

1ST KINGS

Week 8, chapters 4 and 5

We'll finish up chapter 4 and get into chapter 5 of 1st Kings today. We're in a section of the Bible that deals with history more than establishing new God-principles. Thus in many cases the raw history is told without comment on whether the actions of the various characters were good or bad, moral or immoral, godly or carnal. It is up to the reader to discern and determine for oneself the nature of the King's and the people's decisions and choices.

How is the reader to determine this? By knowing God's laws and commands as they are written in the Torah. The people of Solomon's day were expected (by the Lord) to know right from wrong because Moses had laid it all out for them hundreds of years earlier. But by now they were nearly ignorant of the Torah Law and so a new law was established: the law of the King. The King determined the laws his subjects were to go by, and sometimes those laws agreed with the Torah Law and sometimes they didn't. The people didn't always seem to know the difference, and I think the King didn't either.

It is ironic that we Believers of the 21st century have found ourselves in a similar situation. The law of the land has generally replaced the Law of the Bible, God's laws. And sometimes we recognize the conflict between the two, and sometimes we don't. At other times we simply tolerate and acquiesce when our government's laws require us to disobey God's laws. And the reason for this (as concerns Believers in modern times) is the same as it was for the people of God's Kingdom in Solomon's time: ignorance (often willful) of God's commandments.

This is the reason that I rail against that portion of my beloved Church that insists that we are strictly a New Testament church and as such the Old Testament is dead to us. The Old Testament (especially the Torah) is where God's foundational principles, Governing Dynamics, laws, commandments, and regulations as carefully given and explained. The New Testament assumes the reader's knowledge of this, and thus does not repeat all the tenets of the older covenants. Since many in the Body of Christ have decided to not only skip that part of

their Bibles where God's instructions to us are contained, but even go so far as to label these divine instructions as defective or obsolete, we have made ourselves ignorant and so we rather easily accept the substitution of local civil law and a morality based on majority rule in place of God-ordained morality and lifestyle.

For instance: American governmental laws say that we are often not liable for the monetary debts we have incurred at our own free choice; God says we **are** liable. American governmental laws say that it is our choice whether to take the life of a murderer or merely to incarcerate them for a long time; God says their lives must be forfeit both as just payment for their offense and as a safeguard for society. American law says that abortion should be free, safe, and legal and it is wrong to even protest against it; God says it is an abomination before Him. And many Christians and Jews completely agree with these and other laws as the **new** definition of proper morality in American society because an elected majority has created these laws.

Watch closely as we journey through the two books of the Kings as the King's laws slowly and steadily (baby step by baby step) override God's laws, the people seem either unaware or uninterested in this development, and the Kingdom rapidly nosedives into confusion and chaos. At first everything seems to be wonderful; there is great prosperity, Israel is an admired superpower, and international leaders from all over the world come to see how Israel and its King were able to achieve such preeminence. But a few years later, within a handful of months of Solomon's death, Israel dissolves into two kingdoms, immorality reigns, and the remnants of this once great country become just like their pagan neighbors.

This is the price that is paid when God's people abandon God's laws and commandments and go our own way, believing that our hearts are pure enough and our civilization advanced enough to decide for ourselves what is right and what is wrong; what is good and what is evil. This is what happens when we unilaterally declare that God's ways are obsolete and were only for a more primitive people; and that we, on the other hand, are beyond such limits and restrictions.

1st Kings Chapter 4 contains two listings of officials in Solomon's administration. We went over the first list in verses 1 – 6 last week. These were essentially the folks who formed **Shlomo's** cabinet; they were the innermost circle of men closest to the king and with the full weight of national power at their disposal. The next list is actually the more interesting and impactful. In fact it is considered by many scholars as among the most crucial passages in the Bible for understanding the organization of Solomon's government and it gives a very accurate illustration not only of the internal governmental structure but also how the population of Israel

was distributed along tribal and ethnic lines. In other words, on the surface this is just a dry listing of names and territories; but underneath it is a wonderful snapshot in time that helps build a context for understanding Solomon's decisions and Israel's progress under him.

