

“The Wisdom of Good Government”
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Second in a series on King Solomon

1st Kings 4:1-29

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Please read the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Processes for policy development. Avenues of accountability. Measures of performance. Mechanisms for feedback and evaluation. Generally Accepted Accounting Principles.

All I have to do is start talking like this, whenever I want Barb to . . . leave me alone.

I’ve called this reflection, “The Wisdom of Good Government.” It’s a Canadian title. France’s motto is “*Liberté! Egalité! Fraternité!*” The American’s declared independence for “*Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.*” Us? Our constitution aspires to “*Peace, Order and Good Government.*” Feel the stirring within!

Through if you live without peace, or order, or good government —and so many do— effective governance is a dream.

I know the Bible passage Bonnie read isn’t the most gripping. It’s the sort we skim over. But stay with it. It’s got good news. This “wisdom of good government” . . . might even be interesting.

II

We’re looking at King Solomon. From his father David, he’d inherited a small empire. Israel had grown in land, influence and power.

Solomon was young and inexperienced. He knew it. So he asked God for one thing: wisdom. “*Give to Your servant a listening mind in order to govern Your people. . . .*¹ God gave Solomon wisdom. Solomon governed wisely.

Solomon wisely appointed a strong cabinet of ministers to oversee the government.

Solomon wisely set up a system of regional government. Each of the twelve regions provided income to run the king’s administration.

Solomon wisely brought in wealth from other nations under his control.

¹ 1st Kings 3:9 (Common English Bible)

Solomon wisely built his army into a state-of-the art fighting force.

Solomon governed wisely.

III

The people prospered.

They became “numerous like sand alongside the sea.”

They enjoyed “peace on all sides.”

Their economy was strong. Remember the list of the food required to sustain the royal palace, for just one day! The point is, the nation was wealthy enough to furnish such abundance.

They “ate, drank, and celebrated.”

They “lived securely under their vines and fig trees.” What a delightful way to put it! Vines and fig trees take time to cultivate, and grow, and produce. If you can sit under your vines and your fig trees, you must have been safely on your land for quite a while. It’s a sign of peace, prosperity, and flourishing under God’s gracious care.²

That was Solomon’s kingdom. He gave wise, good government.

IV

I was at a conference put on by a large Christian organization. They had workshops on all sorts of ways we can do God’s work in the world. After one set, a friend stopped me in the hallway. “I just went to this one,” he said. “You have to go too.”

It was called *The Ministry of Administration*.

It was led by the organization’s chief administrative officer. He told us about his first day working there. The very well-known and respected founder and head of the organization came into his office, sat on the side of his desk, and said, “I’m very glad you are here. The administrative work you handle is very important. It supports God’s ministry.”

² John Monson, “1 Kings” in John H. Walton, ed., Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Volume 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 24.

The first-day-on-the-job administrator said to the famous founder, *“Thank you. Now, if you talk like that again, I’m quitting.”* He explained administration work is as much God’s ministry as everything else the organization does. Thankfully the famous founder took that to heart, and the administrator stayed for years.

This is what many of you do. Your job is God’s ministry of administration. Maybe you work in government. Or public services like healthcare or education. Or you work in a business or a not-for-profit. You are an administrator. You do human resources, accounting, policy development, management, communications, information technology, or public relations. You help things run well.

Yours is godly work. God cares about your work. God’s Word talks about your kind of work. Good governance is part of God’s mission. Solomon knew this. He was wise.

V

Solomon was wise. But was everything right?

Remember, Solomon divided the nation into 12 regions. Israel had 12 tribes. The regions were different. The region-system competed with the tribe-system. The tribes rested on family relationships. Tribes were different from each. Tribes kept things local. The regions undercut the tribes. This was Solomon’s wisdom. Was it right?

The regions were designed to bring wealth into Solomon’s government. Taxes, for prestigious building projects, to strengthen the armed forces, build international trade, conduct foreign relations, and make the king very rich. The nation benefited. Solomon benefited most. This was Solomon’s wisdom. Was it right?

The regions were unequal. Solomon’s own area, Judah, was exempt. This was Solomon’s wisdom. Was it right?³

Remember, Solomon’s authority spread beyond Israel. “These areas brought tribute to Solomon,” we’re told. In other words, “sitting under vines and fig trees” peace and prosperity was bought with wealth extracted from other people. That’s how empires work. This is how our economy seems to be working. This was Solomon’s wisdom. Was it right?

³ Monson, 24.

Remember, Solomon appointed a cabinet. One minister oversaw the labour force. Actually, it was forced labour.⁴ Slaves. Also, ordinary people conscripted to do work for the king.⁵ This was Solomon's wisdom. Was it right?

Way back, when God's People were clamouring for king (because everyone else had one), God warned them.

He'll take your sons and make soldiers of them. . . . He'll put some to forced labor on his farms . . . and others to making either weapons of war or chariots in which he can ride in luxury. He'll put your daughters to work [in the palace]. He'll conscript your best fields, vineyards, and orchards and hand them over to his special friends. He'll tax your harvests and vintage to support his extensive bureaucracy. Your prize workers and best animals he'll take for his own use. He'll lay a tax on your flocks and you'll end up no better than slaves.⁶

Solomon did all this. With wisdom, yes. But was it right?

A danger of any king, or any system of government, or any bureaucracy, or any department, is that it starts assuming everything happens for it. It stops serving, and wants to be served. Its needs become more important. Its priorities become what matters. Following its systems, keeping to its policies becomes the goal. This isn't about being corrupt, or dishonest, or bad people. It's the way we are.

That man leading the workshop I went to was right to say that his good-governing work is God's mission-work like anything else done in that organization. He would have been wrong if he began thinking the organization existed to do his governing work.

VI

Thanks be to God, Solomon was a very wise king for his people. He went wrong when he thought the people were there for their king.

We have a ruler who is greater than Solomon, and who knows how to serve.

Jesus said to his disciples — that means to us — *"Kings rule over their subjects. . . . But that's not the way it will be with you. Instead, the greatest among you must become like a*

⁴ The word is *mas*. See <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/4522.htm>.

⁵ John Goldingay, *1 & 2 Kings for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 21. Goldingay gives a good description of the different kinds of labour relations that were practiced.

⁶ 1st Samuel 8:11-17 (The Message), adapted.

*person of lower status and the leader like a servant. . . . I am among you [said the Lord Jesus] as one who serves.*⁷

Administrators among us, we follow Jesus. Policy developers. Department heads. Managers. Supervisors. HR gurus and IT geeks. We follow Jesus. Family leaders, moms and dads — yes, good governance matters in those little organizations too — we follow Jesus.

Jesus is the King who shows us wisdom greater than Solomon. He shows us how to serve. For Jesus is God's Word, God's Wisdom. Amen.

⁷ Luke 22:25-27 (Common English Bible).