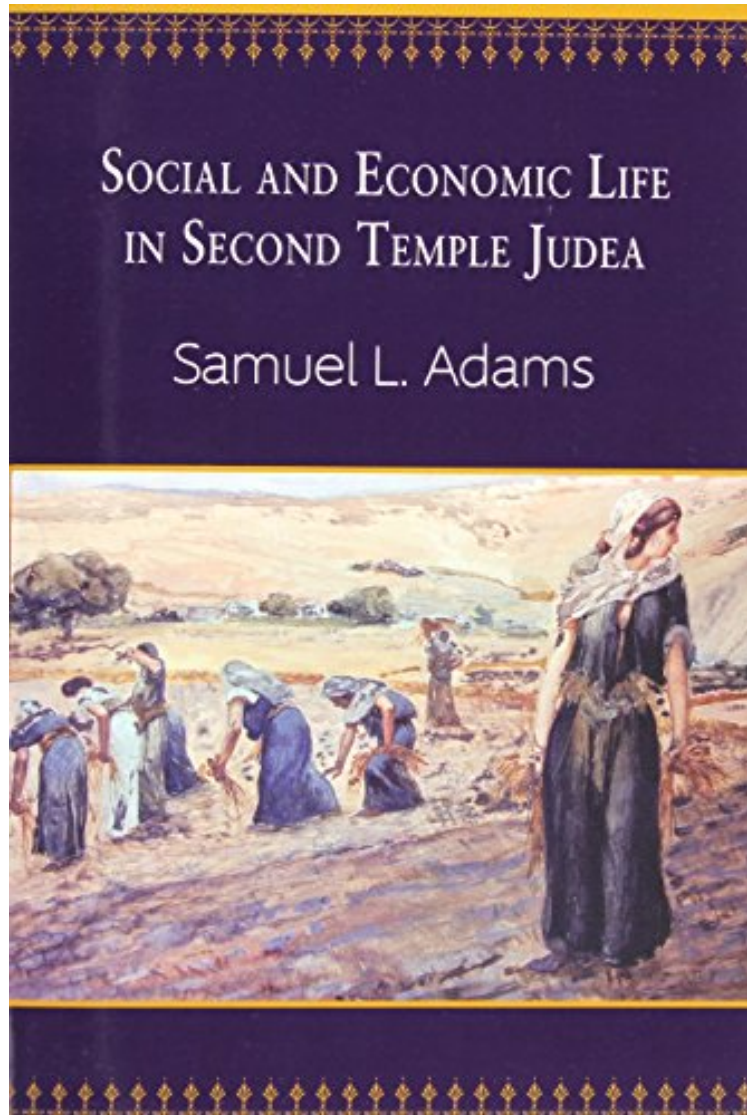


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Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea

Samuel L. Adams

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Samuel L. Adams : Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Glimpsing the Second Century Judean CultureBy Dr Conrade YapWhat was daily social life like in the ancient world? Was it better than our modern fast-paced lifestyle? What kind of taxes did they pay? What kind of socioeconomic concerns were there between 532 BCE to 70 CE? How could the history of the Judean culture increase our understanding of the biblical narratives and bible interpretation in general? Were the economic struggles and social lifestyles very different from our modern world? The answers are fascinating

