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Solomon’s Kingdom
First Kings 4: 1-28

Solomon’s kingdom DIG: What was Solomon’s Isra’el like economically? Militarily? Spiritually? What do these verses reveal about taxes? Who brought tribute? Why? What major project will Solomon use forced labor? How did the district governors supply the daily provisions for the royal court each month? What extra pressure might ben-Abinadab and Adoniram face under Solomon’s reign? What was the extent of Solomon’s kingdom?

REFLECT: Since the Israelites were once slaves themselves in Egypt, why would Solomon have forced labor? Wouldn’t you think he would have been extremely sensitive to that issue? Where is the forced labor where you live? Was Solomon indulgent? Since he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, is it any surprise that he was so privileged? What sacrifices can you make to help those who are less fortunate than you are? Who can you help this week?

The deep source of joy in Solomon’s kingdom was the faithful promises of God.



We find here an indication of the organizational development of the kingdom under **Solomon**. There had already been considerable changes made in **Isra'el** during the reigns of the previous two kings. Under **Sha'ul** the loose confederacy of twelve tribes began to be solidified into a kingdom, but his style of government seems to have been relatively modest and simple. There was no great central bureaucracy and no lavish court, and there is no record of any formal system of taxation. **David** developed a kingdom in a truer sense, and he had far greater and more lasting success in defeating **Isra'el's** enemies. **He** captured Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it a strong and permanent capitol. **David** seems to have had some system of internal taxation, and **he** certainly received **tribute** from **his** various vassal states. **Solomon**, therefore, inherited a stable kingdom. **He** did not expand the empire but did establish a well-organized and strong central government. **He** developed a system of taxation and forced labor to support **his** great building projects, the foremost being the Temple and the royal palace.[93]

Solomon's royal cabinet (4:1-6): The chapter begins with an orderly account of the members of the royal cabinet. **Solomon's** wisdom is now shown in **his** administrative abilities, including the choice of cabinet members. Today this information might be presented in the form of an organizational flow chart, but the Bible simply lists the names of **Solomon's** staff, with their official duties. The names of some of these men are familiar; we have met them before. The support of **Nathan**, **Zadok**, and **Benaiah** was critically important in **Solomon's** rise to power. It is not therefore surprising to see these men and their sons offer prophetic, priestly, and military leadership for the kingdom. **Solomon** put the right men in charge – men who were loyal to **his** kingship and willing to do kingdom work.[94]

So King Solomon ruled over all Isra'el. And this was his royal cabinet: Azariah, grandson of Zadok, was the high priest. He was **the son** of Ahimaaz the grandson of **Zadok, the priest** who had served **David** so faithfully. It appears that Ahimaaz had died and therefore his **son** was given the office **(Second Samuel 15:27** and **36; First Chronicles 6:8-9)**.

While **David** had only one scribe, **Solomon** had two, **Elihoreph and Ahijah,** who were the **sons of David's** scribe **Shisha. He** was also known as **Seriah (Second Samuel 8:17), Sheva (Second Samuel 20:25),** and **Shavsha (First Chronicles 18:16). Solomon's** kingdom was much larger and more complex than that over which **his father** ruled, so keeping records would have been more demanding.

Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud had been a **recorder** during **David's** reign **(Second**

Samuel 8:16), and **Benaiah son of Jehoiada** had been appointed **commander in chief** of the army by **Solomon (First King 2:35)**. **He** was born into a priestly family but chose military life instead.

Since both **Zadok** and **Abiathar** had served with **David**, hence **they** are found in this official roster. **Zadok the priest** had died and was replaced by **his** grandson **Azariah** (see above). It is somewhat surprising to see that despite **his** earlier opposition to **Solomon** (**to see link click Ap – Putting the Kingdom First: Solomon banishes Abiathar**), **Abiathar** was still **a priest** and was apparently restored to the royal court.

Azariah, son of Nathan, was in charge of the twelve district governors who supervised **the twelve** administrative **districts** that **Solomon** had created in **Isra'el** (see below). Wheather **his father** was **Nathan the prophet (First Kings 1:11), Nathan the son of David (Second Samuel 5:14),** or another man named **Nathan** is not explained. **It** was a popular name in **Isra'el**.