Let's re-read a portion of chapter 4.

RE-READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 4:7 – end

What is being described here is 12 commissioners assigned to 12 districts; these districts were formed to provide all the provisions needed for Israel's government. Let me say that in another way: these 12 districts were created to support Solomon and his vast royal court in a manner that **Shlomo** demanded and most kings expected. These districts do not necessarily always follow tribal boundaries but rather are socio-economic zones organized according to their economic capacity. In other words, Solomon and his advisors divided Israel up into taxation districts that often needed to cross tribal boundaries so that each taxation district had a sufficient economic base so as to provide the enormous levy that was required of them by the government. Theoretically the 12 districts should have been about equal in that regard, although no doubt they were not as politics played a significant role in determining the boundaries.

We'll go over them one by one rather rapidly and briefly; but know that 6 of the districts were defined by tribal areas, and the other 6 were defined by the towns used to create the definition of the districts. Further there is a disagreement among scholars as to whether this list included Judah or not. That is, many modern academics (Jewish and Christian) think that these 12 listed districts were strictly concerning the former northern kingdom while Judah was handled separately. We'll discuss this at the end of the list.

Before we start and some of you think that this is too academic or trivial for modern day Believers to bother with, I want to stress that there is no proper understanding of the remaining books of the Old Testament without understanding Israel's politics and tribal affiliations. It would like trying to correctly understand modern day America without knowledge of Plymouth Rock and the Christian Pilgrims, George Washington and our Revolutionary War, Abraham Lincoln and the bloody Civil War, and Roosevelt and WWII. Without understanding how we expanded from east to west, that we acquired much of the territory that forms our southwestern

states in a war with Mexico, and the role that slavery played in our national psyche and then later the Civil Rights movement, then to understand who we are today as a nation is not possible. Thus because foreigners don't have this knowledge they often get convoluted ideas about what some of our American national heritage celebrations mean, why we intentionally created a government system that can only move slowly and incrementally, why we view religion, race and ethnicity as we do, and so on. So hang in there as we deal with this list of districts and other historical issues in the Bible and you will be richly rewarded with a deeper and proper understanding of God's Word.

The first district was run by **Ben-Hur** (son of Hur) and consisted primarily of the hill country of Ephraim, but also included a bit of western Manessah. We'll see in Chapter 11 that this district is also called the district of the "House of Joseph", because it included territory from both of his sons. So even after all these centuries away from Egypt and the replacement of Joseph's tribe by his sons Ephraim and Manessah in Jacob's cross-handed blessing, it was understood that until some unknown future time these 2 sons were but placeholders for Joseph.

The second district is defined by the names of 4 cities, only a couple of which are known to us today: Beth-Shemesh and Shaalbim. This district is managed by Ben-Deker (son of Deker). It is located generally in the area that Dan formerly occupied before they migrated north, unable to defeat those Canaanites and Philistines who occupied their territorial allotment when Joshua arrived with those 3 million Israelites in tow.

Now would be a good time to mention that 5 of the taxation district commissioners were identified only by their family names and not their actual name. That is, each of the 5 is merely called "the son of so-and-so". Son is **ben** in Hebrew.

The third district was governed by **Ben-Hesed** and it ran along the Mediterranean Sea coast. This district was identified partly by clan territory called "the Land of Hefer", and partly by towns.

The fourth was identified only by the vital and powerful port city of Dor and a fellow named **Ben-Avinadav** operated it. Interestingly he was a son in law of **Shlomo** and no doubt that had much to do with his appointment to govern this important sea port that was critical to Israel's international commerce ambitions.