as the Samuel L Adams helps open windows of understanding for modern readers into that of the ancient world. Using the markers when the temple was first restored (532 BCE) till the destruction of the second temple (70 BCE), Adams is inspired by the global financial crises of 2008 that affected many people economically, socially, and personally. Five major categories are covered. 1) Family Life and Marriage 2) Status of Women and Children 3) Work and Financial Exchanges 4) Taxation and the Role of the State 5) The Ethics of Wealth and Poverty. Starting with the family as the basic unit of society, Adams points out the difference between household and family, saying that they were not synonymous as the latter was basically related by kinship while the former means living together in one place. Thus, a servant or slave in the house would be considered a member of the household. Often based on the hierarchical structure where the father was the head of the family, young females were married into and lived with the household of their husbands. The demographics before the exile period shifted from house of the father to house of the fathers showing a greater solidarity among the Judeans, while they were ruled by their foreign masters. In other words, the people were more cohesive after the exile experience, in contrast to the original clans instituted after Moses leadership. Even so, the structures were more complex as economics often determined household formation. The rich would have their own household structures intact while the poor who could not afford land or property would serve their richer bosses in exchange for lodging and basic needs. We also see how the Sabbath helped kept families together as they observe a common celebration each week. Three-generation households were unlikely as often the economics determined the size. In the pre-exilic period, many kings did not live beyond their forties. Often, the powerful determined the way trade was conducted. Persians dominated maritime trade (539-450 BCE). Many Judeans went back to agrarian work. Living together was more a matter of economics which was why many poorer households remained small. The rich often had larger households simply because they could afford it. Marriages were directly affected by economic motivations where financial stability could be secured via betrothal and marriage. There were also tensions related to intermarriages where economic practicalities can trump the concerns over the corruption of the holy seed. For instance, Adams points out the cruel acts in Ezra 10:3 where economic concerns took priority. Such economics were such a big concern that marriages, dowries, even divorces, had major implications. For Women and Children, Adams notes the relative inattention of ancient sources to them. That does not mean their roles were unimportant, which was why Adams sought to fill this gap by talking about their roles and responsibilities; the status of widows; roles and responsibilities of sons and daughters; responsibilities toward parents; inheritance; debt slavery; and more. Contrary to modern interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31 of a perfect or virtuous woman, Adams points out that such behaviors were common and widely accepted back then. Widows faced economic difficulties and vulnerable to loss of assets in a patriarchal culture. This required them to use creative ways to ensure economic survival. While modern eyes may read the cases of Ruth and Tamar as forms of trickery, Adams argues that these are creative ways in which to circumvent the gender inequities at that time. The section on children is an interesting contrast between modern understandings of childhood versus unmarried dependents at that time. Children at that time had household duties, be engaged in farming or trading work, and played a part in the Genesis mandate of being fruitful and multiply. For to accomplish large scale tasks, manpower was needed, and children were seen as transitioning from unmarried to married. Unlike modern career freedom of choice among teenagers, many similar aged individuals then had to take over their fathers trade. Infant mortality was high. Chastity was expected of daughters. Marriage at a young age was encouraged because of the greater likelihood of increased pregnancies. Honouring parents was less about sentimentality but for the sake of the name of the family and health wellness. Debt slavery was a common occurrence too, especially for families that were very poor and needed to pay a debt for food or lodging. The third chapter on Work and Financial Exchanges covers various occupations and how financial exchanges worked back then. With a majority of the people being poor farmers, agrarian lifestyles were means of survival more than choice. Some labored in the fields to settle debts. Others worked for their masters to make a living. The rich would own property and control land. It is interesting to note the three types of land: rough and mountainous; terrace slopes with mineral deposits good for vineyard and olives; and alluvial plains for most plantations. The biblical verse Proverbs 14:4 gives us a clue about how livestock health impacts directly the grain yield. Land seizures were common which helped us understand Jesus parable of the tenants. Adams mentions three theological and ethical insights we can learn of. The first two kinds of vocations parallels the work of Abel and Cain. First, like Abel, many farmers faced the prospect of having their lands seized by the higher powers, which automatically colors the contexts of Jesus gospel parables. The second kind of vocation spoken of was the animal heading. Many later sources spoke of the bullying shepherds, who cheated others, who respected no boundaries, and allowed their animals to graze on restricted lands. People also do not eat meat as much as that would mean killing off laborers in the harvest field. Often, only when the animal had reached its usefulness would it then be killed off as food. While oxen did the ploughing, donkeys, mules, and camels aided in distribution. The third vocation is financial and trading. Financial dealings can be complicated, with multilayered economy and complex lending arrangements. The fourth chapter on Taxation and the Role of the State describes the way the people were taxed. Often, with military ambitions and infrastructural demands, the State exacted financial obligations so heavy that it contributed to the Jewish rebellion in the 66-70 CE. The fifth chapter on Wealth and Poverty looks at Proverbs and the later literature to give us an interesting insight about the shift from retributive based

earthly good works / rewards and bad works / punishment toward the more eschatological dimension involving judgment of things beyond earthly concerns. So significant is this chapter that the author stresses four distinct implications based on Timothy Sandoval's work about how Proverbs spoke to people back then. First, in the character-consequence sayings, we learn of the general teachings against greed, where the consequences of greed can be serious. Second, in the preferability of wisdom over wealth, wisdom is largely advocated. In many of the sayings, people are reminded that chasing after money often becomes a distraction from virtuous living. Not only that, money pursuits contributed greatly to anxiety and unethical behavior. Third, wisdom also means one cares for the poor. With money matters often determining the social status and lifestyle of the haves and the have-nots, those with larger lands wield significant power over others without property. Here, God takes special care for the poor. We should too. The fourth category has to do with illustrious behavior that would reward good works. Unfortunately, life is a lot more complex than the retributive model. Success and prosperity is not about rewards and punishment. Instead, it is measured in terms of fear of the Lord. Some Thoughts