Zabud son of Nathan was **a priest** who served as a special **adviser to the king,** and **Ahishar** was **Solomon's palace administrator,** handling the complex affairs of **the king's** household once it was built.[95]

Yet one thing in this list seems to strike a sour note, especially for a nation that had been enslaved in Egypt. **Adoniram, son of Abda, was in charge of forced labor.** This was something the prophet **Samuel** had warned about when the people of **Isra'el** first clamored for a king. **Samuel** told them to be careful what they wished for, because one day their **king** would take their children and **force** them to do **his work (First Samuel 8:16-18).** Putting someone **in charge of forced labor** was another warning sign that **Solomon** was not the ideal **king**, and that tragic flaws in **his** character would eventually lead to **his** spiritual downfall.[96]

Solomon's administrative districts (4:7-21): Solomon marked out **twelve districts** of various sizes and put **a district governor over each one.** The boundaries of the districts ignored the traditional boundaries of the tribes and even included territory that David had conquered in battle. Each **district** provided food **for the king and the royal household each month**. It is likely that **the district governors** also collected taxes, supervised the recruiting of soldiers, and laborers for the Temple and **Solomon's** other building projects. By establishing new districts that crossed over old boundaries, **Solomon** may have hoped to minimize tribal loyalty and eliminate some tension between **Judah** and the other ten northern

tribes. Instead, the plan only aggravated the tension, especially since **Judah** was not included in the redistricting program. **Judah**, being the royal tribe that contained the royal City, was administered separately and was unchanged and untaxed.

Any king with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, plus numerous officers and frequent guests, would have a large household to feed. **The Queen of Sheva** came (see **Bu – Solomon and the Queen of Sheba**) with a very large entourage that must have included several hundred people. According to **4:22-23** below the provisions needed to feed the royal court were enormous. **Solomon** also needed grain for **his** many horses, which may have been how the **barley** was used. The conquered **nations** may have looked upon those monthly "donations" as part of **their tribute** to **King Solomon**, but the Jewish tribes considered the whole system to be a humiliating form of extortion.[97] After **Solomon's** death, it was no wonder that the ten northern tribes rose up in revolt against **his son Rehoboam** when **he** said: **My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke! My father controlled you with whips, but I will control you with scorpions (1 Kgs 12:14).**

These were their names:

Ben (Hebrew: meaning *son of*)**-Hur – in the hill country of Ephraim,** a fertile district between the land of Benjamin in the south and the plain of Jezreel in the north.

Ben-Deker – in Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh on the Jerusalem-Jaffa road **and Elon Bethhanan,** in the territory of Dan on the west side of the Judean hills.

Ben-Hesed – in Arubboth on the coastal plain between the southern part of the hills of Judah and the Mediterranean Sea **(Sokoh and all the land of king Hepher were his).**

Ben-Abinadab was **Solomon's** first cousin and son-in-law because **he was married to Taphath daughter of Solomon (First Samuel 16:8** and **17:13) –** the area of **Dor** on the sea-coast in the rich plain of Sharon between Mount Carmel and the Mediterranean.

Baana son of Ahilud, brother of Jehoshaphat – **in Taanach and Megiddo, and in all of Beth Shan next to Zarethan below Jezreel. His** area also ran south

from Beth Shan down the Jordan River west bank **to Abel Meholah across to Jokmeam.**

Ben-Geber – was in the mountainous country of the Transjordan around **Ramoth Gilead (the settlements of Jair son of Manasseh in Gilead were his, as well as the region of Argob in Bashan.** It's area was fertile and occupied by **sixty large walled cities with bronze gate bars).** It was the most northerly of the three districts on that side of the Jordan River.

Ahinadab son of Iddo – included south **Gilead** and the Gad tribal lands between Mo'av and Ammon on the south and Bashan on the north. **Mahanaim** was the capital under **Ishbaal (Second Samuel 2:8)** and **Absalom (Second Samuel 17:24)**.

Ahimaaz – in Naphtali and upper Galilee as far as Hazor on the west side of the Jordan. **He** was **the son** of **Zadok (Second Samuel 15:27)**. Having followed and served **David** in adversity, he was sure of Solomon's friendship which may have secured for him the hand of **Basemath, the king's** daughter.

Baana son of Hushai – in Asher and in Aloth between Naphtali and the Mediterranean Sea, including west Galilee (thus fulfilling **Genesis 49:13**).

