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SOCIAL PROTECTION – FROM EARLY HEBREW CULTURE TO CONTEMPORARY CIVILIZATION

Theoretical
articles

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Abstract

Without the slightest exaggeration we can say that in ancient Israel a complex system of social security was regulated. If that system worked as depicted by the words of Moses and its efficiency are altogether other problems that can make the topic of new research.

The disadvantaged categories the Old Testament refers to are not basically different from the persons that make today's social politics topic, which are: the poor, orphans, widows, emigrants and the sick. Besides, a pericope through Deuteronomy bears the name The Rights of the foreigner, the orphan and widow.

It is worth noting that in the Biblical text, the issue of protecting the disadvantaged transcends historical eras. It is found, thus, in the lamentations of the rightful Job, in the thoughts of Solomon and even in the words of our Savior. An everlasting issue to solve which modern approaches should not exclude, in our opinion, is the perennial parts of early Hebrew culture.

Introduction

The concept of social protection, introduced for the first time by John Kenneth Galbraith, is a set of decisions, actions and measures taken by society to prevent, reduce or eliminate the consequences of events considered social risks for the living conditions of the population (Pop, 2002).

From this perspective we can say that in ancient Israel the issue of social protection was addressed on two distinct levels. The first one, having a legislative nature, was meant for regulations and institutions established to support social inclusion processes (Molnar, Poenaru, 2007), as they will be presented in the following. The second one is the moral principles level and it enjoys a suitable illustration in David's psalms and in the thoughts of wise Solomon (Bible KJV).

He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; ...Psalms 112:9

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Proverbs 3:27

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Proverbs 22:9

These principles' perennial character are found in similar expressions in the much later writings of the New Testament.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Luke 6:36

And let us not be weary in well doing; ...Galatians 6:9

But to do good and to communicate forget not; ... Hebrews 13:16

In such circumstances, the Bible reader will be surprised to find – in the same book and in the same chapter, two seemingly contradictory verses.

Save when there shall be no poor among you; for the LORD shall greatly bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it; Deuteronomy 15:4

For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. Deuteronomy 15:11

From a theological point of view, this dilemma has no understanding difficulties nor does it lead to the idea of predestination, as we are tempted to believe. It is just the usual discrepancy between the Providence's standards and the limits of human experience, an experience that is, in its turn, both due to free will and divine foreknowledge. Furthermore, like many other biblical verses, verse 4 is a conditioned promise, this time right in the next verse (and not only).

Only if thou carefully hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all these commandments which I command thee this day. Deuteronomy 15:5

If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, Leviticus 26:3

Disadvantaged categories; social inclusion measures

The most vulnerable social categories, the biblical texts refer to, were: the poor (also named „fortuneless”, or „needy”), the sick, orphans, widows as well as immigrants (called „strangers”). There can be highlighted many protective measures targeting globally the last three of the above mentioned disadvantaged categories, a reason for which they will be treated, usually, together and, only where appropriate, the specific aspects of each case will be detailed.

A first set of regulations is to ensure the living conditions, especially the daily food, establishing mainly the poor's right to some of the goods the earth has to give. If somebody was hungry, he had the right to enter the field, orchard or vineyard of his neighbor and eat grains or fruits to quench his hunger.

When thou comest into thy neighbour's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into the standing corn of thy neighbour, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thine hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn. Deuteronomy 23:24.25

Based on these arrangements, the Lord's disciples, went on the Sabbath day through the cornfields, they plucked the corn ears and ate.

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. Matthew 12:1

The same disadvantaged categories were to have the leftovers after the fields, orchards and vineyards were harvested, and even a certain part of the crop.

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: ... When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: ... When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. Deuteronomy 24:19-21

And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: ... Leviticus 19:9.10

The experience of Moabite Rut, the daughter-in-law of widow Naomi, on the field of Boaz, proves that this was indeed the reality:

And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers: and her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech. ... And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men,

saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not: And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. ... So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; ... Ruth 2:3.15-17.23

A large part of resources for social protection measures came from the second tithe (Rodriguez, 2012). It or its equivalent in money was to be brought two years in a row to the Sanctuary. After offering a gift of gratitude and taking a part for the priest, the rest was used for a fellowship table where Levites, strangers, orphans and widows were to participate.

Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; ... And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; ... Deuteronomy 14:22.23.29

And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are among you, ... And thou shalt rejoice in thy feast, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite, the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, that are within thy gates. Deuteronomy 16:11.14

Every three years, this second tithe was to be used at home, exclusively for the support of Levites and needy:

When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; Deuteronomy 26.12

Another category of regulations aimed for equal opportunity before the law and, generally, the exercise of civil rights.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. Exodus 22:22

Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause. Exodus 23:3

Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause. Exodus 23:6

Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. Leviticus 19:15

Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: ... Leviticus 24:22

Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless, ... Deuteronomy 24:17

Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow. ... Deuteronomy 27:19

The lasting nature of provisions in question can be observed in the resumption of themes and even the above mentioned phrases in other biblical books, books which have been written long after Moses:

If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, when I saw my help in the gate: Job 31:21

Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Psalms 82:3

Rob not the poor, because he is poor: neither oppress the afflicted in the gate: Proverbs 22:22

Remove not the old landmark; and enter not into the fields of the fatherless: Proverbs 23:10

The king that faithfully judgeth the poor, his throne shall be established for ever. Proverbs 29:14

If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: ... Ecclesiastes 5:8

Woe unto them that decree unrighteous decrees, and that write grievousness which they have prescribed; To turn aside the needy from judgment, and to take away the right from the poor of my people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless! Isaiah 10:1.2

Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. Jeremiah 22:3

... and do judgment and justice, and then it was well with him? He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: ... Jeremiah 22:15.16

For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right. Amos 5:12

And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart. Zechariah 7:10

The right to collect the wage claims was regulated especially for the vulnerable categories:

... the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning. Leviticus 19:13

Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates: At his day thou shalt give him his hire, neither shall the sun go down upon it; for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it: ... Deuteronomy 24:14.15

And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness ... against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, ... Malachi 3:5

Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong; that useth his neighbour's service without wages, and giveth him not for his work; Jeremiah 22:13

Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: ... James 5:4

A special case of arrangements received by the people of Israel protected the needy in the lending relationship. Although it may seem we are dealing with a positive discrimination, at first sight, in reality the restrictions aimed at avoiding deepening the impoverishment process and, consequently, to maintain the ability to repay the loan.

If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury. Exodus 22:25

Thou shalt not give him thy money upon usury, nor lend him thy victuals for increase. Leviticus 25:37

... nor take a widow's raiment to pledge: Deuteronomy 24:17

And if the man be poor, thou shalt not sleep with his pledge: Deuteronomy 24:12

They drive away the ass of the fatherless, they take the widow's ox for a pledge. Job 24:3

They pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor. Job 24:9

Beyond all these regulations, the Hebrew people were ingrained with the obligation to support those in need.

And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee. Leviticus 25:35

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: ... For the poor shall never cease out of the land: therefore I command thee, saying, Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. Deuteronomy 15:7.11

Social inclusion of immigrants

The Bible gives many examples of migration, the main causes being economic (lack of resources, famine), as well as social-political (threat, oppression).

And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. Genesis 26:1

They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. Genesis 47:4

And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 1 Samuel 21:10

Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: ... Judges 11:3

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. Ruth 1:1

A special situation is the migration of Abraham's family and his descendants, according to the commandments and divine promises, in respect to the status of chosen people of the patriarch's descendants.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: Genesis 12:1

And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. ... In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: Genesis 15:7.18

And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Genesis 50:24

And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken. Deuteronomy 26:19

Unlike the before mentioned cases, the stranger mentioned in the biblical books is distinguished precisely because he is not part of the "chosen people". Most came from those who joined the Israel people out of Egypt.

And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle. Exodus 12:38

Another category of strangers were the descendants of Gabaon inhabitants, which had gained their survival at the Canaan occupation by deception, only to become slaves of the Jews.

