

Limited Civil Government

2 Samuel 20:23-26

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-18-2014

Introduction

George Washington once said, “A government is like fire, a handy servant, but a dangerous master.”¹ His point was that (like fire) when civil government is kept under control, it can serve a great purpose, but when it gets out of control and begins to dominate the culture, it destroys. And the history of civil government is mostly the history of destruction because it has rarely kept itself within the stove or fireplace (or the Biblical proportions) that God has called it to. And George Washington knew that history. He knew how civil governments have destroyed lives, the value of money, property, freedom, initiative, moral character, planning, and have had a tendency to destroy not only competing governments, but anything that competes with its monopoly. And this destructive nature made most of the founding fathers of America fear efficient civil government and to figure out every way they could have checks and balances to contain the fire. The almost universal belief in total depravity made them fear both a centralizing government as well as anarchy (which means no government).

But (much as I like George Washington) Scripture casts a vision of a civil government that is far more limited than even he believed in. I think that Patrick Henry was a bit closer to the truth. Let me read you Washington’s statement again, and I will explain the problematic phrase. He said, “A government is like fire, a handy servant, but a dangerous master.” Scripture would go further and say that the civil government is not supposed to be a handy servant. In fact, Scripture would say that the moment a population sees the civil government as a handy servant, it becomes destructive. And it becomes destructive because in order to be a handy servant to you it must steal from somebody else. It may not be stealing money – it may be stealing liberty, time, opportunity, or something else. But the moment a government becomes a handy servant to you, Saint Augustine says that it is no different than a robber or a pirate.

And I am very deliberately going to start with a quote from Saint Augustine to show you that the heart of what I am going to be talking about this morning is not weird and far out, but has a long history in mainstream

¹ Cited by Evan Osborn, *Reasonably Simple Economics* (New York: Apress, 2013), p. 120.

Christianity. Augustine was the greatest theologian that the church has ever had, respected by both the east and the west. He lived from 354-430 AD. I will be quoting from his most famous book, *The City of God*. In that book, Augustine said that when a civil government is not built on Biblical justice and restrained to its Biblical proportions, it automatically becomes a society of robbers that pillage and destroy. Let me quote him at length.

Remove justice, then, and what are kingdoms but large gangs of robbers? And what are gangs of robbers but small kingdoms? The gang, too, is a group of men ruled by a leader's command. It is bound together by a pact of association, and its loot is divided according to an agreed law. If, by constantly adding desperate men, this scourge grows to such an extent that it acquires territory, establishes a home base, occupies cities, and subjugates peoples, it more openly assumes the name of kingdom, a name now publicly conferred on it due not to any reduction in greed but rather to the addition of impunity. For it was a witty and true response that a certain captured pirate made to the famous Alexander the Great.²

For when that king had asked the man what he meant by keeping hostile possession of the sea, he answered with bold pride, "What thou meanest by seizing the whole earth; but because I do it with a petty ship, I am called a robber, whilst thou who dost it with a great fleet art styled emperor."³

Augustine was saying that civil government is actually *more* dangerous than piracy because it tends to become a monopoly of pillage, control, and destruction. Or to use our beginning analogy, when civil government is not restricted to the tiny stove that God made for it, it will consume the whole house. And the thesis of today's sermon on limited government is that if Civil Government is to cease to be a cancer sucking the life out of society after society, it must see itself as a humble servant of God that refuses to serve you on any issue that God has not given it jurisdiction to do. In other words, this morning I hope to prod you to consider the kind of limited government advocated by Gary North, Joel McDurmon, R. J. Rushdoony, Mark Rushdoony, Martin Selbrede, Bojidar Marinov, Augustine, the Puritans, the Scottish Reformers, Patrick Henry, and so many others.

² This portion of the quote is taken from William Babcock's translation, *The City of God, Books 1-10* (New York: New City Press, 2012), p. 112. Can be purchased here: http://www.amazon.com/City-God-Augustine-Translation-Century/dp/156548455X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1400159879&sr=1-1&keywords=%22The+city+of+God%22+babcock

³ This portion of the quote is taken from Philip Schaff, eds. *St. Augustine: The City of God and Christian Doctrine*. vol. II of A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Accordance electronic ed. (New York: Christian Literature Publishing, 1886), n.p. Or can be purchased here http://www.amazon.com/dp/1598563378/ref=rdr_ext_tmb, p. 101. Babcock's translation misses the stealing import. It translates this:

When the king asked the man what he meant by infesting the sea, he defiantly replied, "Just what you mean when you infest the whole world! But because I do it with one tiny ship, I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are called an emperor." (p. 112).

I. Note the small size of David's cabinet

A. The only added office was over tribute revenue (Adoram)

And the first thing to notice from this passage is the small size of David's cabinet. Count them up: Joab, Benaiah, Adoram, Jehoshaphat, Sheva, Zadok, Abiathar, and Ira. That makes a total of eight positions on David's entire cabinet. Compare that to 23 on our Whitehouse cabinet. There are 39 on Prime Minister Harper's cabinet in Canada. There are 34 cabinet ministers in the United Kingdom. So just by itself, that gives us a little bit of a hint of the small size of David's government. Under point II we will see that what is far more significant than the number of cabinet members is the number of departments and sub-departments that David was responsible for. But in any case, a cabinet of eight is fairly small.

