The City in the Bible:
A Relational Perspective

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Contents

Summary

Whilst Biblical cities were smaller and in many ways different from current cities, there are many similarities between the two, and the issues and problems that they throw up are similar. They were characterised by the same sort of relationship contact that characterise current cities, with contact with many more people than in the countryside, but in a more superficial, and transitory way.

Cities, like human beings, do not get a very good press in the Bible. Their origins were in sin, rebellion and violence, and they continued in this vein. They were concentrations of oppression, corruption and bloodshed, as well as paganism and immorality.

However, as with individual humans, God's reaction to this was not one of anger but of compassion. It appears that he has a redemptive plan for urban life, which will only be completed with the unveiling of the new Jerusalem, but which will be foreshadowed by the work of his people in earthly cities.

This work of transformation appears to have several facets: it encompasses prophecy against urban sin, evangelism, prayer for the city, compassion expressed in concern for the poor, and political and community involvement. There thus appear to be many ways both for the Church and its individual members to be involved in seeking to transform the city.

The manner of political and community involvement in the city is an important issue. It is not just to be a pragmatic reaction to negative occurrences. It is to be the creation of urban structures which promote human relationships, and participation within them. It seems particularly important that cities are governed with respect for the importance of local action, in a way that encourages co-operation and wide involvement, and in a way that prevents the emergence of extremes of wealth and poverty, whilst developing the urban environment so as to encourage family and community roots.

1. The Nature of Biblical Cities

When trying to draw relevant lessons from the Bible for contemporary cities, it is good to understand the potential pitfalls of too exact a parallel. Many Biblical 'cities' would scarcely rank as walled villages today, having had populations of less than 3,000.[1]

However, despite this relatively low population, there is much common ground with modern cities. Mumford argues that 'both the positive and the negative aspects of the ancient city have been handed on, in some degree, to every later urban structure'.[2] One common feature is the fact that people earn livings from activities other than just agriculture, with commerce and manufacture growing up, alongside bureaucracy. Cities thus attract quite a range of people to them, leading to 'a new order of relationships among persons, radically different from... rural areas'.[3]

The difference in relationships is not only a professional one. Urban relationships differ from rural ones because of the size of cities. It is impossible to know everyone in a city, even in one of 1,000 people, unlike in a village. People who have migrated to cities may not be able to live near family or other contacts, contributing to weaker and less committed family relationships, and a feeling of reduced security. Wilson comments that '(the Old Testament city) was a place of anonymity and isolation'.[4]

Cities then and now are also characterised by the lack of proximity in those relationships, compared with rural areas. This is partly caused by the number of relationships, with volume breeding superficiality. However, there are other reasons. City dwellers are more mobile, reducing the continuity of relationships. They often do not meet directly. The chances of them meeting in several different contexts is lower than in rural areas since people frequently live and work in different areas of the city.

Lewis Mumford acknowledges these likely relational problems in urban environments, which are exacerbated 'the wider the area of communication and the greater the number of participants'.[5] Frick argues that this was also the case in Ancient Israel, in that the city became the main administrative unit on urbanisation, rather than families or tribes.[6] Others have argued that in Israel, clan and city were in fact synonymous.[7]

Another similarity between Biblical and current cities is the influence that Biblical cities have upon the nations in which they exist. One form of this is the influence they have on a nation's religion. If cities are hotbeds of paganism, such beliefs

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[1] Ashcroft, J. and Schluter, M., *Christian Principles for Urban Policy,* Cambridge, 1989

[2] Mumford, L., *The City in History,* London, 1961, p.647.

[3] Lim, D. 'The City in the Bible,' in *Evangelical Review of Theology,* (1988, Vol. 12, No. 2), p.140.

[4] Wilson, R., "The City in the Old Testament," in Hawkins, P., (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City,* (London, 1986), p.7.

[5] Mumford, *The City in History,* p.648.

[6] Frick, F., *The City in Ancient Israel,* (Princeton, 1977), p.115.

[7] Schluter, M. and Clements, R., Reactivating the Extended Family: From Biblical Norms to PublicPolicy in Britain, (Cambridge, 1986), p.4.

can easily spread to the whole country. Biblical cities also appear to have experienced the problems of modern cities, such as oppression, corruption and violence. Finally, some Biblical cities were not small. Nineveh is recorded as having over 120,000 people.[8] Babylon and Rome were much larger, the centres of huge empires.

It is thus possible to infer a lot from the Bible about God's view of today's city. The problems and structures are much the same, if not the size.

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[8] Jonah 4:11

2. God's Attitude to Cities

This paper is attempting to explore how modern Christians should address urban problems, both as a Church, and as catalytic agents within the community. The answer is not obvious: when one thinks of the Biblical narrative, stories of judgement and condemnation of cities and of urban life spring to mind more often than those of mercy. Sulphur rained down on Sodom. Jesus pronounced woe upon Korazin and Bethsaida. The city itself originated in rebellion against God, against a backdrop of a perfect garden creation. Throughout the Bible, cities, even the holy city of Jerusalem, were concentrations of sin and oppression, representing the very core of rebellious nations. It might thus be that the Church would do best to stand a safe distance from the city, issuing prophetic warnings, and sheltering those souls fleeing from it to the safety of the God-fearing countryside.

However, cities, in one respect, represent a microcosm of God's redemptive plan. The Bible begins in a perfect garden, but ends in a redeemed city, the new Jerusalem. Much Biblical material suggests that this heavenly city is a paradigm to be emulated as closely as possible in a fallen world. God's anger may burn against cities, but his love is also evident: Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and God sent jonah to Nineveh because of his love for 'that great city'. The Bible also acknowledges that there is much good in the sort of gathering of people intrinsic to a city, in terms of the fomenting of creativity.

This section thus argues that whilst cities were a human invention, partly as a rebellion against God, he has compassion for them, embraces them, and intends to transform them, even in this fallen world. Later sections describe the particular ways in which God wishes his people to intervene in urban life to achieve this goal of transformation.

2.1. The Origins of the City

The curtain rises on the Biblical narrative in a rural, not an urban setting. God's ideal appears to have been a garden, rather than a city. The city, it appears, is not necessarily God's intention for human residential arrangements, nor is the origin of the city a particularly savoury story.

The Bible records that the origin of the city is part of Cain's rebellion against God. He builds the city of Enoch (named after his son) as a refuge against God's curse upon him.[9] The book of Genesis shows that this association between the origin of cities and rebellion against God is not a coincidence. The tower of Babel is another obvious example of how urbanisation was a challenge to divine authority.

The people of Babel urge one another, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole world'.[10] The rebellion involved in this is best seen when contrasted with the command of God in the garden of

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[9] Genesis 4:17
[10] Genesis 11:4

Eden, before the Fall, which was to 'fill the earth and subdue it'.[11] God's response is swift and decisive, confusing their language so that they are indeed scattered over the whole earth.[12]

2.2. The Character of the City

Just as cities begin, in sin and rebellion, so they continue. Much of the Bible has an urban setting, and much of the narrative concerns human rebellion. Specific references to urban sin are easy to find, often reflecting the sort of urban problems familiar today.

