

1 Kings 4

Written by K B Napier
Tuesday, 10 November 2015 14:19

In this chapter we see Solomon setting up the infrastructure of his reign, and the size of his basic armed force, which was formidable. We also see how his godliness led to the admiration of kings in surrounding kingdoms for his wisdom, bringing a deep and genuine respect for his rule and person. This is how our own nation should be ruled. Instead we have confusion, paganism and godlessness, together with persecution of those who wish to live by God's laws. The lesson is self-evident.

Verses 1-6

1.

So king Solomon was king over all Israel.

2.

And these were the princes which he had; Azariah the son of Zadok the priest,

3.

Elihoreph and Ahiah, the sons of Shisha, scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud, the recorder.

4.

And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests:

5.

And Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers: and Zabud the son of Nathan was principal officer, and the king's friend:

6.

And Ahishar was over the household: and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute.

After removing very real threats to his rule, Solomon chooses a number of 'princes', *sar*, over

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Israel and Judah. As tribal chiefs already existed, 'princes' in this context is really about the administration of the nation, and includes military governance. Perhaps 'governor' is a close analogy. At any rate these would have been high-level courtiers and officials. Whether such a 'prince' is military, civil, or both, depends on the context. Even Jesus Christ is titled '*Sar-Shalom*'

– Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:5).

Azariah is called the 'son' of Zadock, in the same sense that Jesus was the 'son' of David. That is, a family member. In this case grandson to Zadok and high priest. Azariah's father, Ahimaaz, was father-in-law to Saul, who also aided David when Absalom rebelled. As high priest Azariah had great influence throughout the nation.

Two sons of Shisha, **Elihoreph** and **Ahaiah**, were scribes, the equivalent of secretaries to the king, ensuring everything was documented accurately. It is thought that their father, Shisha, is the same as 'Shavsha', who held the same position under David. We are told that

Jehoshaphat

was appointed "the recorder" whose job it was to remember important days and events. Very similar to the scribes' job. This is not the same as the king of Judah, but was son of Ahilus, who was recorder under David.

We already know that the tough soldier, **Benaiah**, was appointed to be general over the whole army. **Zadok** and **Abiathar** were very senior priests.

Another **Azariah** (whose father was Nathan) was set over the officers as a director or prefect ensuring Solomon's laws and policies were adhered to. His chief officer (and it seems, his brother) was the priest **Zabud**, who was also Solomon's close friend.

Chief steward of the royal household and royal family was **Ahishar**. **Adoniram** was chief of tributes. In this context 'tribute' is the service done by forced labour gangs overseen by taskmasters. Tributes were usually captured enemies. Under David there was an organised tribute department, Solomon merely carried this department forward, but also included foreigners and even some troublesome Israelites. Many were used for Solomon's extensive building projects. This latter use of tributes was the direct cause of tribes splitting off to form a northern kingdom. Use of men in this way was no different from prisoners today doing unpaid work for prison regimes, or as part of a court order.

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Verses 7-19

1.

And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision.

2.

And these are their names: The son of Hur, in mount Ephraim:

3.

The son of Dekar, in Makaz, and in Shaalbim, and Bethshemesh, and Elonbethhanan:

4.

The son of Hessed, in Aruboth; to him pertained Sochoh, and all the land of Hopher:

5.

The son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor; which had Taphath the daughter of Solomon to wife:

6.

Baana the son of Ahilud; to him pertained Taanach and Megiddo, and all Bethshean, which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel, from Bethshean to Abelmeholah, even unto the place that is beyond Jokneam:

7.

The son of Geber, in Ramothgilead; to him pertained the towns of Jair the son of Manasseh, which are in Gilead; to him also pertained the region of Argob, which is in Bashan, threescore great cities with walls and brasen bars:

8.

Ahinadab the son of Iddo had Mahanaim:

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9.

Ahimaaz was in Naphtali; he also took Basmath the daughter of Solomon to wife:

10.

Baanah the son of Hushai was in Asher and in Aloth:

11.

Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar:

12.

Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin:

13.

Geber the son of Uri was in the country of Gilead, in the country of Sihon king of the Amorites, and of Og king of Bashan; and he was the only officer which was in the land.

Solomon appointed twelve officers to provide him and his court with food. Each officer or commissariat was to give the food for a whole month once a year, to spread the cost and responsibility. These officers were high-ranking individuals, local chiefs, well able to give one-twelfth of their crops and fruit etc., to the king. The first mentioned is **Ben-Hur** (or, 'son of Chur') whose land included mount Ephraim.

Then there were **Ben-Dekar** of Makaz (actual site not known), who also owned a town in Dan, Shaalbim, and a town in Judah, Beth-shemesh. Another chief, **Ben-hesed**, lived in Aruboth, an area marked by Solomon for tax purposes. Ben-hesed also owned Shochoh (either a town in the lowlands of Judah or in the mountain district) and all of Hopher, west of the Jordan, once conquered by Joshua.

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Another commissariat was **Ben-Abinadab**, who owned the land south of Carmel, Dor, and a coastal city, Manasseh. He also married a daughter of the king, Taphath. Then we have **Baana**

, in Jezreel and land north of the Jordan valley (Taanach, Megiddo on the plain of Esdraelon, not far from Nazareth and mount Carmel, Bethshean in Manasseh, the birthplace of Elisha, and a city of refuge, Jokneam, given to the Levites).