And if you compare the cabinet at the beginning of David's reign in chapter 8 with this one during the last years of David's reign, you will notice only two changes: The first change was that a new department was added, the department of revenue, headed up by Adoram. Though we will see that this department only dealt with revenue and labor from conquered nations, it was a small addition that grew to unbiblical proportions under Solomon and grew even larger under Rehoboam. Growth of departments seems to be the usual trajectory that civil governments have. And so it is remarkable that this is the only additional department that David added. In any case, because of all the nations that had tried to wipe Israel off the face of the map during the past few years, it got complicated to oversee the very Biblical war reparations that were flowing in to the country and to make sure that they were just – that they did not go beyond what Biblical law allowed. So at some point between chapter 8 and this chapter, David needed to add Adoram and not make the military take care of that function.

B. Notice that Ira replaces David's sons as chief ministers

The other change is that David replaced his sons with one cabinet member - Ira. All of his sons had previously been cabinet members, and David downsizes the cabinet to some degree. We aren't told why he removed his sons. Perhaps he had felt burned by Absalom. Perhaps he wanted the nation to see that there was no nepotism in his administration. Perhaps he had realized that these positions needed to be occupied based on abilities, not simply relationship. Who knows? – maybe the states told him that they would not allow his children to be on the cabinet. We aren't told.

But in any case, the cabinet was slightly downsized. But the point is that it remained small throughout David's entire reign.

C. Otherwise, the officers are exactly the same as twenty years before when David "administered judgment and justice to all his people" (8:15)

And that is hugely significant. It is significant first of all because God approved of such a small government. For proof, take a look at 2 Samuel 8:15. This begins the list near the beginning of David's reign as a king over the whole nation. It says,

2Sam. 8:15 So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people.

And then begins the first listing of David's earlier cabinet. And here is the point: the passage shows no sense of lack or inadequacy in this national government. Instead, we see that God approves of this limited government. This is God Himself speaking through the narrator. As far as God was concerned, that cabinet and what it represented was all that was needed in order for David to be able to rule the nation Biblically and with good judgment and justice. That's God's declaration that you don't need a huge government in order to do all that God wants a national ruler to do. And of course, if you study the Pentateuch, you will see that this limited government was also mandated in the law of God. I think that Joel McDurmon does a good job of showing that.

The second thing that is significant about the continued smallness of government in the latter years of David's reign is that it would have been very tempting for David to do otherwise. When you have had a couple of rebellions on your hands and almost lost the nation, it would be very tempting to add an NSA, a Homeland Security, an FBI, and a BATFE to keep the nation from falling apart. It was a stressful time to live in, and it would have been tempting for David to hugely centralize the government just like King Saul had done, in order to protect himself. It would have taken faith for David to trust God with limited government the way God calls kings to trust Him in the book of Deuteronomy. They were not supposed to multiply horses, chariots, or other instruments of war. They were not supposed to multiply wives or gold. 1 Samuel 8 says that they were not supposed to institute a civil service, or have taxation of income or property. In short, they were not allowed to have the massive bureaucracies that other countries had. They were to be completely limited to what God's law allowed the civil government to do – which was virtually nothing. It took

faith for David to have almost as limited a government as existed under the judges.

II. Note the limited role of government

A. Protection (v. 23)

But under point II, you are going to see that David's government was actually far more limited than might be implied by a cabinet of eight. These were not eight massive bureaucracies in contrast to our current 23 massive bureaucracies with numerous sub-bureaucracies. Half of these eight men didn't even head up a department. He had eight advisors on the council, but let's break it down in terms of what they actually did.

1. A general over the state armies when at war (v. 23a)

The passage starts with the most important. The first two advisors oversaw by the far the biggest and the most significant aspect of Biblical government – the Department of Defense. Verse 23 says,

2Sam. 20:23 And Joab *was* over all the army of Israel; Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;

So Joab was the general over the state armies (or the tribal armies) when they were at war. And you will remember from 1 Samuel that the armies were pretty decentralized and under the authority of the local clans. So we are not talking about a massive standing army that Joab was constantly overseeing. There was no standing army other than Benaiah's army of 600. But Joab was the general who was ready to pull the reserves together at a moment's notice. He was over the army reserve. He did not oversee a standing army.

And people wonder, how can you protect your country without a massive standing army? Easy. Arm every citizen to the teeth. If you did that, there wouldn't be a single neighborhood that the enemy could enter without stiff resistance. And we looked at a bunch of Scriptures when we covered how the army was composed in 1 Samuel 23. But let me give you a brief review. And we'll start at the local level. Since every adult male was part of a militia (and there are a lot of Scriptures that indicate that), if there were problems in a local neighborhood, the neighborhood militia would take care of it. They didn't even need the government. They for sure did not need a police department. Just think of that as an armed neighborhood watch of which every household was a part. It became a very polite neighborhood.

