

CHAPTER 4

An instance of the wisdom God granted to Solomon we had in the close of the foregoing chapter. In this we have an account of his wealth and prosperity, the other branch of the promise there made him. We have here,

I. The magnificence of his court, his ministers of state (v. 1-6), and the purveyors of his household (v. 7-19), and their office (v. 27, 28).

II. The provisions for his table (v. 22, 23).

III. The extent of his dominion (v. 21-24).

IV. The numbers, case, and peace, of his subjects (v. 20-25).

V. His stables (v. 26).

VI. His great reputation for wisdom and learning (v. 29-34).

Thus great was Solomon, but our Lord Jesus was greater than he (^{<122>}Matthew 12:42), though he took upon him the form of a servant; for divinity, in its lowest humiliation, infinitely transcends royalty in its highest elevation.

<100>1 KINGS 4:1-19

SOLOMON'S OFFICERS

Here we have,

I. Solomon upon his throne (v. 1): *So king Solomon was king*, that is, he was confirmed and established king *over all Israel*, and not, as his successors, only over two tribes. He was a king, that is, he did the work and duty of a king, with the wisdom God had given him. Those preserve the name and honour of their place that mind the business of it and make conscience of it.

II. The great officers of his court, in the choice of whom, no doubt, his wisdom much appeared. It is observable,

1. That several of them are the same that were in his father's time. Zadok and Abiathar were then priests (^{<A185>}2 Samuel 20:25), so they were now; only then Abiathar had the precedency, now Zadok. Jehoshaphat was then recorder, or keeper of the great seal, so he was now. Benaiah, in his father's time, was a principal man in military affairs, and so he was now. Shisha was his father's scribe, and his sons were his, v. 3. Solomon, though a wise man, would not affect to be wiser than his father in this matter. When sons come to inherit their father's wealth, honour, and power, it is a piece of respect to their memory, *caeteris paribus* — where it can properly be done, to employ those whom they employed, and trust those whom they trusted. Many pride themselves in being the reverse of their good parents.

2. The rest were priests' sons. His prime-minister of state was *Azariah the son of Zadok the priest*. Two others of the first rank were the sons of Nathan the prophet, v. 5. In preferring them he testified the grateful respect he had for their good father, whom he loved *in the name of a prophet*.

III. The purveyors for his household, whose business it was to send in provisions from several parts of the country, for the king's tables and cellars (v. 7) and for his stables (v. 27, 28), that thus,

1. His house might always be well furnished at the best hand. Let great men learn hence good house-keeping, to be generous in spending according to their ability, but prudent in providing. It is the character of the virtuous woman that she *bringeth her food from afar* (^{<A114>}Proverbs 31:14), not far-fetched and dear-bought, but the contrary, every thing bought where it is cheapest.

2. That thus he himself, and those who immediately attended him, might be eased of a great deal of care, and the more closely apply themselves to the business of the state, not troubled about much serving, provision for that being got ready to their hand.

3. That thus all the parts of the kingdom might be equally benefited by the taking off of the commodities that were the productions of their country and the circulating of the coin. Industry would hereby be encouraged, and consequently wealth increased, even in those tribes that lay most remote from the court. The providence of God extends itself to all *places of his dominions* (^{<A32>}Psalms 103:22); so should the prudence and care of princes.

4. The dividing of this trust into so many hands was prudent, that no man might be continually burdened with the care of it nor grow exorbitantly rich with the profit of it, but that Solomon might have those, in every district, who, having a dependence upon the court, would be serviceable to him and his interest as there was occasion. These commissioners of the victualling-office, not for the army or navy (Solomon was engaged in no war), but for the household, are here named, several of them only by their surnames, as great men commonly call their servants: *Ben-hur, Ben-dekar, etc.*, though several of them have also their proper names prefixed. Two of them married Solomon's daughters, Ben-Abinadab (v. 11) and Ahimaaz (v. 15), and no disparagement to them to marry men of business. Better match with the officers of their father's court that were Israelites than with the sons of princes that were *strangers to the covenant of promise*. The son of Geber was in Ramoth-Gilead (v. 19), and Geber himself was in the country of Sihon and Og, which included that and Mahanaim, v. 14. He is therefore said to be *the only officer in that land*, because the other two, mentioned v. 13, 14, depended on him, and were subordinate to him.

<100>1 KINGS 4:20-28

THE SUPPLY OF SOLOMON'S HOUSEHOLD

Such a kingdom, and such a court, surely never any prince had, as Solomon's are here described to be.

I. Such a kingdom. Never did the crown of Israel shine so brightly as it did when Solomon wore it, never in his father's days, never in the days of any of his successors; nor was that kingdom ever so glorious a type of the kingdom of the Messiah as it was then. The account here given of it is such as fully answers the prophecies which we have concerning it in Psalm 72, which is a psalm for Solomon, but with reference to Christ.