And so did he unto them, and delivered them out of the hand of the children of Israel, that they slew them not. And Joshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD, even unto this day, in the place which he should choose. Joshua 9:26.27

Last but not least, recognizing the role of divinity in the prosperity of Israel under the reigns of David and especially Solomon represented a reason of attraction for the surrounding nations.

Moreover concerning a stranger, that is not of thy people Israel, but cometh out of a far country for thy name's sake; 1 Kings 8:41

Anyway, the immigration phenomenon was quite significant, considering that when building the Temple, King Solomon decided to make a census of foreigners, and the result obtained represented over 10% of the country's population, determined according to David's census in the last years of his life.

And Solomon numbered all the strangers that were in the land of Israel, after the numbering wherewith David his father had numbered them; and they were found an hundred and fifty thousand and three thousand and six hundred. 2 Chronicles 2:17

We don't know if the unit of observation was the same (*men that drew sword*), the fact is that the real number of immigrants was much greater, including women and children, along with men who were *to be bearers of burdens, ... to be hewers in the mountain, and ... overseers to set the people a work.*

The basic rule for foreigners' treatment was equal treatment. More, privileged relationships between community members (brotherly love, love of neighbor) had to be extended to them too.

But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: ... Leviticus 19:34

Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Deuteronomy 10:19

Application of principle of equal treatment aimed, for example, at the right of weekly resting time and religious holidays, trial in civilian courts, acquisition of wealth and slaves, public information, but also obligations.

Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that ... the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed. Exodus 23:12

... in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: Leviticus 16:29

... judge righteously between every man and his brother, and the stranger that is with him. Deuteronomy 1:16

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: Leviticus 25:47

There was not a word of all that Moses commanded, which Joshua read not before all the

congregation of Israel, with the women, and the little ones, and the strangers that were conversant among them. Joshua 8:35

Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: Leviticus 18:26

Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law: Deuteronomy 31:12

It seems, however, that the risk of discrimination was significant enough, as the call to avoid it stretches over a period of time of over eight hundred years, from the time of Moses (XIV century BC) until the time of Ezekiel (VI century BC).

Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Exodus 22:21

And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. Leviticus 19:33

Neither let the son of the stranger, that hath joined himself to the LORD, speak, saying, The LORD hath utterly separated me from his people: ... Isaiah 56:3

If ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, ... to your hurt: Jeremiah 7:6

The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. Ezekiel 22:29

In addition, as noted in the previous section, together with other vulnerable categories, foreigners enjoyed regulations such as: ensuring sustenance (including second tithe), equality of chances before justice, the right to collect wage claims, the obligation to be supported when needed.

The only differences between them and natives were the interests charged for the loan of goods and valuables, the exclusion from debt forgiveness in the sabbatical year and the practice of religious ceremonies.

Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury: ... Deuteronomy 23:20

Of a foreigner thou mayest exact it again: but that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; Deuteronomy 15:3

... This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: Exodus 12:43

It was a temporary situation, anyway, as the stranger who had become a proselyte was to be treated as a brother.

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near

and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: ... Exodus 12:48

Without imposing it, the purpose targeted by the measures of including strangers was their assimilation into the “chosen people”, with all the rights and obligations of such status, including the much coveted property ownership.

For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob. Isaiah 14:1
So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you, and to the strangers that sojourn among you, which shall beget children among you: and they shall be unto you as born in the country among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord GOD. Ezekiel 47:21-23

It is true that total elimination of discrimination would occur only after the advent of Christianity, as shown in the writings of the Apostle Paul.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; Ephesians 2:19

Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. Colossians 3:11

The fact that the good treatment given to foreigners is a criterion of evaluating the true Christian spirituality also speaks about the importance of this social category and its vulnerability.

For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Matthew 25:35

Sabbatical year and the jubilee; protection of property right and the status of slaves

„Every seventh year special measures were taken to care for the poor. Sabbatical year, as it was called, began after harvest. When sowing came, which was soon after, the people were not allowed to sow; spring was not to come with crop. From what earth produced by itself they could eat as long as the goods were fresh, but they were not to collect anything in barns. This year’s crop was to be left to feed the strangers, orphans and widows and even birds and field animals” (White, 2005).