On the other hand, if there was an invasion of the tribe of Dan, the Danite leaders would instantly mobilize the militias in that area on behalf of the state (or the tribe). A militia didn't have to join, but generally they would fight under a tribal leader to defend their tribe. And they would stay together until the problem was dealt with. And by the way, when the clans fought for the state, they still fought under their own clan banner, just like counties often fought under their own banners during the early American wars. It was one of the checks and balances against centralized government. The local militias weren't forced out of their militias into a generalized state army. Our founding fathers would have been horrified with that thought. No. Each clan continued to fight under their own banner, but the clan heads were organized under the leadership of the tribal leader. And once the conflict was finished, the tribal army disbanded and the militias went back to their neighborhoods. But because they were constantly trained, they could mobilize instantly.

So where does Joab fit in? Well, if it appeared to be a conflict that would jeopardize the nation as a whole, Joab would talk to the tribal officers under him to get as many of their tribal and clan militias together as possible. Because the militia system functioned so smoothly, a fairly large army could be mobilized under the general within 3 days or so. And that's why David asked Amasa to gather the reserve army within three days in verse 4. And chapter 24 indicates that the army mobilized from the reserves was 1.3 million strong. That's pretty remarkable for a small nation. Their reserve is almost identical in size to our active duty military from all branches, and yet it functioned as a reserve. And those 1.3 million could come together to one place in the nation within three days (verse 4).

Why is this system significant? Well, it made for small, non-invasive government even when it came to the military. Loyalties were generally local, though people and militias could always uproot and follow heroes, like David or anyone else that they wanted on a state or national level. This generally kept the military out of business that wasn't their business. It kept the army from being used to expand territory around the world. It also kept the *king* polite, because if he started to get too tyrannical, states, counties, and cities could easily say, "No. We are not going to be a part of that. We are not contributing our militias." It kept the civil government itself polite. Though Sheba created a rebellion earlier in the chapter, he wasn't able to get a huge following because militias don't generally want to join an army unless there is a good reason for doing so. So that is the first bona fide department on David's cabinet – the army of all Israel. But compared to America's, it spoke of very limited government.

2. A captain over the body guard (v. 23b)

The second half of verse 23 says,

Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was* over the Cherethites and the Pelethites;

Who were they? We've seen in the past that they were David's personal militia, and they served as his bodyguard. They were composed of 600 men who went to battle with David. This is the closest that you could get to a standing army in Israel – a group of 600 men who were more dedicated to David than they were the nation as a whole or to any regional interests. Now, if you understand what I just said, you will understand why our founding fathers did not want a standing army during times of peace. Let me repeat that thought so that you can catch the significance. This standing army; this group of 600 men were more dedicated to David than they were the nation as a whole or to any regional interests. That's why it is good to keep it small. Huge standing armies can be used to subjugate the citizens, as many of our founding fathers feared.

So David's bodyguard was about as close as you could get to a standing army. But they really weren't a totally separate department. We saw earlier in the chapter that they fought under Joab when he went to war. They acted just like any of the other militia units, and during times of war they would have been subject to Joab. But because of their devotion to David, there was a check and balance within the military.

But to be honest, in terms of per capita ratio, David's reserve army is larger than our active and reserve forces from all branches combined. According to chapter 24, there were 1.3 million in David's reserve, and today there are 1.369 million people in our active duty military with another 850,880 in the reserves. But granted, Israel was a smaller country, so let's try to compare apples with apples. Israel's population was 31 times smaller than our population, so they had a massive reserve. But the cool thing about Israel's army is that it always stayed home until there was conflict (other than the 600). And in this, George Washington's approach to the military was almost identical to David's. George Washington had no standing army, but he did have a massive reserve of the militia, which of course constituted every able-bodied man, 18 years old or older. In any case, this is a very legitimate function of decentralized government. But Joab and Benaiah really serve as one department – the Department of Defense. So keep that in mind. David needed the advise of the leaders of both the standing army and the reserves. But this is only one department.

B. Revenue (v. 24a)

1. A captain over tribute revenue (כֶּזֶב – cf. זָבַח .in Deut 20:11)

Verse 24 introduces a second department, the Department of Revenue. It says, “Adoram was in charge of the revenue...” But there is something unusual about the Hebrew word here that shows unbelievably limited government. The word for “revenue” is the Hebrew word, *Mas*, and refers to tribute. It does not refer to income tax or any other form of internal revenue. The same word is used in Deuteronomy 20:11, which says,

Deut. 20:11 And it shall be that if they [that is, the leaders of the hostile attacking city] accept your offer of peace, and open to you, then all the people *who are* found in it shall be placed under tribute [there is the word, כֶּזֶב – they shall be placed under tribute”] to you, and serve you.

This word speaks about a form of restitution to a nation. When aggressor nations attacked Israel and were defeated, they had to pay tribute to pay for the costs of the war that they had started. And Adoram was responsible for collecting those.