1. The territories of his kingdom were large and its tributaries many; so it was foretold that he should *have dominion from sea to sea*, <19718>Psalm 72:8-11. Solomon reigned not only over all Israel, who were his subjects by choice, but over all the neighbouring kingdoms, who were his subjects by constraint. All the princes from the river Euphrates, north-east to the border of Egypt south-west, not only added to his honour by doing him homage and holding their crowns from him, but added to his wealth by

serving him, and bringing him presents, v. 21. David, by his successful wars, compelled them to this subjection, and Solomon, by his admirable wisdom, made it easy and reasonable; for it is fit that the fool should be *servant to the wise in heart*. If they gave him presents, he gave them instructions, and still *taught the people knowledge*, not only his own people, but those of other nations: and *wisdom is better than gold*. He had *peace on all sides*, v. 24. None of all the nations that were subject to him offered to shake off his yoke, or to give him any disturbance, but rather thought themselves happy in their dependence upon him. Herein his kingdom typified the Messiah's; for to him it is promised that he shall have the *heathen for his inheritance* and that *princes shall worship him*, ^{<3406>}Isaiah 49:6, 7; 53:12.

2. The subjects of his kingdom and its inhabitants, were many and cheerful.

(1.) They were numerous and country was exceedingly populous (v. 20): *Judah and Israel were many*, and that good land was sufficient to maintain them all. *They were as the sand of the sea in multitude*. Now was fulfilled the promise made to Abraham concerning the increase of his seed (^{<0227>}Genesis 22:17), as well as that concerning the extent of their dominion, ^{<0158>}Genesis 15:18. This was their strength and beauty, the honour of their prince, the terror of their enemies, and an advancement of the wealth of the nation. If they grew so numerous that the place was any where too strait for them, they might remove with advantage into the countries that were subject to them. God's spiritual Israel are many, at least they will be so when they come all together, ^{<0170>}Revelation 7:9.

(2.) They were easy, they dwelt safely, or with confidence and assurance (v. 25), not jealous of their king or of his officers, not disaffected either to him or one to another, nor under any apprehension or danger from enemies foreign or domestic. They were happy and knew it, safe and willing to think themselves so. They dwelt every man under *his vine and fig-tree*. Solomon invaded no man's property, took not to himself their vineyards and olive-yards, as sometimes was the manner of the king (^{<0084>}1 Samuel 8:14), but what they had they could call their own: he protected every man in the possession and enjoyment of his property. Those that had vines and fig-trees ate the fruit of them themselves; and so great was the peace of the country that they might, if they pleased, dwell as safely under the shadow of them as within the walls of a city. Or, because it was usual to have *vines*

by the sides of their houses (^{<49C8B>}Psalm 128:3), they are said to *dwell under their vines*.

(3.) They were cheerful in the use of their plenty, *eating and drinking, and making merry*, v. 20. Solomon did not only keep a good table himself, but enabled all his subjects, according to their rank, to do so too, and taught them that God gave them their abundance that they might use it soberly and pleasantly, not that they might hoard it up. *There is nothing better* than for a man to *eat the labour of his hands* (^{<21024>}Ecclesiastes 2:24), and that *with a merry heart*, ^{<21007>}Ecclesiastes 9:7. His father, in the Psalms, had led his people into the comforts of communion with God, and now he led them into the comfortable use of the good things of this life. This pleasant posture of Israel's affairs extended, in place, from Dan to Beer-sheba — no part of the country was exposed nor upon any account uneasy; and it continued a long time, *all the days of Solomon*, without any material interruption. Go where you would, you might see all the marks of plenty, peace, and satisfaction. The spiritual peace, and joy, and holy security, of all the faithful subjects of the Lord Jesus were typified by this. *The kingdom of God is not*, as Solomon's was, *meat and drink*, but, what is infinitely better, *righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost*.

II. Such a court Solomon kept as can scarcely be paralleled. We may guess at the vast number of his attendants, and the great resort there was to him, by the provision that was made daily for his table. Of bread there were so many measures of flour and meal as, it is computed, would richly serve 3000 men (Carellus computes above 4800 men), and the provision of flesh (v. 23) was rather more in proportion. What vast quantities were here of beef, mutton, and venison, and the choicest of all *fatted things*, as some read that which we translate *fatted fowl!* Ahasuerus, once in his reign, made a *great feast*, to *show the riches of his kingdom*, ^{<100B>}Esther 1:3, 4. But it was much more the honour of Solomon that he kept a constant table and a very noble one, not of dainties or deceitful meats (he himself witnessed against them, ^{<313B>}Proverbs 23:3), but substantial food, for the entertainment of those who came to hear his wisdom. Thus Christ fed those whom he taught, 5000 at a time, more than ever Solomon's table would entertain at once: and all believers have in him a continual feast. Herein he far outdoes Solomon, that he feeds all his subjects, not with the bread that perishes, but *with that which endures to eternal life*. It added much both to the strength and glory of Solomon's kingdom that he had such abundance of horses, 40,000 for chariots and 12,000 for his troops,