Verse 12 next speaks of **Ba'ana** as the commissioner over the great fertile northern valleys of Israel and the territory is defined by the well known cities of Taanach, Meggido (yes the Megiddo of Armageddon) and by Beth-Shean (that is today that enormous archeological ruin of a fabulous Roman city). This is the 5th district and if Israel had a breadbasket area, this is surely it. It was also an ancient, and continuing, thoroughfare for trader merchants and armies; great battles were fought there and the war to end all wars will be fought there in the future.

The 6th taxation district was governed by **Ben-Gever**, and this was territory that lay to the east of the Jordan River, mostly in an area that the Torah refers to as Bashan. It mentions a couple of cities by name and then says it encompassed 60 walled cities. A large area indeed and many people, Hebrew and gentile, lived there.

7th was what can only be described as the eastern Jordan Valley and is identified by only one city: Mahanaim. Interestingly Mahanaim was a royal city for a time, as it was used by **Ishbosheth**, son of Saul, when he took over as king from his deceased father (but ruled only briefly). Part of the tribal territory of Gad was included in this district.

The 8th district is identified as the tribal territory of Naphtali; **Achima'atz** was its commissioner and he too married one of King **Shlomo's** daughters. This is an area that would later be known as the Galilee. It sat in a very strategic region where crops grew abundantly, and access roads to all the compass directions were present. It was a kind of agriculture hub of commerce.

The Asher tribal territory is the next one and it probably included what we know as the territory of the tribe of Zevulun. As the 9th district it was overseen by **Ba'ana**. This is a different **Ba'ana** than the one I've listed as the 5th district. Just like today when certain names gain popularity for a time, it was obviously so among aristocrats that **Ba'ana** was a trendy name in that era.

The 10th one is called **Yissachar** (meaning the territory of the tribe of Issachar) and the commissioner was **Y'hoshaphat** (again, a different **Y'hoshaphat** than we ran across in the 1st list). It included the town of Jezreel and extended eastward towards the Jordan River valley.

The 11th district was run by **Shimei**, and is essentially the tribal territory of Benjamin. Notice that we have run into another **Shimei** who was a nemesis of David's, and who Solomon put to

death in revenge. He was also of the tribe of Benjamin; **Shimei** was a customary name used in that tribe.

The 12th district's identification is not entirely certain but all that really remains to assign is the southern section of the Trans-Jordan and Judah. Therefore the reference to Gilead is very likely meaning Gad's southern most areas, including Reuben's territory. And since it also speaks of Og and Bashan there is no doubt that this district is located entirely on the east side of the Jordan River and cannot include Judah.

But then the listing of the taxation districts ends with this cryptic statement: "Over all of these was one administrator in the land". The Jewish Publication Society says it ought to be translated as "and one officer that was over all the officers in the land". The noted Jewish scholars Rainey and Notley think it should be rendered "and one commissioner was in the land of Judah".

Here's what's causing the difficulty: there is no mention in this listing of districts and commissioners of a single city, town, or boundary that is in Judah. Rainey and Notley add the word "Judah" because they think that the term "the land" (in Hebrew **ha'ereztz**) can only be referring to Judah. Otherwise the territory of Judah is completely left off the list.

But what this also seems to indicate is that the tribal territory of Judah was dealt with a bit differently than all of the northern tribal territories when it came to taxation under Solomon. And, since **Shlomo** was of the tribe of Judah.....well, that's one reason you always hoped that the king would be from your own tribe. There was always direct benefit to the tribe when one of its own held national power.

Then we're given a further clue as verse 20 ends with the words that Judah and Israel were very numerous and that they all ate, drank, and enjoyed themselves. Two things: 1st, note that Judah and Israel are still spoken of as separate and identifiable entities and that is because despite the fact that they were both under the same king, they refused to give up their identities as belonging to either the northern or southern tribal coalitions as opposed to seeing themselves belonging to a single 12 tribe coalition. And it didn't help that Solomon gave Judah special treatment regarding taxation (and no doubt other matters as well). 2nd notice the "eat, drink and make merry" statement to end the passage. Very quickly the peace and prosperity under Solomon led to a free-flowing, pleasure seeking, carnal type of lifestyle in Israel. Part of this was because of the enormous influx of foreigners into Israel as both visitors and resident

aliens, and because Solomon demonstrated the greatest of tolerance for their customs and their religions with their various gods. Solomon developed quite a multi-cultural society. What (on its face) seemed so intellectual, high-minded, kind and economically profitable soon led Israel off a cliff into a valley of iniquity from which they never quite escaped. The wide road at the bottom of that valley led first to the Empire of Assyria and the scattering of the 10 northern tribes; and then later to Babylon, Judah's place of exile.