2. Note the total absence of internal taxes

But there is no mention whatsoever of anyone heading up the collection of internal taxes. The law of God did not authorize that, and so David did not collect it – despite the fact that King Saul did. And if you want a fabulous book that exams the subject of taxation, I highly recommend Robert Fugate’s book, *Toward a Theology of Taxation*.⁴ He clearly demonstrates that the only internal tax on citizens that God’s law allowed was the head tax. And I would add that even with the head tax, there was no mechanism to force people to pay it. In fact, when they tried to get Jesus to pay the head tax in Matthew 17, the way they word it implies that they had no way of forcing Jesus to do so. People were shamed if they didn’t, just as they are shamed today if they don’t vote. But they said to Peter, “Does your Teacher not pay the tax?” And Jesus said, “Lest they be offended” pay it. That’s the most that you could expect from the internal tax collectors back then – they might be upset if you didn’t pay. So Jesus told Peter to catch a fish, and the coin that Peter would find in its mouth would be sufficient to pay the tax for both of them. That’s the only lawful internal tax that existed in Israel. There was no property tax, sales tax, income tax, or any other kind

⁴ Robert Fugate, *Toward a Theology of Taxation*, (Omaha: Thy Word is Truth Publishers, 2007).

of tax. In contrast, there are an unbelievable number of taxes and hidden taxes in America.

But the point of this passage is that while the civil government had a mechanism in place to force tribute from aggressor nations (as a form of restitution), it had no mechanism to force a tax from its citizens. There was no Internal Revenue Service. It was unconstitutional for Israel to have one. They had a flat tax (often called a head tax) that was the same for everyone. And early in David's reign that head tax was sufficient to pay for the minimal services that the national government provided. With all the wars that had ensued, they also needed to collect tribute or restitution from other nations.

And I want us to think about that a little bit because it is critical to understanding how limited a government needs to be. You might think of the head tax as a \$100 fee for every male adult once a year. I think the national government is worth about that – about \$100 once a year. I wouldn't complain about paying that. And people think, "There is no way that our national government could survive on a head tax." Well, are you sure?

Think of it this way – there was no income tax on citizens from the national government prior to 1913 and we functioned quite well, thank you. If we had a \$100 head tax on every adult male in America, we would have plenty of money to do everything that God expects the national government to do. There are about 118 million adult males in America, but just to be safe, let's round it down to 100 million. Multiply 100 million times \$100, and you get ten billion dollars. That's not a lot of money, is it? People will point out that we would need 75 times that amount to pay the 2015 military budget, and 90 times that amount to pay just the 2015 Social Security budget. And of course, that is only the tip of the iceberg of the almost 4 trillion dollar Budget that pays for everything from pornographic art to space exploration. People look at the measly \$10 billion that a \$100 head tax would raise and they say, "It's impossible; it's ludicrous; it's so outdated. We need an Internal Revenue service to keep up with the times."

But is it impossible? Without making any adjustments to our current budget, let's add the trillions of dollars of tribute that we *should* be receiving from nations we have warred against (assuming of course that all our wars were just wars – a pretty big and unwarranted assumption). And if we collected that tribute, we might actually pay for the current budget. Keep in mind that Adoram would not be collecting the \$100 head tax. He would be collecting tribute from foreign nations that had warred against him. Now, I

don't believe most of America's wars are godly wars, but let's assume that they were. The trillions of dollars of revenue that Adoram would be collecting for America might actually make our current budget. Of course, military expansion and wars all over the world are unbiblical and are part of the bloated government that we have. We need to get rid of most of our budget.

But the point of this exercise is that a study of Biblical taxation would actually solve our problems and promote very limited government. If we got rid of all the agencies that are blatantly unconstitutional, and got back to the four cabinet positions under George Washington and the four departments that they represented, ten billion dollars a year would pay for far more than what a Constitutional National Government would need.

Even the huge government that we had in 1900 could be paid for. According to the official government figures, the budget was 521 million back in 1900, with a 46 million dollar surplus. They tended to operate on surpluses back then. Well, if you adjust that 521 million up using the inflation calculators, it's really not that much more than the head tax would pay for. And that was bloated government in 1900. If you go back to the year 1800, the \$100 head tax would bring in 75 times more money than the Federal government brought in in 1800 – that's inflation adjusted. Well, our population is only 60 times greater than it was back then. So even if you divide by 60, you find that a \$100 head tax would have produced a huge surplus. Let me show you my calculations. A \$100 head tax today would be worth \$7.52 back in 1800 (compliments of government induced inflation – and stopping inflation is another reason to have limited government). So I will use \$7.52 as the head tax back then. If you subtract all the females and all the children from the census, you are left with 2,295,112 male adults who could pay a head tax. Multiply that times \$7.52 head tax and you get a budget for the Federal Government of \$17,259,242. Since their expenditures were \$11 million, that would have left a \$6,000,000 surplus in 1800. So don't buy the argument that the Federal government could not survive on a head tax. In 1800 they survived with far less revenue than that \$7.52 per adult.