Violence was clearly associated with the city, for reasons ranging from the juxtaposition of different cultures and people to the protection of trade routes. Lamech's violence appears to be associated with the city of Enoch[13], and Nimrod's violence is associated with Babylon, Erech and other urban centres.[14] As cities grow, violence remains a constant feature. Nahum describes this graphically with reference to Nineveh: 'Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims! The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots! Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number...'[15]

Cities were also centres of idolatry. Lim argues that one of the defining features of Biblical cities is their role as religious centres.[16] In most cases, this means the veneration of foreign gods. Solomon builds cities which are named after pagan gods, such as Baclath.[17] This urban focus on paganism is just as prominent in the New Testament. Corinth contained at least 12 temples, including one dedicated to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, whose followers practised religious prostitution.

Corruption and oppression also seem to figure heavily in Biblical cities. Isaiah condemns Jerusalem for these reasons: 'See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her, but now murderers! Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them.'[18]

The sin of Biblical cities appears to be matched only by their unbelief. Sodom is destroyed when God cannot even find ten righteous people within it.[19] Jesus tells Korazin and Bethsaida that 'if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago'.[20]

However, urban civilisation is not painted in a wholly negative light in the Bible.

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[11] Genesis 1:28
[12] Genesis 11:7-8
[13] Genesis 4:23-24
[14] Genesis 10:8-12
[15] Nahum 3:1-3
[16] Lim, The City in the Bible,' in *Evangelical Review of Theology,* (1988), 141
[17] 1 Kings 9:18
[18] Isaiah 1:21-23
[19] Genesis 18:32
[20] Matthew 11:21

Cities can be concentrations of faith as well as of evil, and of culture and progress as well as destruction and oppression. It is at the very time that Enoch (the first city) is being built that people begin to call on the name of the Lord.[21]

As well as being places of refuge from God, cities also provided a place of refuge from more legitimate enemies. Goldingay argues that there is evidence in the Bible of cities as the birthplaces of literature, manufacture of tools and science.[22] Cain's early descendants, who were city-dwellers, were the first people recorded in the Bible to have used iron and bronze tools and to have developed music and art.[23] The fact that cities can be places where good things are concentrated is shown in John's description of the heavenly city, in that 'the glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it'.[24]

Just as Washington or London are now often used as shorthand for the countries in which they are located, cities appear to be seen in the Bible as representative of nations, often in a negative way. Cities are also representative of rebellion against God, with the best example being Babylon: 'Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit.'[25]

Babylon is a useful example and summary of the sin endemic in Biblical cities. It is consistently used as a Biblical image to represent all that is sinful and depraved in cities, both in Jeremiah, as the description of a real city, and, symbolically, in Revelation. The example of Babylon shows how the sin of cities can affect whole nations. Jeremiah says of Babylon that 'nations drank her wine, therefore they have now gone mad'.[26] Revelation records that 'all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries'.[27]

Outright opposition to God, in the form of idolatry, paganism and persecution of the saints is also a feature of Babylon. Jeremiah exposes Babylon's idolatry[28], and her false prophets.[29] He also shows Babylon to be a persecutor, saying that 'Babylon must fall because of Israel's slain'.[30] Revelation agrees, stating that she is 'drunk on the blood of the saints'.[31]

Materialism and greed are also Babylonian features. This is seen both in the 'many treasurers'[32] enjoyed in the city, condemned by Jeremiah, and in the 'merchants who gained their wealth from her'.[33] Other sins include pride and arrogance[34] and sexual immorality.[35] This short list of the sins of Babylon

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[21] Genesis 4:26
[22] Goldingay, J. The Bible in the City,' in *Theology,* (1989, vol. 92), 6
[23] Genesis 4:17-22
[24] Revelation 21:26
[25] Revelation 18:2
[26] Jeremiah 51:6-7
[27] Revelation 14:8
[28] Jeremiah 50:2-3
[29] Jeremiah 50:36-38
[30] Jeremiah 51:49
[31] Revelation 17:6
[32] Jeremiah 51:13
[33] Revelation 18:15
[34] Jeremiah 50:31-32
[35] Revelation 18:3

indicates why John describes her as having 'sins piled up to heaven'.[36]

2.3. God's Response to the City

Cities represented a perversion of God's plan for humanity, and continued to be sickening concentrations of sin and rebellion. However, the amazing fact is that this did not precipitate God's rejection of the city. Just as God redeemed fallen humanity, he also chose mercifully to transform the city, the focus of so much human activity.

The first thing to note is that God's response to cities was not one of destruction. Babel appears to have been the exception rather than the rule. God appears to accept the existence of the city, voluntarily working within the framework that it offers. There is plenty of evidence for this.

The Promised Land that is given, eventually, to the Israelites is one filled with flourishing cities. This is reflected in the book of Deuteronomy, which is the last book of the Law given to the Israelites. preparing them for their time in Canaan. Unlike Exodus and Leviticus, it has a primarily urban focus. Many of the issues on which it makes rulings are issues of urban life, such as the relationship between customer and merchant, machinery for difficult legal cases and provision for those with no means of support. Deuteronomy was given to a people 'on the edge of life in the city'.[37]

However, the Bible does not just suggest a divine tolerance for the city. It shows a divine love, and a concern for its transformation to a more righteous model. There are, of course, instances of judgement upon cities, such as those against Sodom and Gomorrah. However, equally prominent is God's concern for cities, and the pain he feels at their suffering. In the Old Testament, God speaks to jonah of his love for Nineveh, a pagan city: 'Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their left hand from their right. Should I not be concerned about that great city?'[38] In the New Testament, Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and its rejection of him:'0 Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.'[39]

This concern for cities appears to be a motivating factor behind the Biblical theme of merciful transformation of the city. The ultimate expression of this is the new Jerusalem described in Revelation (and in Ezekiel 40-48). Whilst the imagery of earth before the Fall (in Genesis) is rural, that concerning Heaven is urban. It is a city with gates, streets and a temple. 'I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God ... Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.'[40]

The characteristics of the new Jerusalem differ markedly from the earthly, sinful

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[36] Revelation 18:5
[37] Goldingay, J. 'The Bible in the City,' in *Theology, 6*
[38] Jonah 4:11
[39] Matthew 23:37
[40] Revelation 21:4

cities described earlier. It is devoid of violence or oppression: 'there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'[41] It is free from idolatry: 'I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.'[42] It is free from corruption and sin: 'nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful.'[43]

It is arguably significant that the Bible does end in such a relational way: not in a garden, but in a city. Once the sin has been removed from the urban environment, it can be seen to be a place of incredible potential, where people live in perfect harmony with each other and with their creator. Much of this joy comes from these totally restored relationships.