Jehoshaphat son of Paruah – in Issachar (Joshua 19:17-23) which ran around Mount Gilboa and the Valley of Jezreel between Zebulun on the north and Manasseh on the south.

Shimei son of Ela – in Benjamin, north of Jerusalem and west of Jordan, comprising the southern central Ephriam highlands.

Geber son of Uri – in Gilead (traditionally **the country of Sihon king of the Amorites and the country of Og king of Bashan). He was the only governor over the district. His** area covered the Transjordan south and part of **Gilead**.[98]

However famous **they** were in their own day, these **men** in charge of **their districts** are no longer household names. It is easy for us to overlook people like this in the Bible, with all their unfamiliar and unpronounceable names. But the lives of these men mattered to them and to **God**, which reminds us that we matter also. In the Kingdom of **God**, every person matters. Most of the people in the world have no idea who we are, and our names may sound as strange to them as names like

Ben-Deker and **Ahinadab** sound to us. But every one of us has a name that is only known by **God** (see the commentary on **Revelation Bb – The Church at Pergamum**), as well as a spiritual gift or gifts to serve in **His** Kingdom. We should not be discouraged, therefore, if our service to **Messiah** seems insignificant or sometimes gets overlooked by others. **God** knows the people that belong to **Him** and remembers the work we do for **His** glory.[99]

The same gift that these men had is available to us today, by the work of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**. The B'rit Chadashah has a name for this gift: it is called **administration (Romans 12:8; First Corinthians 12:8).** Most people probably think administration as one of the less important spiritual gifts. Some people may even think that getting the congregations of God better organized will only set up a spiritual bureaucracy. But anyone who has ever been involved with something that was poorly planned and poorly executed knows how important this gift is.

The joy of **Solomon's** kingdom had a deeper source than simply **the king's** ability to get things organized. By itself, good organization is not able to bring true spiritual joy. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for a joyful kingdom. The deep source of joy in the kingdom of **Solomon** was the faithful promises of **God**. We see the promises kept in the happy summary that follows the list of **Solomon's district governors.**

The vocabulary here in **First Kings 4:20-21**, with all its talk of **sand on the seashore** and **kingdoms from the Euphrates River to Egypt,** refers directly to the covenant promises that **YHVH** made to **Abraham**. **The people of Judah and Isra'el were as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Gen 22:17); they were eating, drinking, and rejoicing. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt (Gen 15:18; Ex 23:31; Josh 1:4).** This did not fulfill the boundaries of the Land Covenant (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Fp – Restoration After Repentance**) because all those **kingdoms** were put under tribute and were not considered part of **Isra'el**. Now those promises of the Abrahamic covenant were coming true, to the joy of **God's** people. **Those nations brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life (Gen 12:2-3; 15:1, 18:18** and **22:17).** Now the wealth of **the nations** was flowing to **Solomon**, just as **God** had promised. Kings were coming to bring **tribute** to **his** royal treasury, swearing loyalty to **the house of David**, and promising loyal service to **Solomon** as **Isra'el's** mighty **king**. Through the reign of **Solomon's** kingdom, the blessing of **Abraham** was coming to **the nations**.[100]

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** for **Your** faithfulness to keep every promise **You** make! How awesome are **Your** promises to those who love **You, "For God Himself has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you' (Hebrews 13:5)."** How special it is to have the **God** of the universe always near to me. Not only are you always near to me, **You** are also **Almighty Sovereign God** who controls all! **ADONAI appeared to Abram, and He said to him, "I am El Shaddai (Genesis 17:1b-c).** Nothing is too hard for **You**. Life and death are in **Your** power. **You** are more powerful than a huge army with many soldiers (**Revelation 19:11-21). You** are our powerful, immovable **Rock! (Psalms 18:2, 31, 19:14, 31:3, 94:22).** How wonderful **Your** promise to go ahead of me to guide all that happens to me for my good. **Now we know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to His purpose (Romans 9:28). You** are Wonderful! It is with unspeakable depth of great love that I bow before **You** in humble adoration. In **Yeshua's** holy name and power of His resurrection. Amen*

Solomon's daily provisions (4:22-28): Such an impressive government required vast resources to continue operations. Estimates of the number of persons **Solomon** sustained vary from fourteen thousand to thirty-two thousand. These figures are not unusual given what other contemporaries of **Solomon** employed. Coupled with the military expenditures related to **the horses** mentioned, the money earmarked for the central government appears to be great. Still, the money may have been well spent, since **the Land** was at peace.[101]