But more importantly, if we looked at how the Free Market in 1776 dealt with virtually everything that the Federal Government currently deals with, you will see how there is no reason that the feds need a more expanded revenue than what David had. Put virtually everything that the government does back into the free market, and the free market would do it far more

efficiently. Just to give you a perspective on what the free market has been able to do more efficiently than the government, Leonard Reed said,

During recent years, men in free and willing exchange (the free market) have discovered how to deliver the human voice around the earth in one twenty-seventh of a second; how to deliver an event, like a ball game, into everyone's living room, in color and in motion, at the time it is going on; how to deliver 115 people from Los Angeles to Baltimore in 3 hours and 19 minutes; how to deliver gas from a hole in Texas to a range in New York at low cost and without subsidy; how to deliver 64 ounces of oil from the Persian Gulf to our Eastern Seaboard - more than half-way around the earth - for less money than government will deliver a one-ounce letter across the street in one's home town. Yet, such commonplace free market phenomena as these, in the field of delivery, fail to convince most people that "the post" could be left to free market delivery without causing many people to suffer.⁵

People are so used to an omnipotent, omnipresent government intruding into every level of their lives that they cannot conceive of it being possible to bring government back to the tiny levels that it existed at for the first 100 years. But it is not only *doable*, it is *Biblical* and *must* be done. It is a moral imperative of the law of God. The cabinet position of Adoram implies a kind of civil government that is vastly smaller than anything I have experienced in my lifetime. But it is my hope that we will get back to those levels of spending within my grandchildren's lifetimes. And you may be part of the process of achieving that.

C. Records (vv. 24b-25a)

1. Jehoshaphat the recorder/correspondent (v. 24b). Clarke describes this as the registrar of public events.

Then come two departments related to records. Verse 24 says, "Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder." Notice that it doesn't say he is over anything; just that he was the recorder. One man apparently was able to handle things. In our modern government, the office of records has to deal with so much information from so many agencies and committees, that it is composed of a huge army of people. Anyway, the Hebrew is *maschir* (מִזְכִּיר), and refers to a clerk or a secretary. Clarke's commentary describes this office as being equivalent to a registrar of public events, a recorder of official actions, and a correspondent within and without the nation. He may have needed some help, but this office does not constitute much of anything.

⁵<http://antisocialist.ru/papers/cliche.of.socialism.number.08.the.free.market.ignores.the.poor.htm>

2. Sheva the scribe/secretary of state (v. 25a)

The second area related to records is in verse 25. It speaks of “Sheva the scribe.” The word “scribe” is *sofer* (סֹפֵר), and it refers to an office that kept a history of events and also had a few of the functions of the modern Secretary of State. The scribe probably would have maintained official records, overseen election results, may have been involved in some diplomatic issues with foreign countries, would have managed Israel’s official seal of office, and would have had a few other official functions. This too may have required a few people to assist him, but it was not the massive office that Secretary of State has become under John Kerry. It would have been equivalent to the function occupied by Thomas Jefferson, who was Secretary of State under George Washington.

But it would be a big mistake to assume that these two divisions of Israel’s records department is even remotely like the records departments in Washington DC. The spider web of records departments in DC is so vast that it is bewildering when you dig into it. And we only know the half of it, because a lot of the records are completely hidden from public eyes and from Congressional oversight. The government itself estimates that it spends more than one billion dollars a year on publishing and records. That gives you a tiny insight into the incredible bureaucracy that has evolved in our country.

Now, don’t get me wrong; our founding fathers believed in good record keeping, but they would be stunned at the records being kept today. And Obama wants to expand that. He wants records on all of you. Because the state pretends to be divine, it also has to be omniscient. In George Washington’s day, filing records was tedious because most of it was done by handwriting. Their view of records automatically tended to create a somewhat limited government. But with the age of computer, there is even greater incentive for civil governments to grow out of control, as has been happening in America for quite some time.

D. Advisory priests who knew God’s law (v. 25b)

But let’s move on to verse 25 and see that the two men listed here are not actually representatives of a department of the civil government, but are *part time* advisors to the government *sent by the church*. Verse 25 says, “Zadok and Abiathar were the priests.” Every king had access to priests whom he could consult. Deuteronomy 17:18 called for priests to teach the king and to oversee the king writing out the Pentateuch. Verses 8-12 of the same passage indicates that whenever tricky civil issues came up that

magistrates couldn't figure out, they were commanded to consult the priests, who were expert in the application of the law to every area of life. Wouldn't it be great if two of the people on every president's cabinet were pastors who were experts in applying the law of God to every issue that a president might face? Think of a Rushdoony or a Bahnsen on every president's cabinet. Wouldn't that be cool? Well, that's what David had. And to show that these two priests were not overseeing vast departments, all you have to do is see what their main business was. Elsewhere we see that they were not full time government employees. They oversaw the temple work full time, and they would meet with David's cabinet part time to give their theological input on questions being discussed. Why were they paid by the church rather than the national government? To keep their judgment from being influenced by David. It's a check and balance that promoted limited government.

E. Chief Minister / Attorney General (v. 26).

And then there is one last department on David's cabinet. Verse 26 says,

2Sam. 20:26 and Ira the Jairite was a chief minister under David.

If you look in the margin you will see that an alternative rendering is David's priest. And that is a possible interpretation. If he was David's personal priest, then this is actually not a department. It would be David's pastor. A second interpretation of this word is that it refers to a civil advisor. They would say that verse 25 refers to church advisors and Ira would be a full time civil advisor. That is also a possibility. The third group of commentators believe that it should be translated "chief minister," and is possibly equivalent to an Attorney General. The reason there is controversy is that the word is *cohen* (כֹּהֵן), which is a word that literally means priest. It's exactly the same word translated "priest" in verse 25.