The theme of merciful transformation of cities is not confined to this final, spectacular vision. There is a wealth of evidence elsewhere of God's intention to transform earthly cities. The choice of Jerusalem as a holy city in the first place is an act of redemption, and of the sanctification of a fallen, human structure. Lim argues that God determined that sinful Babylon would not be the final form of the city, and that he would, instead, model a different sort of city, founded on his principles, and centred upon the worship of him.[44] David chose the city for military and political reasons (it had previously been a city of the Jebusites),[45] but God chose to transform it. Solomon confirms this in referring to 'the city you have chosen, and the temple I have built for your Name'.[46]

Jerusalem was, of course, only ever a pale shadow of the new Jerusalem described in Revelation, constantly falling short of God's standards. The passage already quoted from Isaiah describes the oppression within it (Isaiah 1:10-27). Micah also records sinful happenings within Jerusalem: 'Hear this, you leaders of the house of Jacob, who build Zion with bloodshed and Jerusalem with wickedness.'[47]

However, the passion for it to be a holy city, and a paradigm for other cities, is shown in the book of Nehemiah. The need to rebuild the city walls inspires Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem, but is only part of the story. He also clearly sees Jerusalem as incomplete as a 'holy city'[48] when there is injustice and suffering within it. Chapters 5 and 13 describe how he reformed unjust practices such as usury (leading to destitution and slavery)[49], failure to support the Levites financially[50], and work on the Sabbath.[51]

It can be argued, however, that the focus in Jerusalem in Nehemiah, and

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[41] Revelation 21:4
[42] Revelation 21:22
[43] Revelation 21:27
[44] Lim , The City in the Bible,' in *Evangelical Review of Theology,* (1988), p.144.
[45] Wilson, "The City in the Old Testament," in Hawkins, (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the city,* P.9.
[46] 2 Chronicles 6:38
[47] Micah 3:9-10
[48] Nehemiah 11:1
[49] Nehemiah 5:4-5
[50] Nehemiah 13:10-11
[51] Nehemiah 13:15-18

elsewhere, is motivated by covenant considerations, and that Jerusalem is of interest as the object of a covenant promise, rather than as an example of a city. In this case, it is of less interest to those in the era of a New Covenant. However, despite the obvious covenant context, it is arguable that God's desire to transform cities is an undercurrent in the material on Jerusalem. This is backed up by his concern for other cities, even those in pagan lands.

The theme of merciful transformation of cities is not just confined to Jerusalem, although this city is supposed to be a beacon of Godliness. God also promises to rebuild Sodom[52] and the cities of Judah.[53] God's attitude to Babylon is also revealing. To the Israelites exiled there, it represents everything hateful to their nation and to their religion. However, God's instructions, through Jeremiah (which are explored in more detail in later sections) were not to attack it or to retreat into a ghetto, but to seek the city's welfare: 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city into which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for if it prospers, you too will prosper.'[54]

Isaiah 58, which is a significant passage in understanding God's desire to see his people involved in social action, also has an urban theme to it. Amongst its promises to Israel, should it become concerned to overcome the oppression within its ranks, is a promise that its 'people will rebuild the ancient ruins and raise up the age-old foundations, you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings'.[55]

The Biblical pattern is thus that God wishes to transform cities, by destroying sinful practices within them, and replacing them with worship of him, with the holy city of Jerusalem as the most prominent example. With flawed people as his servants, operating in a sinful world, the task was only ever going to be partially completed. However, it was dearly. meant to be attempted. The examples of Nehemiah and of the exiles addressed by Jeremiah show God's call for his people to involved in practical and spiritual acts of transformation within cities, ranging from physical rebuilding, spiritual revival and political reform in Nehemiah to practical co-operation with secular authorities and earnest prayer for an alien city in Jeremiah.

The ultimate redemption of human urban civilisation is not in doubt. However, God does not wish cities, despite their potential for sin and rebellion, to be left as they are. He wants them to be transformed, even if that transformation cannot be complete until the new Jerusalem. In a limited way, this mirrors the process of personal salvation, in the sense that there is a 'now' and a 'not yet' about both.

Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians that 'If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.'[56] However, the Bible also clearly teaches that people who are saved do not stop sinning altogether. Their total transformation into perfect, blemishless creatures has to wait until after their death (or the Lord's return). A Christian's relationship

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[52] Ezekiel 16:53-55
[53] Psalm 69:35
[54] Jeremiah 29:7
[55] Isaiah 58:12
[56] 2 Corinthians 5:17

with God is clearly a reality, and yet still inferior to that which he or she will later enjoy in heaven. Paul describes this in his famous passage in 1 Corinthians: 'now we see but a poor reflection in the mirror, then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.'[57] Just like sinful people, God seeks transformation now, even if that transformation will not be complete in this life.

Nevertheless, however urgently God wants current, earthly cities to be transformed, and however much he wants people to be committed to them, their ultimate attention should always be fixed on the new Jerusalem that he has prepared for his saints for eternity, as described in Hebrews: 'for here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.'[58]

The argument is thus that God embraces cities, despite the fact that they are the sinful creation of humans. He not only embraces them, but seeks to transform them, using his people to do so, in order for them to reflect something of the heavenly city that will one day replace them. The question that remains is how God intends his people to be involved in the transformation of the city. Section 3 addresses this question.

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[57] 1 Corinthians 13:12
[58] Hebrews 13:14

3. Christian Involvement in Cities

Human involvement is a major characteristic of divine transformation. Whilst individual salvation was rendered possible by the death and resurrection of Christ, the communication of this good news to the world was a task left to human believers, albeit armed with the divine resources of the Holy Spirit.

The transformation of cities appears to follow a similar pattern. The examples of Biblical figures from Nehemiah, the city rebuilder to Paul, an urban evangelist, show the crucial contribution that God allows his people to make in transforming cities.

This section looks at how the Bible teaches Christians to be involved with cities. Involvement appears to be urged at every level: from prophecy and evangelism to practical love and involvement in good administration. These tasks overlap and interlink in interesting ways. For instance, practical love sows evangelistic seeds.

3.1. Prophecy

The purpose of much Old Testament prophetic material was the pronouncement of woe upon cities, domestic and foreign, because of their corporate sin. There was, and clearly remains, an important task of pointing out the many evils of city life in an uncompromising manner. These sins would range from moral liberalism and permissiveness to the creation and tolerance of poverty and injustice.

It must also be presumed that there is continuity between the functions of the Old Testament prophets and those of New Testament disciples, in that Jesus placed the latter firmly in the tradition of the former, at least in the treatment they could expect.[59] Thus, continuing warnings against urban sin were likely to be expected of the disciples and the church as a whole. As argued earlier, Jesus also showed himself willing to speak out against the sin of cities like Bethsaida and Korazin.[60]

God calls Christians to speak out against the sins of the city. Examples of this have already been given in section 2, ranging from Isaiah's condemnation of Jerusalem for its oppression and violence to Revelation's exposure of Babylon's sins of adultery, crime, materialism and corruption. In a similar vein is Ezekiel's description of Sodom as 'arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy',[61] as a warning to 'unfaithful Jerusalem'. He also condemns Jerusalem as being full of princes tainted with a lust for power and bloodshed.[62]

In many cases, the prophecies were warnings to Jerusalem and other cities about the danger of their current rebellion, culminating in a call to repentance. Jonah is a good example, prophesying against a secular city, at Nineveh: 'On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of

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[59] Matthew 5:11-12
[60] Matthew 11:21
[61] Ezekiel 16:49
[62] Ezekiel 22:6-7

them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.'[63]

Thus, one task for the Church is to point out the sin of the city, as a precursor for a call to repentance. Whilst full of compassion, the Church must not compromise on this important message. It is to be noted that John the Baptist's message, whilst delivered in the desert, attracted a large urban audience: 'And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him.'[64] He was never shy in exposing the sins of city dwellers, such as Herod[65] and the Pharisees.[66]

3.2. Evangelism

In tandem with the exposure of the evil of the city is the task of evangelism, as shown in the example of John the Baptist. The people who are an integral part of a city's sin should respond to its exposure by repenting. The task of bringing sinful citizens to repentance is a crucial one. The best thing for the transformation of any city is clearly the individual redemption of large numbers of citizens. Only successful evangelism can swell the numbers of urban Christians so as to participate in the other activities required of the urban church.