Despite the different eras mentioned, I am intrigued at how similar the social concerns are for both ancient and modern people. Like the size of households back then, those of us who can afford bigger houses are often the wealthier ones. Marriages and divorces also have an economic dimension, with financial implications after any marital fallout. Back then, women often had to be creative about how they can overcome the largely male-dominated social structures. The women now too, despite greater gender equality still have to grapple with the challenges of marriage and divorce. It tells me one thing. Marriage and divorce in themselves are huge social matters that transcend time. The worklife and financial transactions are remarkably similar in terms of implementation of working structures. The rich and powerful controls the way the economy is run. The poor are vulnerable to the exploits of the rich. Bribery exists then and now. While the nature of vocations may change due to opportunities and different landscapes, the general social concerns remain similar in many ways. Government impose taxes based on infrastructural and war demands. Wealth and poverty remain key bread and butter issues. Samuel L. Adams, Professor of Old Testament at Union Presbyterian Seminary, is an emerging scholar with key interests in matters pertaining to the Ancient Near East. Having said that, when we understand the ancient cultures more, we will learn to be better interpreters of the Bible passages that we have often taken for granted. It is one thing to read ancient texts with modern minds. It is yet another to read them like an ancient. For example, I appreciate the clarification about using the word "Judean" instead of the word "Jewish" to describe the ethnic label of the Jews in the nation of Israel. This is primarily because "Jewish" is more religious in nature, whereas "Judean" encapsulates a larger perspective of life then. This book is less about religion but about religion plus much more, such as the political, social, economic, and other factors affecting the people then. Moreover, the "religion" perspective in our modern times is quite different from how life was seen back then. In fact, the moment we try to use religion on them, we risk dichotomizing their ancient world into modern terms, which is not what we are seeking to achieve. We do not dissect them in order to manipulate them into our modern understanding. We let them be as original as possible so that they can inform our understanding. The big difference is that the ancient live out their religious beliefs as a natural way of life in all aspects of society. Our modern minds cannot understand that because many of us see religion more as an add-on rather than a presumed way of life. Use this book as another way to shed light on social and economic life in second temple Judea, but at the same time, be open to alternative interpretations as more research and data becomes available. That said, even with books like this, it can be tricky for contextual interpretation. As the saying goes, it takes one to know one. Without having someone from the past, or a time machine to send someone from this time to the ancient period, we simply have to make do with the best interpretation and sources at hand. This book is a good bridge to do just that. Rating: 4.5 stars of 5. conrade

This book is provided to me courtesy of Westminster John Knox Press and NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. All opinions offered above are mine unless otherwise stated or implied.

This book looks at the socioeconomic landscape of Second Temple Judea (532 BCE - 70 CE) with close attention to the daily life of ordinary people. Adams uses the Hebrew Bible and other historical resources to examine work and economic exchange, marriage and the complexities of family life--including the roles of women and children--and the burdensome taxation policies under imperial Rome. He culminates with a rich analysis of the ethics of wealth and poverty found in various texts, including the Hebrew Bible, pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Q, and the New Testament. This study of socioeconomic and theological issues provides students with a helpful context for understanding religious beliefs and practices in the time of early Judaism and emerging Christianity.

"This well-researched and innovative study is an essential resource for both researchers and religious leaders. Adams adeptly illustrates how the social and economic context of the ancient world helped to shape people's beliefs about God, justice, and fair balance. There are strong implications for our contemporary context as we witness a dramatic acceleration of wealth inequalities in the United States and around the world. The significance of Adams's work extends beyond a historical study and invites readers to seek the wisdom and alternative vision of ancient traditions of faith as we confront one of the most pressing problems of our own time." Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, Chair, Department of Theology, Bellarmine University

Sam Adams's exciting and timely book brings to life the social and economic

world of Second Temple Judea. Adams masterfully balances attention to micro- and macroeconomic structures, giving equal space to the spheres of family and empire. Informed by critical gender studies and postcolonial theory, Adams examines old and new evidence with a keen and judicious eye. Accessible, well-organized, and fresh, this book will be a vital resource for students and scholars alike."Anathea Portier-Young, Duke Divinity School"Social and Economic Life in Second Temple Judea serves as a major advance for the study of biblical economies. With a broad knowledge of early Judaism, Professor Adams deftly works through biblical and extrabiblical texts to present a balanced portrayal of the social currents of the Second Temple period. Beginning students will find this book accessible and engaging, while scholars will appreciate its thorough research and nuanced discussion."Roger S. Nam, George Fox University"Adams's groundbreaking work provides a long overdue survey of the realities of economic life in Second Temple Judaism. Grounded in detailed knowledge of the literature, this book provides a solid and realistic basis for future work on social justice in early Judaism and the nascent Christian movement."John J. Collins, Holmes Professor of Old Testament Criticism and Interpretation, Yale Divinity School

About the Author Samuel L. Adams is Associate Professor of Old Testament at Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia. An ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), he is the author of *Wisdom in Transition: Act and Consequence in Second Temple Instructions*. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

This book examines the socioeconomic landscape of Judah/Judea in the Second Temple period, from the end of the Babylonian exile to the destruction of the Temple by the Romans (532 B.C.E. - 70 C.E.). No previous study has focused specifically on economics when analyzing this timeframe, and the current discussion will engage in a close reading of key sources, consideration of relevant archaeological evidence, and theoretical analysis. By taking up topics like marriage gifts, borrowing and lending, and taxation, our discussion will provide an overview of economic life, with fresh insights from relevant biblical texts, including passages and entire books that do not get enough attention in this regard (e.g., Ruth, Ezra-Nehemiah, Tobit).

from the introduction