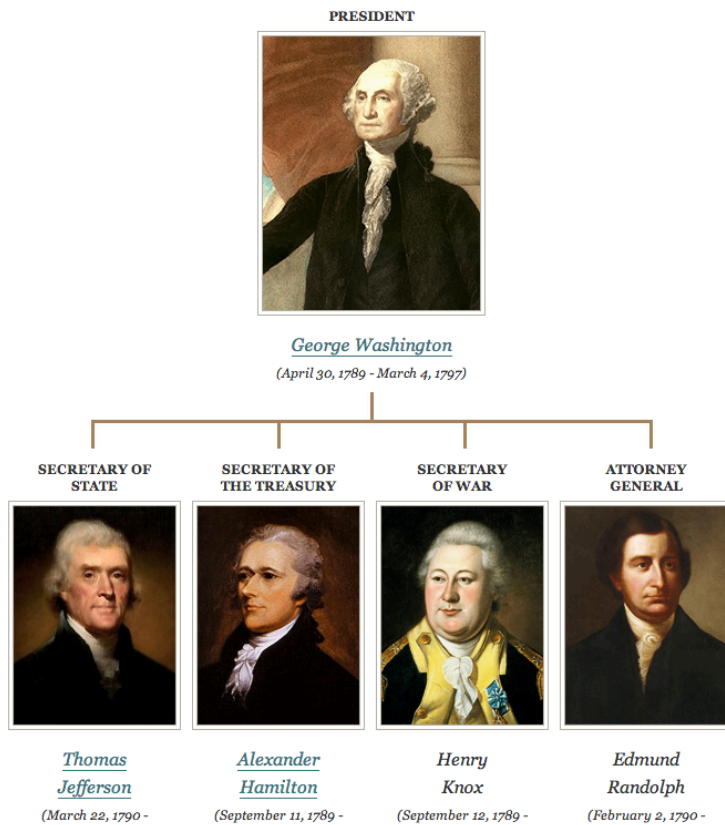
But I want to give you the evidence of why I believe that this is David's chief liaison to other civil magistrates, or possibly, the Attorney General heading up a department. Turn to 2 Samuel 8:18. This is part of the listing of David's cabinet at the beginning of his reign. It says,

2Sam. 8:18 Benaiah the son of Jehoiada *was over* both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers.

If you look in the margin you will see that the last phrase can be rendered, "David's son's were priests (or cohens)." The problem is, everyone agrees that it would have been impossible for David's sons to literally be priests in the temple. Only Levites could be church priests. The

law of God clearly forbade the king or for any other person other than a Levite from being a priest. So it is a conundrum for some people.

But several dictionaries have pointed out that just as the New Testament Greek word for “minister” can refer to both a church pastor like Gary, Rodney, and me and can also refer to a civil magistrate (because Romans 13 calls civil magistrates God’s ministers), the Old Testament Hebrew word *cohen*, is a religious term that can refer to both church pastors in the Old Testament as well as civil magistrates. It’s equivalent to the term minister. It’s a religious term for those who judge according to God’s law, whether they are in the church or in the state. So either David had a personal priest who was on his cabinet or he had a civil representative of God who was a judge over other judges. Because of chapter 8, I am forced to believe it has to be the latter. Ira replaces the role that David’s sons had, and David’s sons only had a civil role. So this is probably a reference to a department head of Attorney General, and he would have had similar functions to those exercised by Edmund Randolph, the Attorney General appointed by George Washington.



So if you look over the listing that I gave under Roman numeral II, you will see that the functions of all these officials can be summarized as

Defense, Revenue, Records, Advisors, and Attorney General. Since the advisors did not head up a major department, what is left is the four departments that I have pictured for you under George Washington's administration: Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of War, and Attorney General.

And that is not by accident. There is a book that shows that every level of early American government was very deliberately copied from Scripture by our founding fathers. The book was written by E. C. Wines, and is titled, *The Hebrew Republic*.⁶ Patrick Henry argued that Scripture called for much more limited government than what the Constitution puts together. But almost all of the founding fathers (Alexander Hamilton being one exception) argued that the Christian conception of a Republic was a much more limited form of government than anything in Europe or Britain. Our constitution was a huge advancement in civics.

And none of our founding fathers (Alexander Hamilton included) would have dreamed that America could have become such a bureaucratic monstrosity as it has become. I was reading on Thursday in the Congressional Record, and there were references to the fact that no man, woman, or child is outside the reach of one or more of the agencies of Washington DC. Prior to World War I you could go for years without ever meeting or being impacted by the civil government, other than the Post Office and perhaps the Sheriff. And yet our own government today claims that it daily touches the lives of every man, woman, and child. Obama's Cabinet has 23 members besides the president, and they oversee 23 massive departments, which in turn oversee numerous agencies, boards, commissions, and committees. I went to the Federal government's website just to count up how many committees were under the Executive Office. I may have miscounted, but when I counted on Thursday, I counted 157 of the agencies in our capitol as listed under the Executive Branch. That's astonishing – 157 massive boards, agencies, commissions, and committees. It looks nothing like what God calls the national government to be. Instead, it looks much more like the empires of Egypt, Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. In fact, because of technology, our national government has become far more massive and far more intrusive than any other empire in the history of mankind has ever been – including the Soviet Union. And of course, none of it is authorized by the Constitution.