Evangelism within the city was a fundamental part of the early church's activity. A brief scan of Paul's epistles bears this out. These letters were sent to the churches he had established in his missionary travels, the vast majority being in big cities such as Rome, Corinth, Philippi, Ephesus and Thessalonica.

Meeks believes that 'Paul's world was a world of cities',[67] and that he shows his urban orientation, for instance, in his reference in 2 Corinthians 11:26 to being in danger in cities, in the wilderness, and at sea, with no mention of the countryside where most people at the time lived.[68] He argues, convincingly, that this was a deliberate attempt to maximise the impact of the gospel, in that it was in the less conservative towns and cities that ideas gestated and it was from those urban centres that they spread. 'If (Christianity) had remained a village movement, we would probably never have heard of it. It was in the cities that it discovered the means to spread across the empire in a time so short that we still find it astonishing.'[69]

Paul's approach was to evangelise from the heart of the urban community, living in the cities for substantial periods of time. 1 Thessalonians records that 'we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well...'[70] Lim argues that, in the same vein, 'the Church

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[63] Jonah 3:4-5
[64] Mark 1:4-5
[65] Mark 6:18
[66] Matthew 3:7-9
[67] Meeks, W, 'Saint Paul of the Cities,' in Hawkins, P., (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City,* p.16.
[68] Meeks, 'Saint Paul of the Cities,' in Hawkins (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City,* p.16.
[69] Meeks, 'Saint Paul of the Cities,' in Hawkins, (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City,* pp.15-16.
[70] 1 Thessalonians 2:8

must incarnate itself in the city to demonstrate God's love and power in a Babylon'.[71]

3.3. Prayer and Praise

A similar theme is that of prayer for the city. Being moved by the plight of a city, or repelled by its sin is common in the Bible, often leading to prayer.

Abram is a good example. He prays for mercy on Sodom and Gomorrah, for the sake of the few righteous people left within it. Genesis 18 records this lengthy dialogue, in which he persuades the Lord that if only ten righteous people can be found in those cities, the cities themselves should be spared.[72]

Jeremiah's message to the exiles in Babylon is one that includes a call to prayer. He tells them to 'Pray to the Lord for (Babylon), because if it prospers, you too will prosper!' [73]

The Psalms also have examples of prayer for cities. Psalm 122 includes prayer for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem: 'May those who love you be secure, May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. For the sake of my brothers and friends I will say, "Peace be within you".'[74] Psalm 107 has an example of a Psalmist praying against the evil forces within cities: 'confuse the wicked, 0 Lord, confound their speech, for I see violence and strife in the city ... destructive forces are at work in the city, threats and lies never leave its streets.'[75]

These examples all show prayer for different aspects of urban life: for peace and prosperity, for deliverance and for victory over evil. This diversity of prayer for the city suggests that all the other aspects of urban involvement (e.g. evangelism, reform, prophecy) need to be undergirded by prayer.

Urban prayer needs also to be complemented by urban praise and thanksgiving, as the Psalms exemplify. As argued in section 2, there is much that is good within the city, for which God deserves thanks and praise. In addition, God, when called upon, does intervene both spectacularly and subtly in the city, which should invoke the same reaction. Psalms of praise and thanksgiving and praise such as 127, and 122 have a decidedly urban theme to them. Psalm 122 rejoices over worship in Jerusalem:

'Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord.'[76]

3.4. Compassion

David Lim argues that 'the Church must help the helpless in the city. The city tends to be uncaring and insensitive to the needs of its constituency, especially

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[71] Lim, 'The City in the Bible,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* (1988), p.148.
[72] Genesis 18:23-33
[73] Jeremiah 29:7b
[74] Psalm 122:6-8
[75] Psalm 107:36
[76] Psalm 122:3-4

the poor.'[77] A crucial calling for the Church is to individual and corporate acts of compassion within the city, addressing the concentration of needs within it. This imperative is derived implicitly from Biblical teaching and practice.

The Bible's requirements for compassion are for all Christians, urban and rural. The parable of the Sheep and the Goats is a reminder of the importance of compassion. Many of the acts of compassion recommended by it are from an urban setting, such as visiting people in prison[78], or giving hospitality to strangers (strangers are rarer in insular village settings).[79]

James issues a similarly memorable exhortation to acts of compassion: 'religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress...'[80] Similarly, John urges people towards compassion: 'If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.'[81]

Jesus teaches in Matthew 5 that the 'good deeds' of his followers would be a prelude to them 'glorifying your Father in heaven'.[82] It is crucial not to see compassion and the more spiritual aspects of urban Christianity (e.g. evangelism) in isolation from one another.

This can be seen in practice in contemporary America. The unconditional love and commitment of the (mainly Black) inner city churches have had such a positive effect on that difficult environment that some people in the Washington establishment are arguing that churches are better equipped to deal with the problems of the poor than the government is, and that they should receive public support to do so.[83]

This is also shown starkly in Isaiah 58, when there is a stern rebuke for Israel seeking God's intervention on 'religious' matters, yet lacking in practical compassion.

'They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them...
    Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers...
Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice...
  to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
  and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter?
When you see the naked, to clothe him and not to turn away from your own
  flesh?
Then your light will shine forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly
  appear...
Then you will call and the Lord will answer.'[84]

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[77] Lim, 'The City in the Bible,' *Evangelical Review of Theology* (1988), p.150.
[78] Matthew 25:36
[79] Matthew 25:35
[80] James 1:27a
[81] 1 John 3:17-18
[82] Matthew 5:16
[83] Klein, J., "In God they Trust," in *The New Yorker,* 16 June 1997
[84] Isaiah 58:2, 3, 6-8

A church bearing a message of good news about love must display this love, in the many and varied ways described above. Many of these commands can be obeyed by the church on its own, and by individual members of it. However, there are some which cannot be addressed solely, or indeed at all, by the church. These political and community matters are dealt with in the next section.

3.5. Political and Community Involvement

The church can have a major impact on urban life on its own. However, there are some matters that it cannot affect much as a sole agent. For instance, the prevention or reversal of injustice has legal aspects which are the domain of Government. The provision of food and shelter can be addressed by the church, but tends to be such a large commitment that a community or country has to pool its resources to provide for it adequately. There is thus a range of activities in which Christians and the church must act as one of many partners, trying to ensure that the values it puts into practice in grass roots compassion are also reflected in the laws and policies of the land and of the community.