Let's move on to chapter 5. But before we do, you may notice that some of your Bibles continue on for another 15 verses in chapter 4; but Hebrew text based translations like the CJB move on to chapter 5. This causes no harm at all; this only has to do with a scholarly disagreement over where to end one chapter and start the next. All the verses and words are there no matter which version you are using. Since we're using the CJB, chapter 5 begins now.

READ 1ST KINGS CHAPTER 5 all

What is described in verse 1 is the largest expanse of territory that Israel has ever held and controlled. Although I'll make the point again at a later time, it is a sad truth that the short time that modern Israel has existed (63 years) is only slightly shorter than the mere 80 years that Israel existed as a unified sovereign nation under David and then Solomon. Israel's golden age was very brief.

The statement that describes the extent of **Shlomo's** rule over all the kingdoms (meaning gentile kingdoms) from the Euphrates to the Philistines to Egypt needs explanation. Just as in the last verse of chapter 4 when it was said that the residents of Judah and Israel were as numerous as grains of sand on the seashore, this is to be taken in the same vein as this statement of about Solomon ruling over **all** kingdoms from the Euphrates River southward to Egypt. Obviously there weren't trillions of Israelites equal in number to all the sand grains, and just as obviously Solomon didn't rule over EVERY kingdom south of the Euphrates River. For one thing the Euphrates River is over 1700 miles long, beginning in modern day Turkey and emptying into the Persian Gulf.

Please be aware that just as we use certain broad and expansive statements in our English language to communicate largeness or relatively high quantity, and we use other general

statements because there is no need to communicate something precisely, so it is in the Bible. Further, just as it is today, we usually speak in relation to our location, our culture, and in the context of whatever is the subject; the Bible does the same. So we have to be careful not to take biblical statements like the one which ends chapter 4, and the 1st one to begin chapter 5, as rigid and absolute.

Rather, the territory that forms Solomon's Israel is generally the land to the west side of the Euphrates, not towards the east. And it is speaking of land in relation to areas near the only land Israel had interest or divine rights in: the Promised Land. Thus Solomon's Israel generally controlled the land along both sides of the length of the Jordan River and what is modern day Syria, Jordan, and Israel including the so-called West Bank. What Solomon's Israel did NOT control was Lebanon and Phoenicia (but they had excellent diplomatic ties with those countries), and they did not control Philistine territory (what we think of as Gaza and then a few miles north), although there was peace. Israel's border with Egypt is almost identical to their border with Egypt today that ends at the Sinai.

There were a number of small and medium sized kingdoms of non-Hebrews in that large area controlled by **Shlomo**. And (as was usual for that time) a vassal king was installed by Solomon over those kingdoms or an existing king agreed to come under Solomon's control in exchange for being allowed to remain in power. The price for such an arrangement was that each kingdom agreed to give a specified amount of tribute on a regular basis to King Solomon who ruled over them all.

In verses 2 and 3 (chapter 4 verses 22 and 23 in some Bible versions) is a list of the food items needed to supply Solomon and his royal court. The numbers are staggering, and they are given in terms of what was needed daily! C.F. Kiel (the 19th century Christian commentator) calculates that this was sufficient provisions for 14,000 people. Other scholars have calculated as high as 60,000 people. The differences are generally based on what the meanings are of these ancient measures in relation to modern standard measures, and on how much a single person might require. Either way it shows us just how large Solomon's government had become in so short a time, and how many of that government the ordinary citizens had to support by giving up their own produce and livestock.

