household in just relationships between male and female, old and young, subordinates and 'bosses.' *Sabbath rest is, above all, relief for the household's most vulnerable members. The household ethic at the root of Sabbath is the foundation of a broader social-economic ethic expressed in prophetic condemnations of the royal political economy, such as those found in Amos. This prophetic critique makes clear that Sabbath has a distinctively economic dimension. It is a matter of justice, not simply a pious holiday.* (Italics added) In fact, the failure to attend to the needs of the vulnerable negates the value of 'technical' observances of Sabbath-day rest. Sabbath without justice is blasphemy." (121)

– Kinsler, Ross and Gloria, unpublished *Jubilee Workbook #4*, article entitled "Sabbath Rest" from their "Biblical Faith" section.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## *Personal Journaling—Collecting Consciousness, Reframing, Re-narrating*

*Journal on the questions below:*

*In a society driven into unremitting speed-up, over-work, and burn-out, into techno-idolatry and the worship of doing and making, it is our religious communities that can call the nation to a sense of the sacredness of calm, of being, of loving – of Shabbot.*

--Rabbi Arthur Waskow

*Note: From Session 2 onward, all “Personal Journaling” begins with questions to help us reflect on the themes and work of the previous Session, and then concludes with a question or two to prepare us for the work of the next Session. We want to be sure to collect whatever new consciousness has come to us during the interactive Learning Community or our own preparation. Let the questions here guide you, but not limit you. Seek to claim the transformative potential. Collect your own feelings and thoughts. It is even more important than collecting the sayings of others.*

1. Thinking about Adam, Eve, and the Serpent, describe how you are aware of them as parts within yourself?
2. Describe an experience when you moved from innocence to consciousness on an economic matter.
3. What was the blessing and the curse that went with that experience?
4. What further economic consciousness do you now wish for?
5. What feelings and thoughts rise in you as you meditate on the above quotation from Rabbi Waskow on Sabbath?
6. Based on the introduction to Section 2 “Shaping Alternatives to Empire Economics through Dangerous Memory,” what will you have your eyes open for in this Section?

## Scenario for This Session (120 minutes with a 5-minute break)

1. 10 minutes – Opening Ritual
2. 5 minutes – Facilitator’s overview of this Session
3. 20 minutes – Telling stories from our life experience related to this Session’s themes, e.g., talk about one of the journaling topics
4. 70 minutes – Our Activist Learning Community – uncovering together the transformative possibilities and making them real
5. 10 minutes – Summarizing and identifying action steps (add to the Paradigm Chart and the Action Chart at the end of Session 1)
6. 5 minutes – Concluding Ritual

### Opening Ritual

Place your food of empire on the alter altar. Imagine tasting the flavors of the empire foods placed there. If you were really, really hungry, which of the empire foods would you eat first? Now have some of the Manna bread that is being passed around. (There actually is a cake-bread product named “Manna,” but any healthy substitute can be used.) Take a moment for everyone to respond to the nature of empire food and manna.

### Our Activist Learning Community: Together We Seek the Transformative Potential

*Reminder: We will try for more than one perspective, or even more than one answer, to these and other questions that arise when we gather to interact with the selected reading. As such, we depart from the assumption that good questions have only one answer. Sacred texts often lay down parallel or even competing narratives, allowing the divine word to be heard in the dialogue between them.*

#### Questions on the Biblical Text

1. This story is part of what is conventionally called “Wandering in the Wilderness,” or something similar. What reasons do you see for this? Does such a name emphasize any positives economically?
2. What are the contrasts between living in the Nile delta governed by Pharaoh and living in the desert governed by a confederacy of tribes?
3. Exodus 16 is not commonly connected with jubilee passages. What reasons can you see for making such a connection?
4. As we make the hermeneutical leap to apply Exodus 16 to our situation (c. 525 B.C.E. to 2000+ C.E.; Middle Eastern empire to United States empire), what clues can we take from the hermeneutical work of the priests?

5. What significance may there be to the fact that people did not recognize the food (manna) or its sufficiency in Ex. 16 or John 6?
6. How do you define greed in Exodus 16?
7. What disposal issues are there in Exodus 16 and John 6? Is it a zero waste economy?

### **Questions Related to the Readings**

8. How do you respond to “Project for a New American Century” and the belief of its creators that “America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend” America’s position following the 1989 unraveling of the Soviet empire “as far into the future as possible”?
9. Reference to the U.S. as an empire, though true, was typically shied away from officially and in the press. But “The Project” purposefully used the term *Pax Americana*, an intentional analogy to *Pax Romana*, the name often given to the Roman empire. How can this further open our eyes as we read the parts of the bible written during the *Pax Romana*, looking for their transformative power for today?
10. Why is the exodus from Egypt and this wilderness experience of Sabbath economics a dangerous memory for empires?
11. How can you connect Sabbath to justice in today’s world based on Richard Lowery’s interpretations of its enormous economic importance?

### **Questions for Living Jubilee Today**

12. What are the economic ways of practicing Sabbath today?
13. How would you contrast the meanings of security in empire economics and the Sabbath economics of Exodus 16?
14. How do you define greed in today’s economy? (recognizing that it takes more than one planet to sustain our lifestyles)
15. A “subsistence economy” is often framed to highlight its negatives. Can you give examples?
16. Given the lack of surplus and extra in a “subsistence economy,” what are some of its positives?
17. How is the “Lord’s Prayer” changed for us if “Give us this day our daily bread” actually expresses our willingness to live in a subsistence economy?
18. What is the strongest economic theme in the manna story for you in shaping your economic life today?
19. After interacting with this Sabbath economics story, how do you now answer, “How much is enough?”

## Summarizing and Identifying Actions

20. Complete this thought: The purposes for this Session have or have not been fulfilled for me in the following ways ...
21. Adding to the Paradigm Chart: Show how the themes of this Session differ in their role and use in the two paradigms, by adding to the Paradigm Chart at the end of Session 1.
22. Adding to the Action Chart: If through our work on the theme of this Session you have become aware of a step that you can take to live more fully in the paradigm of Covenant Community Economics (Jubilee), what is it? Record this action in the Actions: Next Steps Chart found at the end of Session 1.

## Concluding Ritual

For reading in unison:

*Sabbath anticipates and ritually celebrates an in-breaking world that reverses the severe conditions of peasant and village life under ancient monarchy. It rejects the 'natural law' of scarcity, poverty, and excessive toil for the laboring majority alongside luxury, leisure, and excessive consumption for the court-connected few. It assumes instead a divinely sanctioned social and cosmic order characterized by social solidarity, natural abundance, and self-restraint. ... Sabbath is both a prophetic critique of the royal status quo and a visionary call to build a better world.*

– Richard Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, Chalice Press, p. 102