The involvement of people of God in government and administration, both national and local, appears to be, important in the Bible. Joseph's turbulent life appears to have been planned by God to have a political element. In talking of the way his presence in Egypt allows him to become Pharaoh's second in command, and thus take precautions against imminent famine, he says to his brothers: 'God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.'[85]

There are plenty of other examples of people of God who rightly took part in the national or local political process. One example is Daniel and his friends, who, through their courageous stands at the centre of Babylonian government ensured bad laws were short-lived. Another is Obadiah, who was in charge of Ahab's palace, and used the power to save God's prophets from the murderous queen Jezebel.[86]

Nehemiah clearly believes that the reform of ungodly practices in Jerusalem requires more than individual action by believers. He makes decrees as governor, outlawing practices such as selling people into slavery so as to pay off debts.[87]

The New Testament also has examples of Christians who are involved in public life, alongside nonbelievers, in a common attempt to deal with local problems. Paul draws attention to Erastus' occupation in his greetings at the end of Romans: 'Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.'[88] Bruce Winter comments that 'Paul did not normally mention the present, secular occupations of the other Christians who are mentioned in his letters. In doing so in the case of Erastus, he was able to provide an example for his readers of the role that the well-to-do Christian could

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[85] Genesis 45:7
[86] 1 Kings 18:3-5
[87] Nehemiah 5
[88] Romans 16:23

undertake in seeking the welfare of the city.'[89]

Peter tells 'God's elect' to 'live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us'.[90] The good deeds are to be done among the pagans, and in the context of submitting 'to every authority instituted among men'.[91] This implies participation in local public life, as well as separate good deeds performed by the church.

Winter argues that Peter, and other New Testament writers, were encouraging Christians to build upon, and not abolish, contemporary principles of civic benefaction: 'conversion to Christianity did not mean that civic benefactors ceased to seek the welfare of their earthly cities.'[92] Christians were to be part of an expanded version of that tradition, which should include widows[93] former thieves[94] and those formerly dependent upon richer benefactors.[95]

The visibility of this benefaction was important to their evangelistic efforts. This principle can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount, when the disciples are urged to 'let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good deeds, and praise your Father in heaven'.[96] Peter argues 'It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men',[97] and, as mentioned above, that their good deeds should cause non-believers to 'glorify God on the day he visits us'.[98]

The passage in 1 Peter is often seen as a New Testament echo of Jeremiah 29, in which the exiles are exhorted to be, involved in the public life of Babylon, their hated captor city, and seek its peace and prosperity. This verse is clear in its command that the people of God should not only pursue their own, unique acts of compassion and mercy, but be involved alongside non-believers in improving the quality of urban life.

There thus seems considerable evidence that the imperative for the church to call cities to repentance, to pray for them and to show them compassion is matched by one commanding the involvement in public life of themselves and their members.

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[89] Winter, B., *Seek the Welfare of the City,* (Carlisle, 1994), p.195.
[90] 1 Peter 2:12
[91] 1 Peter 2:13
[92] Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City,* p.39.
[93] 1 Timothy 5:10
[94] Ephesians 4:28
[95] 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12
[96] Matthew 5:16
[97] 1 Peter 2:15
[98] 1 Peter 2:12

4. The Bible and Relationships

4.1. A Biblical Framework for Society

The church and the individual Christians which comprise it have a duty to be involved in the public life of the cities that they inhabit. Ideally, they are to contribute to the sort of rule prayed for by Solomon in Psalm 72: 'Endow the king with justice, 0 God, the royal son with your righteousness. He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice... He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.'[99]

Whilst this is, no doubt, a foretaste of the rule of the Christ, it also seems to be a paradigm for those among the people of God who are rulers, those with influence and those making any contribution to public life.

However, such lofty ideals require practical policy, especially in the complicated field of modern urban life. Some commentators would be content to urge Christians to become involved and to do good by merely acting pragmatically on behalf of the poor, the afflicted and the needy.

The Jubilee Centre, however, has always maintained that 'there is a coherent Biblical framework for society', and that the Bible, if read carefully, can provide principles upon which policy can be constructed, rather than just to act as a rough guide to benevolent pragmatism. Much of this pattern must be derived from the Old Testament, and especially from the Law. The reason for this is that the New Testament is written almost exclusively for a redeemed group (the church), whilst the Old is aimed at the more mixed audience of the nation of Israel. The Law is thus the part of the Bible most relevant for the structuring of a society containing both redeemed and unredeemed individuals.

This fact is seen in Matthew 19:8, in which Jesus tells the Pharisees some of the reasons why the demands of his principles for believers were tougher than the demands of the Mosaic Law. He says that 'Moses permitted you to divorce you wives because your hearts were hard'.[100] The Law was part of a covenant relationship, but one with a whole nation, many of whom were hard-hearted, and the purpose of Israel's law was to make Israel a light to the nations. The new covenant relationship with the Church is different, in that it involves the changing of hearts, whereby the law is put in people's minds, and written on their hearts.[101]

The Jubilee Centre argues that the Law is best understood if its laws are seen as creating conditions necessary for the flourishing of human relationships. Ashcroft and Townsend argue that 'the key which helps unlock the purpose of Old Testament Israel's laws is the question of how a particular law fostered better relationships between the people and God and among the people of Israel'.[102]

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[99] Psalm 72:1-2, 4
[100] Matthew 19:8
[101] Jeremiah 31:31-34
[102] Ashcroft, J. and Townsend, *C., Political Christians in a Plural Society,* (Cambridge, 1994), p.10.

The general rationale for this is explored elsewhere (e.g. Ashcroft and Townsend), but the basic thrust is explored below, before being examined in an urban context.

4.2. The Importance of Relationships

Relationships are a key part of the Law. This can be seen most simply from Jesus' summary of the Law: 'Love the Lord your God ... and love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments'.[103] He also urges people to 'do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets'.[104]

These statements show how Jesus regarded the Law, which he also regarded as vitally important.[105] It appears to be summed up by love (e.g. the command to love others as one loves oneself), and love is a quality of relationship. Ashcroft and Townsend argue that 'a person fulfils the most important ethical requirements of God if his or her relationships with God and fellow human beings are characterised by loving action and attitudes'.[106]

This mirrors the loving relationship inherent in God's very nature, in the Trinity. God is a relational being, and clearly wants both society and church to mirror this. God's prime dealings with human beings, throughout the Bible, are in terms of covenants, which are long-term relationships resting upon unbreakable promises. Scripture stresses relationship as an essential part of being human, right at the beginning saying 'it is not good for man to be alone'.[107]

An examination of the Law shows why it is accurate to cast it as being a set of principles for good relationships. For instance, the jubilee Laws and the interest ban served to prevent the accumulation of land and capital in too few hands. Many other laws also serve to ensure parity in relationships (e.g. those regulating customer/merchant relationships). There are also laws to prevent the exclusion of the most vulnerable from God's provision, such as the tithe to provide for 'the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns'.[108]

If this analysis is correct, then, at the very least, the Bible would suggest that a vital component of policy should be a requirement that it upholds and facilitates human relationships, rather than undermining them. It suggests that one of the keys to a successful society is one in which relationships are a high priority, rather than just the crude maximisation of GDP. In practical terms, this would mean policies that strengthen families and communities, and prevent power being concentrated in few hands, to the detriment of a more marginalised group.

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[103] Matthew 22:39-40
[104] Matthew 7:12
[105] Luke 16:17
[106] Ashcroft and Townsend, *Political Christians in a Plural Society,* p.51.
[107] Genesis 2:18
[108] Deuteronomy 14:29

5. The City and Relationships

The guarding and encouragement of relationships appears to be important in the Bible as a whole. The relational perspective has lessons for many areas of public policy, and its prescriptions are numerous. Such prescriptions are described in the literature of the Relationships Foundation, and are not explored in depth here.