⁶ <http://www.amazon.com/The-Hebrew-Republic-Americas-Government/dp/0842516239>

But it all started with Alexander Hamilton opening the stove door that had been constructed by our founding fathers, and allowing a few coals to fall onto the carpet in the living room. He deliberately took a non-original-intent interpretation of the General Welfare Clause, and it opened up a Pandora's Box. Or to use George Washington's image of a fire, once the fire got out of the fireplace that the Constitution had built for it, it began to grow and grow until it has consumed most of the house of our economy, and threatens to destroy everything. We've got to get back to limited government. We've got to stuff the civil government back into the limits of its constitutional fireplace.

III. Note that Joab's continued presence shows that David was unwilling to use unlawful means to deal with problems that could not be achieved lawfully (v. 23a)

To make this a three-point sermon I have one more thought: Verse 23 shows that David continued to work with Joab. He didn't like Joab. He believed that Joab should be executed for murder, and in 1 Kings he tells his son to figure out a way to deal with him. But David's power to deal with him was limited. As tempting as it might have been to grow his own power to protect himself, David did not do so. As tempting as it may have been to use unconstitutional means to achieve justice against Joab, David did not do so. As tempting as it may have been for David to grow his own militia into a massive standing army, he did not do so. As tempting as it may have been for David to use Saul's techniques of redistribution of wealth to curry favor and manipulate Joab out of influence, he did not do so. It took faith for David to follow God's law that mandated limited government. It took faith.

And in our own day we may be tempted to allow emergencies like David faced to cheat and to cut corners. We may be tempted to allow the civil government to expand because it is more convenient. We may be tempted to see the civil government as a handy servant. But I would urge you not to. The moment compromises are allowed on this principle of limited government, the fire gets out of the box, and it grows and grows and grows out of control. Back in February, Nelson Hultberg wrote an essay that described a national government that is growing out of control and why the covenanted federalism of our founding fathers and the constitution is so important to hold it in check. And near the end of the essay he said this:

How important is federalism? If it hadn't been sabotaged by Abraham Lincoln and his massive centralizing agenda, the Federal Reserve and the income tax would not have come to America in 1913. Without the Federal Reserve and its engine of inflation, Woodrow Wilson would not have possessed the monetary

capacity to drag us into World War I. Without our entry into that grisly war, the nations of Europe (so dissipated in both morale and manpower by 1917) would have had to sue for peace and go home. There would have been no Versailles Treaty, and thus no fervent Nazi movement in Germany. Without Hitler, there would have been no World War II. Moreover, without a Federal Reserve in America, there would have been no inflationary 1920's boom, and therefore no devastating 1930's depression. No depression, no Roosevelt-Keynesian New Deal. What a different 20th century it would have been if we had remained true to federalism. If we who advocate a free political order are to challenge today's liberal / neoconservative destruction of the American experiment, then we will have to coalesce around this most important legacy of the Founders. Federalism is the only means to unite libertarians and conservatives, and a unity of these two movements is our only hope to defeat the enemies of free civilization that rule us today in such an insufferably tyrannical way.⁷

Well, I would disagree with the last sentence. The answer to this dilemma is not in man. It will require Spirit-given national repentance, a return to the limits imposed by the law of God, a strong national conviction that the government is not a handy servant but is a dangerous fire that must be contained completely in the stove of the Regulative Principle of Government. The Regulative Principle of Government was the principle that all the Puritans and Scottish Reformers held to. It was the belief that of the four governments, the civil was the most dangerous. And that self-government and family government retains all rights, powers, privileges, ministries, actions, or any other thing that God Himself has not explicitly given to either the church or the state in the Scripture. R. J. Rushdoony, whose brilliant mind had sifted endlessly through the Biblical content on what the nature of civil government should be, said this:

Few things are more commonly misunderstood than the nature and meaning of theocracy. It is commonly assumed to be a dictatorial rule by self-appointed men who claim to rule for God. In reality, theocracy in Biblical law is the closest thing to a radical libertarianism that can be had.⁸

In other words, the Biblical prescription for civil government is that virtually everything belongs to the Free Market and is within the jurisdictions of self-government and family government. According to the Bible, the destructive power of the civil government's coercion is restricted to those sins that the Bible lists as crimes, and no more. You may want the civil government to make a war on drugs, but the Bible nowhere gives the civil government that power. I don't care how much you hate drugs, don't go to the civil government to fix the problem. I don't care how much you hate

⁷ <http://www.dailypaul.com/313173/federalism-the-founders-legacy>

⁸ R. J. Rushdoony, *Chalcedon Position Paper #15*.

the cost of medicine, don't go to the civil government to fix the problem. God has not authorized them to mess around with that. Numerous essays on mises.org have documented that it was the intrusion of the civil government into medicine that has caused most of the rise in medical costs anyway. There were many Christians that wanted the civil government to make alcohol consumption illegal, but God never gave that power to the civil government. And as soon as the BATFE (or its predecessor) was established to deal with alcohol, government tyranny began growing at an astronomical rate. Christians were stooges when they supported that.