Solomon's daily provisions (literally *bread, however, it embraces all kinds of food*) **were thirty cors (That is, probably about 5.5 tons or about 5 metric tons) of the finest flour and sixty cors (That is, probably about 11 tons or about 10 metric tons) of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphsah to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. During Solomon's lifetime** the people of **Judah and Isra'el, from Dan to Beersheba,** from the northernmost to the southernmost part of the Land**, lived in safety.** So that was the extent of his reign, north, south, east, and west. The statement that **everyone sat under their own vine and under their own fig tree (First Kings 4:22-25)** speaks of undisturbed prosperity, and this became a favorite catch phrase used by the prophets to point to the ideal conditions prevailing during the Messianic Kingdom **(Micah 4:4; Zechariah 3:10)**. The fact that a man could enjoy the fruit of the **vine** and the **fig tree** meant that the people

were able to develop their land without the disruption of war. In addition, the crop yields were abundant because of the blessing of **God**.[102]

But contrary to the teachings of the Torah, **Solomon** multiplied horses in the Land **(Deuteronomy 17:16),** and built special cities for housing **them**. **Solomon had forty thousand stalls for chariot horses, and twelve thousand horses for his charioteers (First Kings 4:26** and **10:26-29; Second Chronicles 1:14-17, 9:25** and **28).** Because **First Kings** was written before **Second Corinthians**, the seeming contradiction in **Second Chronicles 9:25,** reading **four thousand**, was probably a copyist error.

The district governors, each in his month, supplied provisions for King Solomon and all who came to the king's table. They saw to it that nothing was lacking. They also brought to the proper place their quotas of barley and straw for the chariot horses and the other horses (First Kings 4:27-28). It is interesting to realize that at this point in the story the author expresses neither approval or disapproval of **Solomon's** activities. Certainly, the author presents **Solomon** as a man made wise by **ADONAI**. Of course, the people seem happy now. Yet, the warnings of Moshe, especially the one about collecting **great numbers of horses,** and **Samuel's** cautions about royal excess **(First Samuel 8:10-18)** linger in our minds. What long-term good can come from such disobedience to **God's** Word?[103]

Everything good in **Solomon's** kingdom is greatly surpassed in the Kingdom of **Yeshua Messiah**, which is superior in every way. **His** Kingdom is better organized. This is the work of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, whom **Yeshua** has sent to bring order to your home, your place of worship, to order your life and relationships. This order is not imposed on us from the outside, but comes from the inside out, as **the Spirit** works within us to produce patience, forgiveness, gentleness, self-control, and the rest of the spiritual gifts (see the commentary on **First Corinthians Ct – The Priority of Love Over Spiritual Gifts**).

Messiah's Kingdom is bigger than **Solomon's** kingdom, with more people in it, coming from more nations. **Yeshua** said that when **He** was **lifted up, He** would **draw all people to Himself (John 12:32).** On the cross **He** took the guilt of our sins upon **Himself**, dying in our place, offering **His blood** to atone for our **sin**. But **Messiah** also announced **His** intention to save people from every nation. In being **lifted up**, **He** would **draw the nations to Himself**. And that is exactly what happened. Down through history, untold millions of people have joined the Kingdom

of **God**: saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in **Messiah** alone. And it is happening right now, as believers share the Gospel with their friends and families, as missionaries go into the whole world with the Good News. The promise made to **Abraham**, which was only partially fulfilled in the days of **King Solomon**, is coming true today.

How happy we are to belong to this great Kingdom! As the people of **God**, we find our true **joy** in the prosperity of **the King**. The more **He** is worshiped, the more we rejoice. This is why we love to see spiritual order come to broken lives and damaged relationships. It is why we take such an active interest in the Kingdom work that **ADONAI** is doing in our own community and around the world. The work of **God’s** Kingdom is the most important work in the world, and our **joy** is to see it grow.

As we minister in our giftedness, we do not depend on our own abilities, least of all in the area of administration. Rather, we depend on the Kingdom promise that **Yeshua** will be with us as we do **His** Gospel work in the power of **the Ruach**. Our desire is for **Yeshua Messiah** to receive as much honor as possible, from as many people as possible, in as many places as possible, for **He** alone deserves all the glory.[104]