The relational model also appears to be an important one for the city. Themes of particular importance for the city are explored below. These include action at a local level, co-operation among disparate groups, wide participation by citizens, the prevention of extreme wealth or poverty, and attention to the layout and architecture of cities. These themes both illustrate the importance of the encouragement of relationship in an urban context, and give some idea as to how it might be achieved.

5.1. Local Responsibility

When addressing political means to deal with urban problems, the Bible appears to show the importance of local action as well as action by more distant authorities. This is seen primarily in the fact that much Old Testament history and law is an attempt to prevent over-centralisation of power. Such centralised power inevitably detracts from local responsibility.

One example of this is the long-running struggle between Israel and God over the appointment of a King. When the people of Israel were led out of Egypt, they were led by divinely appointed leaders, in the form of Moses and Aaron, and then Joshua. This was followed by the appointment of judges, a period of wildly oscillating faithfulness to God.

Israel was not satisfied with being ruled by judges, and demanded (via their elders), the appointment of a King. The main problem with this was the rejection of God's leadership that it entailed. This is seen when the Lord said to Samuel 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king'.[109]

He then tells Samuel to warn Israel of the perils accompanying the establishment of a monarchy. The warning includes the conscription of sons into armies, and of daughters to perform royal functions. It also concerns the confiscation of property, servants and livestock.[110] Thus, as well as a plain rejection of God, there is another problem with this demand for a King. Implicit in the warnings that God conveys through Samuel is the danger of the centralisation of power involved in a powerful, national monarchy: an inability of local people to prevent their exploitation by a central power.

Elazar and Cohen argue that the structures of Jewish political organisation have always been primarily federal, and that 'these structures were characterised by a lack or minimum of central institutions',[111] although they argue that this shows

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[109] 1 Samuel 8:7
[110] 1 Samuel 8:11-18
[111] Elazar, D., and Cohen, S., *The Jewish Polity,* Indiana, p.11.

Israel to have been a non-centralised, rather than a decentralised nation. They see national and local government as a flexible matrix, rather than a rigid hierarchy.[112]

This aversion to over-centralisation is in marked contrast to other surrounding cultures. In Mesopotamian society, 'kingship was the gift of the gods, and provided the stable hierarchical, political and economic structures necessary for civic life'.[113]

Complementing this resistance to centralised power is the active promotion of devolved power in the Old Testament model, such as the appointment in Deuteronomy 'of judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town'.[114]

Nehemiah's approach to urban reform is illuminating, showing an interesting mixture of the use of national and local power. He used his influence with King Artaxerxes to ensure him safe passage and to provide the necessary materials for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, but he used his powers as Governor of Jerusalem to achieve goals ranging from practical rebuilding to social reform, thus acting at a more local level.

The book of Nehemiah is, also interesting from another angle. As well as showing the importance of citylevel governance, it also demonstrates how effective neighbourhood-based action can be. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem is done at a level more local even than that of the city: each person rebuilds the portion of the wall outside their own house. This is a good example of local people taking responsibility for local affairs. It is explored later for its implications for co-operation and inclusion.

The oft-quoted passage in Jeremiah 29 is also a call for local action. It is an exhortation to local citizens, to prompt them to local action by seeking the peace and the prosperity of the city into which God has carried them in exile.[115] It is not a call for them to seek the peace and prosperity of the *nation* into which they have been carried, but the *city.*

One significant reason why action at such a local level is important is that it is a small enough arena for people to have a chance of knowing one another, and for this to form part of their motivation for political involvement. This seems to accord with the continual focus in Deuteronomy (the most urban of the books of the Law) on "Brotherhood" as a motivational factor for good urban living.

This focus on brotherhood is shown, for instance, in that God commands people to be 'open handed towards their brothers and towards the poor and needy in their land',[116] to choose a 'brother Israelite' for King[117], and to ensure that the King's conduct is such that he 'does not consider himself better than his brothers

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[112] Elazar and Cohen, *The Jewish Polity*, p.15.
[113] Wilson, R., "The City in the Old Testament," in Hawkins, (ed.), *Civitas: Religious Interpretations of the City, p.3.*
[114] Deuteronomy 16:18
[115] Jeremiah 29:7
[116] Deuteronomy 15:11
[117] Deuteronomy 17:15

and turn from the law'.[118] It is also shown in commands to cancel debts to brothers in the seventh year[119], and not to charge interest to brothers.[120]

Whilst there is a religious element to this, there is also a relational one. The enforcement of a law relies not only upon one's conscience, but also upon the visible effects of keeping or breaking the law upon friends, relatives and neighbours. If breaking a law affects one's 'brothers', especially those who are geographically close enough to observe, one is much less likely to do so.

5.2. Co-operation and Inclusion

Co-operation for mutual benefit appears to be a theme of urban success in the Bible. Diverse groups are urged to co-operate together for the good of their common environment, with the importance of including not only 'key players', but a wider range of ordinary citizens.

This theme is encountered in several texts. One is the important text from Jeremiah 29, which urges people to co-operate even with their hated oppressors, for mutual benefit. They are told that if the city of Babylon prospers, they too will prosper. This is more than just a plea for co-operation with 'brothers', with exceptions for 'foreigners', as in Deuteronomy. It is a command to work with those with whom the Israelites have little in common, and against whom they have legitimate grievances.

This gives an indication that the success of a city can be strongly influenced by whether there is cooperation between the disparate groups resident in multi-class and multiethnic cities. The Israelites are told that only when they co-operate and seek the city's peace and prosperity will they prosper.

Another urban unity text is an intriguing one: Jesus is recorded in Matthew's gospel as saying that 'every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand'.[121] is part of an illustration that Jesus uses to counter accusations that it is only by BeeIzebub, the prince of demons, that he is able to drive out demons. However, Jesus uses it as an illustration because he considered it to be self-evidently true. Disunity within a city brings ruin and decline. Unity breeds success, and unity is a product of strengthened relationships seeking after common goals.

Co-operation appears to be strongest when there is some form of common interest or common set of values. Elazar and Cohen argue that the lack of centralisation of the Jewish political system 'did not prevent a great deal of unified action because of common interests, and, more importantly, a shared law, constitution and political tradition'.[122] For Israel, it is common values, and not dictatorial power, that is to be the basis of social cohesion. It is worth stressing, however, that co-operation is not, in itself, necessarily a good thing. Co-operation for non-godly purpose is not to be encouraged, as witnessed by the

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[118] Deuteronomy 17:20
[119] Deuteronomy 15:3
[120] Deuteronomy 23:19-20
[121] Matthew 12:25
[122] Elazar and Cohen, *The Jewish Polity,* p.11

unity of the residents of Babel and Sodom.

Biblical urban co-operation also seems to have a inclusive theme. It is not just cooperation of the 'key players', but of all citizens, in that all are seen as having a role. The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah was done by a vast army of ordinary people, each attending to the section of wall nearest to their house.