And all that we have talked about may lead you to ask, "Well, how do we know what is a crime and what is not?" And here is the simple answer: any sin that God explicitly adds a civil penalty to (a penalty such as a fine, a beating, or an execution) is a God-defined crime that the government may fight against. Any sin that does not have a penalty attached to it in the Bible is not a crime, and it's none of the government's business, whether that government is city, county, state, or federal.

But it is not enough to know what constitutes a crime. We also need to ask if God has given the authority to fight against those crimes at the city level, the state level, or the national level. There are very few crimes that the Bible allows to be punished at the national level. Most are not even dealt with at the state level. Most were intended to be dealt with at the city level and for the punishment to be meted out in the gates of the city. Why? Because civil government is a fire that always wants to burn out of control. And the bigger the government, the more dangerous the fire.

Just keep this in mind: the budget in 1800 could be fully paid for with a head tax of less than \$5 per adult male. Of course, with inflation, their \$5 is now \$67.46. But you get the point. They didn't believe in big national government. They wanted the army to be dismissed as soon as the war was finished. They didn't want huge armored police departments or drones. They wanted every home to be well-armed, every man to be well-regulated and trained in a militia, and for his involvement in any call to wars to be up to the individual's free will, the county's choice, and the state's choice in whether to pursue the national objective. In other words, they wanted a mature citizenry with character, strong families as the backbone of society, churches that would instruct both individuals and kings in the will of God from Scripture (just as Zadok, Abiathar, and other priests did). They wanted to maintain state's rights. But above all, they wanted all fires (whether city, county, state, or federal) to be contained within the stove (or the fireplace) of the Regulative Principle of Government.

Conclusion – five applications

Let me give you five quick applications in the conclusion. First, the fires of civil government are not contained right now, but we can start at least teaching our children what the stove should look like. And by that I mean, teach them what Biblical civil government looks like. Don't buy either party's lame excuses that you can trust their party's fires to be on the living room carpet. Government must be contained.

Second, this calls for self-government. If you do not restrain your own desires for someone to do something for you for free, you are part of the problem. You are bringing coals out of the stove and playing with fire. Do you take food stamps? Then quit it. You are playing with fire. Don't take subsidies and benefits from the government unless you are forced to - and old age pensioners are forced to. But if you are able to get out of slavery to Egypt, try to do so. Citizens must embrace the risks, responsibilities, and hard work of freedom. Don't be like the first generation of Jews after the Exodus who constantly wanted to go back to Egypt; who wanted to flee to the security of slavery. We cannot have liberty if we do not have self-control, or self-government.

Third, this takes faith – faith that God's ways are better than man's ways. It takes faith to believe God's civil laws are better than any humanistic civil laws. People complain about God's punishments in the Old Testament, and it takes faith to believe God rather than the critics of theonomy. Of course some of the civil penalties are tough. As Washington said, civil government is a fire. It is a destructive force, but when it is kept within the confines of the stove that God has given to it, it becomes a blessing and it brings liberty and warmth to the whole society. In fact, by faith we believe the Bible's promises that when nations once against implement God's laws as they apply to family, business, church, and civil government, those nations will be so blessed and prospered by God that they will make other nations jealous to have the same thing. So have faith that God's stove for fire works and is a blessing. Don't overreact to modern tyranny by throwing out all stoves and fireplaces. Have faith that God's way works, and promote it.

Fourth, pray for limited government and work for limited government with all your might. The welfare of your grandchildren depends upon it.

And then finally, pray for Zadoks and Abiathars to be counselors to government officials all over the world. We need people who understand the Word of God and can be advisors to magistrates. We desperately need

pastors who are competent in applying the law of God to all of life. May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.

Limited Civil Government 2 Samuel 20:23-26

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 5-18-2014

Introduction

- I. Note the small size of David's cabinet
 - A. The only added office was over tribute revenue (Adoram)
 - B. Notice that Ira replaces David's sons as chief ministers
 - C. Otherwise, the officers are exactly the same as twenty years before when David "administered judgment and justice to all his people" (8:15)
- II. Note the limited role of government
 - A. Protection (v. 23)
 1. A general over the state armies when at war (v. 23a)
 2. A captain over the body guard (v. 23b)
 - B. Revenue (v. 24a)
 1. A captain over tribute revenue (דָּבָר – cf. דָּבָר in Deut. 20:11)
 2. Note the total absence of internal taxes
 - C. Records (vv. 24b-25a)
 1. Jehoshaphat the recorder/correspondent (v. 24b). Clarke describes this as the registrar of public events.
 2. Sheva the scribe/secretary of state (v. 25a)
 - D. Advisory priests who knew God's law (v. 25b)
 - E. Chief Minister / Attorney General (v. 26).
- III. Note that Joab's continued presence shows that David was unwilling to use unlawful means to deal with problems that could not be achieved lawfully (v. 23a)

Conclusion – five applications