And six years thou shalt sow thy land, and shalt gather in the fruits thereof: But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard. Exodus 23:10.11

Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the

fruit thereof; But in the seventh year ... thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard. That which groweth of its own accord of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, neither gather the grapes of thy vine undressed: for it is a year of rest unto the land. And the Sabbath of the land shall be meat for you; for thee, and for thy servant, and for thy maid, and for thy hired servant, and for thy stranger that sojourneth with thee, Leviticus 25:3-6

Every seventh year was one of forgiving the debts of the poor. Beyond that it was forbidden to take interest from the needy, this year the poor enjoyed the forgiving of payment obligation and even the loan’s remaining unpaid amount.

At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release: Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; ... Deuteronomy 15:1.2

Furthermore, the biblical text draws attention over continuing the practice of charity-loan, without taking into account the sabbatical year.

If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth. Beware that there be not a thought in thy wicked heart, saying, The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand; and thine eye be evil against thy poor brother, and thou givest him nought; ... Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto thy brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy, in thy land. Deuteronomy 15:7-9.11

The year of joy was another occasion to be preoccupied by the faith of the oppressed. It was placed after seven sabbatical years („seven times seven years”), basically every fifty years.

As in sabbatical year, the land was not to be nor sowed nor harvested, and what grew freely was considered legitimate earning for the poor. Certain categories of Hebrew slaves – all those who were not set free in a sabbatical year – were now released.

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; ... But as an hired servant, and as a sojourner, he shall be with thee, and shall serve thee unto the year of jubile: And then shall he depart from thee, both he and his children with him, and shall return unto his own family, and unto the possession of his fathers shall he return. Leviticus 25:39-41

Specific to a jubilee year was the return of all lands to their former landlords. Moreover, starting with the fact that in order to ensure the means of survival man had to till the ground from whence he was taken (Genesis 3:23), land transactions were not allowed, as a first means of protection.

The land shall not be sold for ever: ... Leviticus 25:23

If, however, due to poverty, the alienation of land took place, there was firstly a right of redemption, extended also to the seller's relatives.

And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land. If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold. Leviticus 25:24.25

If it was not repurchased meanwhile, in the jubilee year the sold land returned in the possession of the former owner.

... then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubile: and in the jubile it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession. Leviticus 25:28

Besides, the biblical regulation of land sales targeted only the usufruct, not the right of ownership.

According to the number of years after the jubile thou shalt buy of thy neighbour, and according unto the number of years of the fruits he shall sell unto thee: According to the multitude of years thou shalt increase the price thereof, and according to the fewness of years thou shalt diminish the price of it: for according to the number of the years of the fruits doth he sell unto thee. Leviticus 25:15.16

We are dealing thus with a regulation that protects those affected by poverty and, in the same time, motivates them to work to regain their property. Basically, by providing family land ownership, it was set in place a system to avoid social polarization, with all its negative consequences.

One of the extreme forms of social vulnerability was slavery, the causes of its apparition being multiple: enslavement of conquered peoples, sale of criminals by the judges, sale of debtors by creditors and, sometimes, even family impoverishment.

Their children that were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel also were not able utterly to destroy, upon those did Solomon levy a tribute of bondservice unto this day. 1 Kings 9:21

... for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft. Exodus 22:3

... Thy servant my husband is dead; ... and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen. 2 Kings 4:1

And if a sojourner or stranger wax rich by thee, and thy brother that dwelleth by him wax poor, and sell himself unto the stranger or sojourner by thee, or to the stock of the stranger's family: Leviticus 25:47

The practice of selling debtors as slaves was so ingrained that we also find it in the books of the New Testament.

But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. Matthew 18:25

The Scripture does not interfere to change social order existent, but it requires a very precise set of rules, to improve the fate of those enslaved. It is interesting that the first set of civil rules, right after the moral law (the Ten Commandments) refers precisely to the situation of Hebrew slaves.

If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. Exodus 21:2

Their status was rather resembling servants employed with wages (*a hired servant* - Leviticus 25:40), and at the end of six years of service, the released slaves were to receive enough material goods to avoid a swift return to previous poverty.