This process involved many people. Nehemiah 3:3-32 may not make for gripping reading, but it gives a crucial glimpse into the division of responsibilities for such a major project, showing how everyone made a small, vital, local and co-operative contribution. For instance: 'Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah ... made repairs beside his house'.[123]

It remains a matter for speculation as to why co-operation and inclusion seem to be important for a successful town or city. However, the themes tie in with the strong Biblical idea that God has created each person as a unique and valuable individual, and each has an important and different part to play both as an individual and as part of wider communities such as the nation of Israel or the people of God.

The Bible consistently teaches that the absolute size of an individual's contribution to the corporate effort is unimportant. What is important is their attitude, often shown by the contribution relative to their resources. This is seen both in the practice of tithing,[124] by which individuals are commanded to give to God a proportion of income, and not an absolute sum, and in the New Testament story of the widow's mite, when a tiny financial contribution from a poor person is seen as morally superior to the large contributions given by wealthy, religious people.[125]

The New Testament also presents the image of the church, the ultimate co-operative institution, as a body. There are two relevant implications from this. One is that the contributions of the 'parts with no honour' and the 'parts with honour' are valued equally, despite being different in nature, and in visibility. The second implication is that the parts have to co-operate closely in order to succeed.[126]

These Biblical themes do not relate directly to the city and its secular governance, but they do shed light on what the Bible regards as important undercurrents in successful common ventures.

The implication of the importance of co-operation and inclusion in Biblical teaching is that such values ought to be built into urban structures and initiatives.

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[123] Nehemiah 3:23
[124] Leviticus 27:30
[125] Luke 21:1-4
[126] 1 Corinthians 12:24

5.3. Prevention of Extremes of Wealth and Poverty

One common, negative feature of cities is the co-existence of extremes of wealth and poverty, whether in terms of the rich man at whose gate poor Lazarus lived, in Jesus' parable in the book of Luke, or the juxtaposition of the City of London, source of enormous wealth, and Tower Hamlets, the poorest borough in the UK. It is an ugly trend: it amplifies urban problems rooted in jealousy and fear (such as crime and oppression). It also marginalises the vulnerable, giving them little influence compared with the rich.

Novelist Courttia Newland illustrates the breakdown of relationships resulting from this phenomenon, speaking from the perspective of his native White City, which is separated from more affluent Notting Hill and Holland Park by the M41 motorway. '...Who could have planned putting a multi-million pound government-funded industry (the BBC) bang next door to a funding-starved council estate. Madmen maybe? ... And they wonder why there's so much crime.'[127]

The Bible appears both to condemn such extremes of wealth, and to provide ways to correct and prevent them. The interest ban and the Jubilee legislation act as systemic mechanisms to prevent the overaccumulation of land and capital in the hands of the few, at the expense of the many. Commands to be generous and charitable to the local poor, especially via 'soft lending', help to correct or alleviate existing inequalities.

The interest ban is not merely a ban on 'excessive interest'. or 'usury' as some have argued.[128] It is a ban on the charging of any interest on loans, as Deuteronomy makes explicit: 'Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest.'[129]

Mills argues that there would be several effects from the application of these laws. One would be a limit to the accumulation of wealth: 'the immediate effect of obedience to the laws on loans and interest would have been the extinction of the profession of money lending ... (otherwise) ... land holdings and monetary wealth can become concentrated in their hands.'[130]

Another result would be the shoring up of local relationships, in that 'the abolition of profitable moneylending - that the Old Testament law envisages would have encouraged decentralised - financial flows between members of the same family or neighbourhood. These would result from the lender's need for personal contact with the borrower. The absence of interest would ensure that the lender would need to know if the borrower had a good chance of repaying, since provision for unrecoverable debts could not be made by charging a higher interest rate.'[131]

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[127] Newland, *C., The Scholar,* quoted in "One Motorway, two Britains,' in *The Independent on Sunday,* 11 May 1997, p.3.
[128] Mills, P., *Interest in Interest: The Old Testament Ban on Interest and its Implications for Today,*(Cambridge, 1989), p.2.
[129] Deuteronomy 23:19
[130] Mills, *Interest in Interest: The Old Testament Ban on Interest and its Implications for Today,* p.31.
[131] *Mills, Interest in Interest,* p.31.

A successfully enforced interest ban would thus have a dual relational impact, both preventing excessive accumulations of wealth and poverty, which undermine urban relationships, as well as helping build relationships of trust between lender and borrower.

The Jubilee legislation is also important in preventing the accumulation of excessive wealth. Schluter and Clements argue that the Law's land holding system was a way for every clan or family to own a piece of land in perpetuity. In times of distress, this land could be leased so as to allow people 'in grave financial distress' to find some way out of their difficulty.[132]

However, the systemic mechanism of the Year of Jubilee ensured that, every forty-nine years, the property would revert to its original ownership. Israel was commanded to 'consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a Jubilee for you; each one of you shall return to his family property and each to his own clan'.[133] This meant that, 'if many families lost control of their land through leasing it out and had then moved away, a massive movement would have been necessary for families to re-establish ownership of ancestral land'.[134]

One important implication from this is the prevention of the excessive accumulation of land in the hands of the few, just as the interest ban prevents this in terms of other forms of wealth. Land could not be held freehold, and thus, affluent people could not accumulate land, in the long run, at the expense of more vulnerable people.

These systemic mechanisms, which are central to the social aspects of the Old Testament law, need to be mirrored in urban structures in modern cities, ensuring that extremes of wealth, with their detrimental effects on urban relationship, are not allowed to develop. The main priority in the Old Testament law is to enable these systemic mechanisms to prevent a wealth inequality problem from emerging.

This prevention of excessive wealth goes hand in hand with prevention of poverty. Deuteronomy 15 argues both that 'there should be no poor among you' because the land Israel was about to receive would be blessed. However, the Law realises that these systemic measures might not be properly implemented, and that it is likely that, for this and other reasons, 'there will always be poor people in the land'.[135] This fact is thus used to take remedial action if they find poverty in their midst. The Law urges the Israelites 'to be open-handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in your land'.[136]

Whilst there is a need for the systemic, preventative measures in modern urban policy, the fact has to be faced that inequality has been allowed to take root, and that remedial action may thus be a first priority. Ideally, this action is to be taken

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[132] Schluter and Clements *Reactivating the Extended Family: From Biblical Norms to Public Policy in Britain,* p.15.
[133] Leviticus 25:10-11
[134] Schluter and Clements, *Reactivating the Extended Family*, p.14.
[135] Deuteronomy 15:4
[136] Deuteronomy 15:11

in a co-operative, consensual way, motivated by a compassion for the less fortunate among the rich of the city. The Bible establishes that voluntary redistribution via charity is a crucial way to deal with existing problems of wealth inequality. Such giving is not based upon compulsion, but on the local, relational motivation of brotherly love and duty.

This is seen clearly in the important command that: 'if there is a poor man among your brothers in any of the towns of the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted towards your poor brother. Rather, be open-handed and freely lend him whatever he needs.'[137] This is emphasised later, e.g. in the Psalms. Psalm 37 records that: '(the righteous) are always generous and lend freely,'[138] and Psalm 112 which states that 'good will come to him who is generous and lends freely, who conducts his affairs with justice.'[139]

It is interesting that the recommended charitable mechanism is that of interest-free loans, and not that of grants. It is possible that the reason for encouraging loans rather than one-off donations is a relational one. Ensuring repayment of the loan gives the lender an ongoing interest in the economic fortunes of the borrower, creating a relationship, perhaps with a mentor quality about it. It prevents panic or guilt giving so as to rid oneself of the distasteful, immediate spectacle of poverty, and promotes ongoing, committed relationships between people from different segments of the community. The loan emphasis is also probably an acknowledgement that people are 'hard hearted', as Jesus points out in Matthew 19:8, (see section 4.1.), so that the unrestrained generosity demanded in the New Testament church cannot be expected.