Ben-geber, who lived in Ramothgilead, is another officer. He owned the 'towns of Jair' in Gilead, and the whole region of Argob in Bashan, east of the Jordan and very fertile. It contained 60 "great cities" fortified with copper bars.

In verse 14 **Ahinadab** is mentioned; he owned Mahanaim east of the Jordan. Another is **Ahimaz**, another son-in-law of Solomon, who owned Naphtali (land given to the tribe of the same name), **Baanah** owned Asher (from the tribe of Asher) and Aloth in south Judah.

Jehoshaphat, son of Paruah, owned land given to Issachar. **Shimei** owned the lands of the tribe of Benjamin, son of Jacob. The twelfth officer was **Geber**, son of Uri and overseer of Gilead. To the west was the Jordan; its northern flank was Bashan; on the east was the Arabian plateau; on the south were Moab and Ammon. The whole area was often called 'mount Gilead'. He was the only Israelite chief to live in the lands of the king of the Amorites, Sihon (defeated by Moses), and Og, king of Bashan last of the Rephaim giants.

As we can see, all of the commissars were wealthy men with much land, and so were well able to provide the royal court with food. The king could not rule and still be, say, a farmer. So, his subjects had to support him. There is a very loose analogy here to the New Testament teaching, to support pastors and those preaching the Gospel and teaching scripture (though not adhered to).

Verses 20-24

1.

Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking, and making merry.

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2.

And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life.

3.

And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal,

4.

Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl.

5.

For he had dominion over all the region on this side the river, from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings on this side the river: and he had peace on all sides round about him.

The text tells us that the people of Israel and Judah were “many”, as prophesied to their earliest forefathers. They were “eating and drinking, and making merry”. This does not mean they were wayward or sinning, but that they enjoyed Solomon’s reign of peace and were glad. In this context “merry” means to be glad, joyful, merry-hearted. Imagine if Christians suddenly had the curse of current national leadership removed and replaced by godly men! We, too, would then be ‘merry’!

The extent of Solomon’s kingdom is given. It covered everywhere west to the land of the Philistines, south to Egypt and east and north as well. All sub-rulers and kings supplied Solomon with gifts and provisions, “all the days of his life” (as promised by God). We then have a list of the foodstuffs needed to keep his family and court in provisions every day: 30 measures or *kor* of fine flour (each measure being 6.25 bushels or 220 litres/10 ephahs. Sixty measures were needed of meal (more flour, probably less fine). Ten well-fed oxen and 20 pasture-fed oxen were added, plus 100 sheep, with an unspecified number of harts (stags), roebucks (gazelle or an animal now extinct), fallow-deer (red in colour and often found today in great English estates), and specially fattened birds. These were provided by all the kings around

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Solomon's lands, over which he had "dominion".

Though his reign was powerful, surrounding kings treated Solomon peacefully. This rule extended east from the Euphrates river, Mesopotamia, over to Gaza (Philistine land). Israel and Judah, then, knew peace during Solomon's reign, thanks to his holy walk with God and to God's promises to him.

Verses 25-28

1.

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

2.

And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen.

3.

And those officers provided victual for king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every man in his month: they lacked nothing.

4.

Barley also and straw for the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the officers were, every man according to his charge.

Solomon's reign brought not just peace, but prosperity, depicted here as "every man under his vine and under his fig tree". In our own country today, we see discord and uncertainty, socially and financially, with assaults upon those who love God. This is a direct result of ungodliness in both the country and the churches.

We are given an indication of Solomon's initial wealth (which later grew substantially): he had

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40,000 stalls of chariot-horses, and 12,000 horsemen (which were extra to the horses used for the chariots). The court, king, and any high-ranking visitors, were supplied generously with food from his 12 officers, and he lacked nothing. And surrounding kings sent barley and straw to each of the 12 officers, who passed them on to the court from every corner of the kingdom. They also sent horses and camels. We do not see coercion, but a genuine, peaceful co-existence.

Verses 29-34

1.

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore.

2.

And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

3.

For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about.

4.

And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

5.

And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes.

6.

And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom.

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In return God gave Solomon “largeness of heart” (generosity), plus great wisdom and understanding. Do we see this generosity amongst Christians? Rarely, because most modern men think they should keep for themselves what they earn, instead of acknowledging that what they earn comes from God, belongs to Him, and should be shared amongst believers who need it (another attribute usually ignored today)

The wisdom of Solomon was known throughout his land and in lands of other nations. The seers and wise-men of every land knew that their own wisdom was no match for that of Solomon. We are given the names of several famed wise men of his period, all of whom had wisdom inferior to Solomon’s wisdom. We know almost nothing about the named persons, but they were famed for their wisdom.

Solomon uttered 3000 proverbs and wrote 1005 songs, all expressions of his wisdom. We are then told that he had knowledge of many natural things, such as trees, animals, birds, small crawling animals and insects, and fish. All gifted to him by God. Throughout his reign people came from far reaches to just listen to him speak, including kings. They all had heard of his wisdom and wanted to hear it for themselves. God has a way of using men for His purposes, often giving them extra knowledge coupled to understanding. And others recognise the gift.

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