A little research into Persian and Arabian monarchies show that the size of the royal court in relation to the size of the overall population, and the amount of the levy to supply these government officials that is envisioned here in 1st Kings is commensurate with those Kings and Sultans of other cultures. So the biblical account in no way needs to be regarded as either exaggerated or exorbitant on **Shlomo's** part.

Verse 4 gives us a little more detail on the area of Israel under Solomon and it speaks of **Tifsach** (a city that lies along the Euphrates) all the way to Gaza (one of the Philistine cities). The key word here is peace; as much as his father David was a man who fought wars most of his life and during his reign, Solomon inherited peace and security and was thus free to seek to economic expansion. Saying from Dan to Be'er Sheva was an old traditional way of indicating "all of Israel". Saying a man lived under his fig tree and his vine meant a leisurely life, enjoying the fruits of what grew on his land and in his fields and orchards.

But verse 6 is problematic because the number of horses contemplated is enormous and probably not correct. Whereas 1st King 5 says that the number was 40,000, 2nd Chronicles 9 says that the number was 4000. Further, the number is not of horses, but rather of "stalls of horses", which leads to issue of how many horses per stall? Some rectify the discrepancy between Kings and Chronicles by saying that Chronicles actually lists stalls while Kings lists individual horses so therefore there must have been 10 horses per stall. But there is no evidence of that (Biblical or archeological) and the likelihood of Solomon having 40,000 horses is remote.

So no doubt the number is indeed stalls and the 40,000 is a copyist error that ought to read 4,000. And if we calculate that each of Solomon's 1400 chariots required 2 horses plus 1 as a spare (which was customary) that says that the need for all his chariots was 4200 horses. If each of his 12,000 horsemen had a horse, then the total number of horses needed would have been 12,000 plus the 4200 for the chariots, which equals 16,200. And that is a much more plausible number. No matter, for that era even that amount of horses was awesome.

Another interesting factor is that Egypt was the main supplier of horses to the Middle East in those days. There is no chance that Israel could have obtained so many horses without obtaining a substantial number of them from Egypt. Horses were very valuable animals and they were fearsome in battle; thus the nation that had them didn't sell them to just anyone. It's like today regarding military armaments; a nation that manufactures them sells them only to someone they are on friendly terms with and the armaments are often used as political bargaining chips. I have little doubt that the mention at the start of chapter 3 of Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh is part and parcel for the reason for the vast cavalry now at Solomon's disposal. But more, as Rashi pointed out, the marriage to Pharaoh's daughter began a steady downward slide in **Shlomo's** relationship with God, and thus in how he ruled over his kingdom. And this was because the marriage was nothing more nor less than the surety of an alliance between Egypt and Israel. This kind of alliance was NOT supposed to have happened; in fact it was forbidden.

Deut 17:14-17 CJB

¹⁴ "When you have entered the land ADONAI your God is giving you, have taken possession of it and are living there, you may say, 'I want to have a king over me, like all the other nations around me.'

¹⁵ In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose. He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you- you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman.

¹⁶ However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again.

¹⁷ Likewise, he is not to acquire many wives for himself, so that his heart will not turn away; and he is not to acquire excessive quantities of silver and gold.

Solomon was running headlong into trouble all the while thinking his brilliance was leading Israel into a new age of enlightenment and peace. In this short passage alone just look at the commandments of God that he was breaking (not only the letter but the spirit of the commandments). Should Israel appoint a king over themselves (something warned against), the Torah says that this king ought not to lead his people back towards Egypt. That is, they were not to create a relationship of alliance with Egypt. This did not necessarily mean that they were to war with Egypt; but to begin to intermingle politically, religiously, socially, and with intermarriage was forbidden. Not only that but the king was not to obtain a large number of horses or a large number of wives.

Solomon not only ignored these divine instructions he did the opposite to the extreme. The eventual outcome was inevitable.