However, as a caveat, the Bible does not recommend debt as an ideal state of being. Whilst it may have the above advantages, it does mean that, in most cases, an unequal relationship is set up, with the lender dominant. This is reflected in Proverbs, which states that 'the borrower is servant to the lender'.[140] This is probably why the exhortation to lend freely is tempered by the mechanism of frequent debt forgiveness, every Sabbath year.[141]

The teaching of the Bible thus seems to include various systemic safeguards against the excessive accumulation of wealth, and its antithesis, the growth of poverty, thus sparing the community the relational problems resulting from the juxtaposition of extremes of poverty and wealth. These safeguards are both systemic, in terms of the interest ban and the jubilee legislation, and remedial, in terms of exhortations to generosity toward the poor, especially through the mechanism of charitable loans.

5.4. Urban Environment

Where people live and the quality and lay-out of the urban environment is of crucial importance to relationships. The effects of town planning and architecture

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[137] Deuteronomy 15:7
[138] Psalm 37:26
[139] Psalm 112:5
[140] Proverbs 22:7
[141] Deuteronomy 15:1

on relationships can be clearly seen in the British post-war slum clearance campaign. Some 1.165 million dwellings were demolished. between 1955 and 1974, often replaced with high-rise blocks of flats. This led to 'the moving of some 3.1 million people and profound disruption and dispersal of established working-class communities'.[142]

Winston Churchill once argued that 'we shape our buildings, and then they shape us'.[143] However, Dalia and Nat Lichfield argue that this does not mean that our relationships are entirely determined by the urban environment, but that this makes an important contribution.

They argue that urban planning can be used to improve relationships. 'On the positive side, it can seek to ensure that the opportunities desired by people to achieve rich and diverse relationships are made available: in brief, the meeting points in work, exchange, culture, recreation, leisure and also their accessibility to nature. On the negative side, it can plan to avoid the disbenefits that urban living can create that undermine the potential of relationships: poor sanitation, congestion, pollution, amenity, overcrowding, noise and separation from nature.'[144]

The Bible does show concern about where people live, and the effects of this on human relationship, even though it pre-dates some of the architectural issues caused by today's population densities.

The Jubilee legislation examined in section 5.3 is important evidence of this. It establishes two principles: that, in the long run, people should have roots in a specific place, and that there should be continuity in the relationships there, primarily around kinship.

The legislation thus establishes the importance of roots. The fact that land can only ever be held leasehold from its original incumbents is crucial: in the long run, families and communities will live in the same place as they always have, reinforcing a continuity of relationship, which breeds responsibility, co-operation and obligation. Such roots are often lacking in urban environments. Many people move around frequently in pursuit of financial gain, whilst others are moved because of their poverty and inability to influence their own living plans.

There is clear evidence of the importance of roots, and of the upholding of the jubilee laws in the incident of Naboth's vineyard.[145] Schluter comments that 'if land had been merely an economic asset, and if the jubilee had been primarily about a redistribution of those assets, Naboth would not have objected so strongly to Ahab's offer of cash or an alternative piece of land. Naboth, however, viewed his "ancestral land" as symbolising his membership among God's people, his roots and identity as an Israelite.'[146]

It is also interesting to note that the jubilee laws established what might now be

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[142] Ward, *S., Planning and Urban Change,* (London, 1994), p.153.

[143] Cited in Lichfield, D. and N., 'Urban Relationships: A Challenge in Town Planning,' in Baker, N. (ed.), *Building a Relational Society,* (Aldershot, 1996), p.224.

[144] Lichfield, 'Urban Relationships,' in Baker (ed.), *Building a Relational Society,* p.224.

[145] 1 Kings 21

[146] Schluter, M., "Roots: Biblical Norm or Cultural Anachronism?" (Cambridge, 1995), p.2.

seen as a 'Stakeholder' system: each family owned its piece of land in perpetuity. The pattern of property occupation that it developed was not temporary ownership, nor was it a rental agreement. For this reason, each family had a long-term stake in the success of the nation of Israel, and. in the geographical land in which it was founded. This would affect both their feeling of belonging, and their motivation in many areas of life.

It is thus important that city governance, and public policy more generally, sets the establishment and retention of family and community roots as key priorities for town planning and other urban environment issues. This is key to the development of healthy community and family life in cities, which is a recipe for social stability.

Conclusion

The first sections of this document drew together an argument about God's intended transformation of cities in this world, to foreshadow their eventual redemption in the new Jerusalem. It was thus established that cities are concentrations of sin and rebellion, but that God cares deeply for them and the people within them, and that he has a definite redemptive purpose for them.

It was also argued that there are several ways in which the Church, and its constituent parts, should be involved in this transformation of cities, including prophecy, evangelism, prayer and praise, acts of mercy and political and community involvement.

The particular focus of the paper, however, is the examination of how cities should be ordered, from a Christian perspective. It is these issues upon which this conclusion will concentrate, so as to draw out Christian principles for involvement in, and governance of secular cities.

A Christian response to the city should be more than just a hazy aspiration to help the poor and prevent injustice. It should be based upon clear principles. The argument of this paper, and of the jubilee Centre more widely, is that this framework, for cities and for society, should be based upon the nurture and reinforcing of human relationships.

1. Citizens should act locally and have local responsibilities

The Bible stresses the importance of local responsibility and local action. It does this both negatively, by constraining centralised power, and by encouraging local, inclusive institutions. Examples of urban involvement by the people of God are focused on local action (e.g. in Nehemiah, Jeremiah), and are motivated by brotherhood, which has both local and religious connotations.

2. Attempts to improve cities should be co-operative and inclusive

In addressing common problems, citizens should be encouraged and enabled to cooperate, even if there are cultural and social differences between them. Unity amidst diversity, in pursuit of worthy aims, appears to be a precursor of successful cities, according to key texts in Jeremiah and Matthew. Such co-operation should also not just be among 'key players', but among the population as a whole, all of whom have an important part to play in a successful city.

3. Prevention of the extremes of wealth and poverty

If left unchecked, there is a tendency for cities to polarise into rich and poor, with strong, negative effects on urban relationships. The Bible contains systemic mechanisms to prevent this accumulation of wealth in the hands of an affluent few, such as the interest ban, and the Jubilee legislation on land ownership. There are also remedial mechanisms for addressing such problems when they occur, such as constant reminders to lend to poor brothers. Mechanisms to prevent and address these problems should be built into urban governance.

4. Urban planning and property-ownership should be geared to building and strengthening longterm relationships

Town planning and architecture can have a major effect on urban relationships. An obvious example is the construction of tower blocks, and their negative effect upon community. The creation and maintenance of community, and even the protection of urban extended families (despite the difficulties inherent in this) should be a cornerstone of urban governance.

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