And if thy brother that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor, and be sold unto thee; thou shalt not compel him to serve as a bondservant: Leviticus 25:39

And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee. And when thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the LORD thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. Deuteronomy 15,12-14

If Hebrew slaves were in the service of strangers, a possibility of redemption was possible, personally or through family, before the jubilee. In this case, the price paid for a slave and the price paid for repurchase were established by the period of time in service until the release year.

After that he is sold he may be redeemed again; one of his brethren may redeem him: Either his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or any that is nigh of kin unto him of his family may redeem him; or if he be able, he may redeem himself. And he shall reckon with him that bought him from the year that he was sold to him unto the year of jubile: and the price of his sale shall be according unto the number of years, according to the time of an hired servant shall it be with him. Leviticus 25:48-50

Other provisions aimed to protect the life and integrity of the mentioned people, killing slaves being punished, and a slave injured by his master, even if it meant only losing a tooth, entitled him to be released.

And if a man smite his servant, or his maid, with a rod, and he die under his hand; he shall be surely punished. ... And if a man smite the eye of his servant, or the eye of his maid, that it perish; he shall let him go free for his eye's sake. And if he smite out his manservant's tooth, or his maidservant's tooth; he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake. Exodus 21:20.26.27

Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee: Deuteronomy 23:15

Conclusions

Biblical texts show us that rules of conduct set for the Hebrew people, known throughout history until today as the Laws of Moses, were often broken.

... Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. Notwithstanding they would not hear, ... 2 Kings 17:13.14

Because he hath oppressed and hath forsaken the poor; because he hath violently taken away an house which he builded not; Job 20:19

For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, ... Psalms 12:5

Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondmen, saying, At the end of seven years let ye go every man his brother an Hebrew, which hath been sold unto thee; and when he hath served thee six years, thou shalt let him go free from thee: but your fathers hearkened not unto me, neither inclined their ear. Jeremiah 34:13.14

So the issue of protecting the disadvantaged transcends historical periods, remaining always in topic. We find it thus, in the book of Esther, in the lamentations of Job, in the lyrics of psalmist David and in the thoughts of wise Solomon.

... that they should make them days of feasting and joy, and of sending portions one to another, and gifts to the poor. Estera 9:22

Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. Job 29:12

Blessed is he that considereth the poor: ...Psalms 41:1

He that despiseth his neighbour sinneth: but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he. ... He that oppresseth the poor reproacheth his Maker: but he that honoureth him hath mercy on the poor. Proverbs 14:21.31

He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; ... Proverbs 19:17

He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor. Proverbs 22:9

Many references to vulnerable social categories are also found in the words and teachings of our Savior.

Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Matthew 25:36

But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: Luke 14:13

For some of them thought, ..., that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of

against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. John 13:29

Also in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul noted the generosity of Christians in old Elad, but also the urge of Jerusalem's church leaders, urging to a progressive assuming of responsibilities toward the ones in need, first by the family and then by the church:

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. Romans 15:26

Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. Galatians 2:10

But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first ... to requite their parents: ... If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.1 Timothy 5:4.16

But the deepest connection between faith and charity is presented by the Apostle James, a reference text for the subject discussed in this chapter.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, ... James 1:27

Although these social politics were so refined structured thousands of years before they were named and defined as such by academics, the question that remains still is, what was the decisive factor for their failure (Marshall, 2006).

An explanation regarding the motivational sublayer of human actions is also found in the biblical texts. *And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, ..., and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. 1 Corinthians 13:3*

In a positive logic this time, the same idea is expressed in the study of some distinguished contemporary Romanian researchers. „If the divine virtues are directed towards good deeds (exclusively), their dedication and commitment cannot stay amorphous as message and symbolism. A good deed - from the simple gesture to the grand project - is the manifestation of love, whose perfection is its universality, equal for all and everything. This is how the divine virtue of love makes us humans take part of the correct universal equilibrium between our own interests and the interests of others” (Pop, Ioan-Franc, 2009).

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