1000 horse, perhaps, in every tribe, for the preserving of the public peace, v. 26. God had commanded that their king should not multiply horses (^{<05176>}Deuteronomy 17:16), nor, according to the account here given, considering the extent and wealth of Solomon's kingdom, did he multiply horses in proportion to his neighbours; for we find even the Philistines bringing into the field 30,000 chariots (^{<09175>}1 Samuel 13:5) and the Syrians at least 40,000 horse, ^{<10018>}2 Samuel 10:18. The same officers that provided for his house provided also for his stable, v. 27, 28. Every one knew his place, and work, and time; and so this great court was kept without confusion. Solomon, that had vast incomes, lived at a vast expense, and perhaps wrote that with application to himself, ^{<20511>}Ecclesiastes 5:11. *When goods increase those are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes, unless withal they have the satisfaction of doing good with them?*

^{<1029>}1 KINGS 4:29-34

SOLOMON'S DISTINGUISHED REPUTATION

Solomon's wisdom was more his glory than his wealth, and here we have a general account of it.

I. The fountain of his wisdom: *God gave it him*, v. 29. He owns it himself. ^{<1016>}Proverbs 2:6, *The Lord giveth wisdom*. He gives the powers of reason (^{<13335>}Job 38:36), preserves and improves them. The ordinary advances of them are owing to his providence, the sanctification of them to his grace, and this extraordinary pitch at which they arrived in Solomon to a special grant of his favour to him in answer to prayer.

II. The fulness of it: *He had wisdom and understanding, exceeding much*, great knowledge of distant countries and the histories of former times, a quickness of thought, strength of memory, and clearness of judgment, such as never any man had. It is called *largeness of heart*; for the heart is often put for the intellectual powers. He had a vast compass of knowledge, could take things entire, and had an admirable faculty of laying things together. Some, by his *largeness of heart*, understand his courage and boldness, and that great assurance with which he delivered his dictates and determinations. Or it may be meant of his disposition to do good with his

knowledge. He was very free and communicative, had the gift of utterance as well as wisdom, was as free of his learning as he was of his meat, and grudged neither to any that were about him. Note, It is very desirable that those who have large gifts of any kind should have large hearts to use them for the good of others; and this is *from the hand of God*, ^{<2024>}Ecclesiastes 2:24. He shall *enlarge the heart*, ^{<882>}Psalms 119:32. The greatness of Solomon's wisdom is illustrated by comparison. Chaldea and Egypt were nations famous for learning; thence the Greeks borrowed theirs; but the greatest scholars of these nations came short of Solomon, v. 30. If nature excels art, much more does grace. The knowledge which God gives by special favour goes beyond that which man gets by his own labour. Some wise men there were in Solomon's time, who were in great repute, particularly Heman, and others who were Levites, and employed by David in the temple-music, ^{<359>}1 Chronicles 15:19. Heman was *his seer in the word of God*, ^{<375>}1 Chronicles 25:5. Chalcol and Darda were own brothers, and they also were noted for learning and wisdom. But *Solomon excelled them all* (v. 30), he out-did them and confounded them; his counsel was much more valuable.

III. The fame of it. It was talked of *in all nations round about*. His great wealth and glory made his wisdom much more illustrious, and gave him those opportunities of showing it which those cannot have that live in poverty and obscurity. The jewel of wisdom may receive great advantage by the setting of it.

IV. The fruits of it; by these the tree is known: he did not bury his talent, but showed his wisdom,

1. In his compositions. Those in divinity, written by divine inspiration, are not mentioned here, for they are extant, and will remain to the world's end monuments of his wisdom, and are, as other parts of scripture, of use to make us *wise unto salvation*. But, besides these, it appears by what he spoke, or dictated to be written from him,

(1.) That he was a moralist, and a man of great prudence, for he spoke 3000 *proverbs*, wise sayings, apophthegms, of admirable use for the conduct of human life. The world is much governed by proverbs, and was never better furnished with useful ones than by Solomon. Whether those proverbs of Solomon that we have were any part of the 3000 is uncertain.

(2.) That he was a poet and a man of great wit: *His songs were* 1005, of which one only is extant, because that only was divinely inspired, which is therefore called his *Song of songs*. His wise instructions were communicated by proverbs, that they might be familiar to those whom he designed to teach and ready on all occasions, and by *songs*, that they might be pleasant and move the affections.

(3.) That he was a natural philosopher, and a man of great learning and insight into the mysteries of nature. From his own and others' observations and experience, he wrote both of plants and animals (v. 33), descriptions of their natures and qualities, and (some think) of the medicinal use of them.

2. In his conversation. There came persons from all parts, who were more inquisitive after knowledge than their neighbours, to *hear the wisdom of Solomon*, v. 34. Kings that had heard of it sent their ambassadors to hear it and to bring them instructions from it. Solomon's court was the staple of learning, and the rendezvous of philosophers, that is, the lovers of wisdom, who all came to light their candle at his lamp and to borrow from him. Let those who magnify the modern learning above that of the ancients produce such a treasure of knowledge any where in these latter ages as that was which Solomon was master of; yet this puts an honour upon human learning, that Solomon was praised for it, and recommends it to the great men of the earth, as well worthy their diligent search. But,

Lastly, Solomon was, herein, a type of Christ, *in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*, and hidden for use; for he is *made of God to us wisdom*.