

What the Bible Says About Big Government, Pt. 2

This is the second part of a two-part article on the Bible's teaching about big government. For part one, [click here](#).

David and Solomon

David succeeded Saul as king, united the people of Israel under his rule, defeated their enemies, pushed the borders of his domain south to the Gulf of Aqaba, an arm of the Red Sea, and by treaty with vassals extended his control north and eastward to the Euphrates River.

Thrusting aside an attempt of an older brother to become king, Solomon followed David, his father, on the throne. His reign was marked by lavish construction programs and public works projects. An extensive bureaucracy was established to man the elaborate governmental structure Solomon created. Twelve administrative regions were defined and each was to provide the taxes and other resources to support the king and his government for one month of each year. Solomon took as one of his wives a daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh and built her a luxurious residence. He also built a temple at Jerusalem to be the center of worship for the entire nation. He was described as having "wisdom and great depth of understanding as well as compassion, as vast as the sand on the seashore" (1 Kings 4:29). At the same time, however, the Scripture speaks repeatedly of Solomon's use of forced labor and it tells of the hundreds of wives and concubines that he took. History casts doubt on the wisdom of a ruler who burdens his people with oppressive taxation and encumbers them with the upkeep of a sprawling bureaucracy and a parasitic court.

Like the Roman Catholic popes of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Solomon mulcted the people of the resources to

build imposing structures and create works of art. The popes left great paintings and sculpture, as Solomon left a temple that stood for four centuries, but the exactions of the popes brought schism to the church and those of Solomon brought rebellion in the kingdom when his son, Rehoboam, succeeded him.

After the death of Solomon the people who assembled for the coronation of Rehoboam came to the new king with a plea: "Your father made our yoke heavy. Now therefore, lighten your father's labor and heavy yoke that he put on us, and we will serve you" (2 Chr. 10:4). Rehoboam sent them away for three days while he consulted first with the elders who had advised his father and then with his youthful associates. In the end he rejected the counsel of the elders that he accede to the people's wishes. Instead he took the advice of his contemporaries and when the people returned for his answer, he told them, "My father made your yoke heavy, but I will increase it. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" (2 Chr. 10:14). Their appeal rejected, the people cried out, "To your tents, O Israel!" (1 Kings 12:16). And the historian records in 1 Kings 12:19, "So Israel rebelled against the house of David, *and it remains so even to this day.*"

The Scriptures say that Saul and David and Solomon each reigned for 40 years. So 120 years passed, or approximately four generations, from the time when the people abandoned limited government until the time when their descendants did "cry out" because of the king they had chosen. By 600 B.C. or earlier the people of Israel had learned, however, that government is indeed force – a dangerous servant and a fearful master.

The Role for Government

If government is force, as the serious students of the subject have agreed, what kinds of things should government do? The

answer is obvious. Government should do those things that can be properly done by the use of force. The question follows: What are the proper uses of force among responsible adults?

Nobody has answered that question more clearly than the nineteenth century French statesman, Frederic Bastiat: "Every individual has the right to use force for lawful self-defense. It is for this reason that the collective force—which is only the organized combination of the individual forces—may lawfully be used for the same purpose; and it cannot be used legitimately for any other purpose."

Government, therefore, is to be used to defend, to protect, to prevent violence, fraud, and other predatory acts. Other endeavors are to be left to the initiative and the choices of people acting voluntarily, either jointly or as individuals. In short, government should do what the judges of Israel did.

Obviously that is not the direction Americans have been moving for the past two generations. Instead, as noted earlier, a naive faith that government can solve all problems has taken root and persists in spite of the repeated failures of government social programs. But it makes no difference that large numbers hold a wrong view. Right is not determined by majority vote. As Anatole France stated, "If 50 million people say a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing." And Supreme Court Justice George Sutherland said, "A foolish law does not become a wise law because it is approved by a great many people." Right, like truth, is usually discerned first by a minority, often in the beginning a minority of one.

Everybody Is Responsible

Everybody has a stake in preventing the unprincipled members of society from committing acts of violence or fraud upon peaceful persons, and should help pay a part of the cost of the police and defense mechanism necessary to protect people in their peaceful pursuits. Government is society's mechanism

for protecting and defending; it properly collects taxes to pay for these services. But when it takes from some persons what belongs to them and gives it to other persons to whom it does not belong, government commits an act of plunder. One person who uses force or the threat of force to take from another what has been honestly earned or built or created, commits an immoral act and a crime. Two or more persons banding together do not acquire any moral rights that they did not have as individuals. When government provides benefits for one citizen at the expense of another by doing what the citizen himself cannot do without committing a crime, it performs an act of plunder.

Not only is governmental plunder immoral, it reduces the general well-being of the people. It does so by taking away from some people what they have produced but are not permitted to use. It reduces well-being by distributing to other people what they have not been required to produce. Both the producers and the receivers are thus deprived of incentive. And government reduces the general well-being by creating an unproductive administrative bureaucracy to do the taking away and the distributing. Society needs the productivity of all its able members.

The Lesson

Shifted to producing goods and services that can be exchanged in the marketplace, the legions of bureaucrats could add materially to human well-being.

How is the situation to be corrected that has been allowed to develop? Rose Wilder Lane points the way: "The great English reform movement of the 19th century consisted wholly in repealing laws." What is needed in the United States is to repeal laws, not to pass new ones. Repeal laws that vest some men with authority over other men. This is not to set the clock back, it is to set it right.

In the same way Samuel warned the people of Israel when they chose big government, various prophets have warned the people of America. Prophets can only tell *what* to expect, however, not *when* to expect it. More than a century of suffering passed before the people of Israel rose to throw off the yoke from their necks. {eo}

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