



King solomon and king noah, two peas in a pod:  
'neoliberalism' and the redistribution of wealth

1 kings 1-12 and Mosiah 11

## Introduction

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Today's homily is an admittedly longer and somewhat awkward homily. Some might rather call it a study or essay. But, as my skills, such as they are, are more inclined to homily than to dense scholarly examination, we will stick to homily. In addition, there is always a ministerial aspect to what I do. I aim to touch the human heart as well as inform the human mind; influence attitudes and behaviors more than thoughts and opinions.

There is much discussion from time to time about the "distribution," or "redistribution" of wealth. Many Americans—perhaps most, I do not know—consider the notion despicable, often painting it in the darkest hues of black wickedness or the deepest reds of communism. This is, of course, impure bull-pucky. Christians, in particular, ought to know better, what with their Bible shouting the praises of just redistribution of wealth from their bedside nightstands. Unfortunately, this gospel too often gets drowned out by their pulpit thumping pastors, who often teach another idolatrous and whorish gospel by the name "prosperity."

So, let's just be clear. All governments, I repeat, ALL governments from ancient Sumer to the classical Han dynasty to Democratic Greece; from the Roman republic and then empire, to Medieval France; from Colonial America to modern America; all have redistributed

financial resources. When it comes to economic affairs, this redistribution of wealth is one of the primary and most common activities in which governments engage. The question is not, then, does or will a government, any government, our government redistribute wealth? They do and will! *Our* government has and does and will. This is a certainty. The only question is, *HOW* will it redistribute wealth?

In looking at our own U.S. history, we can observe that redistribution of wealth policies and practices have swung wildly back and forth. Whether we were always true to our convictions and wise in our practices, from the 1930's through 1970's there was a "progressive" attempt—halfhearted sometimes, but present nonetheless—to maintain a level of economic equity through the modest redistribution of wealth. This was a modest redistribution of wealth from the top (wealthiest) down (to the poor).

I would argue that this American experiment created one of the greatest and most equitable economies in world history—falling far short, it is true, of the more perfect redistributive economic systems established by an Enoch or that found in 4<sup>th</sup> Nephi. I would argue, in addition, that such redistribution was in complete harmony with the word and desires of God. A large part of what made the U.S. progressive economy great was its focus, at least theoretical if not always practiced as strenuously as one would wish, on individuals, and raising everyone—except, alas, African Americans, who can count on nothing if not being left out in the cold. "Economy," after all, is not about how well Wall Street's gamblers are doing in the Stock Market/Casino. "Economy" is about people, and should be about securing every citizen in the basic human necessities of food, shelter, healthcare, education, etc.

Anyway, America's great progressive experiment came to a screeching halt with the 1980 election. Since the election of the venerable Ronald Reagan there has been a concerted and highly, if shamefully successful effort to redistribute wealth in the opposite direction: from the bottom up. This was and has been attempted and accomplished, in large part, through the impressive sounding theories of "Neoliberalism," which, with all its pseudo-science, was and is nothing more than a conservative reaction to the progressive economic attitudes and activities of the previous generation. Like Korihor's doctrine, its appeal is that it is "pleasing

unto the carnal mind.”<sup>1</sup>

This anything-but-liberal movement, as all conservative movements do, has worked tirelessly to see that wealth is sent gushing upward like a geyser to the wealthiest Americans—in this case about the top 1-10%. While doing so, the conservative proponents of Neoliberalism have assured us—with a straight face and as if we should be grateful—that a few precious drops would trickle back down to the rest of us. Why no one has focused on and rebelled against that word, that concept, “trickle,” is one of the great mysteries of our time. One cannot live on a trickle of economic benefits any more than one can live on a trickle of water. This is not “economy,” it is highway robbery and oppression. We see it every day in the suffering and want of America’s class of serfs.

We can look all over the globe and back into the past and see the same battles waged over the direction that the distribution of wealth will take. One example of this struggle can be found in the Hebrew Bible’s narrative reporting on the reign of Israel’s third king, Solomon. Another can be found in the pages of the Book of Mormon and its chronicling of wicked King Noah.

Both kings sought to transform society. The struggles depicted in these two narratives are dramatic and informative. The kings themselves and the economic evils that they perpetrated against their own nations have much in common. The inspired texts that report the battles that raged over who and what kind of people the two nations, Judah and Nephite, would be have implications for our own day and what kind of nation we are or can be. We can hear and learn from the inspired writers, and thus avoid much suffering, or we can close our ears, our minds, and our hearts, learn nothing from the nations’ experiences, and suffer the same fate that those corrupt and corrupted nations suffered—civil war and finally complete annihilation.

Now, to be clear, as I have said repeatedly in the past, I do not expect America to observe Biblical law. I do not maintain, as many do, that America is or should be a fundamentally Christian nation. I do maintain, however, that in the Bible’s ideals and customs, we find

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<sup>1</sup> Alma 30.<sup>53</sup>

principles that are applicable to every people and every nation, Christian or not. The application and observance of these basic principles can make for a more peaceful and secure nation. The rejection of them leads to conflict, chaos and collapse.

### the progressive genius of moses

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We have suggested that both Solomon and, later, Noah, aimed at transforming their respective societies. They were largely successful in transforming their respective nations in many ways. But we are most interested, here, in one economic policy that they were successful in transforming: how wealth was distributed or redistributed.

While we are well informed of King Noah's policies in regard to the distribution of wealth, unfortunately, we know little of Nephite economy policy on the subject during pre-Noah times (or post-Noah times, either, for that matter). So, we cannot compare and contrast what he did with what had been done before him—though we can make a reasonably accurate guess, based on the mood of the narrative reporting on Noah's activities.

Fortunately, however, we are well informed about the economic sentiments and policies concerning the distribution of wealth in pre-Solomonic Israel. Though we cannot say how true they were to the principles, how consistently they practiced them, or how they administrated and enforced them, the tribes that became known as the nation of Israel possessed a progressive economic theory. According to the tradition, Moses was the genius behind the vision. But, Moses' vision includes "economic theory and practices" that would make today's economic theorists howl at the moon, send American businessmen into apoplectic fits, and, as I have said, make "Christian" preachers thump the pulpit in a frenzy of "righteous indignation."

I know, because I have had numerous discussions with such individuals. For example, I had a good friend years ago who was an economics professor at a prestigious mid-western university. As so many of his colleagues have, he has given up on religion. One of the reasons he abandoned his faith is that he gave up on scripture in general and the Bible in

particular—“Just too many ridiculous stories.” Some of his least favorite parts of the Bible are those in which economic principles and policies are discussed. “Unbelievable,” he exclaimed vociferously on more than one occasion, “no society could ever function under such impossible economic policy. It could only bring economic catastrophe and collapse.”

What is this catastrophic economic policy? We will not, here, go into a detailed examination of Biblical economic policy. We have discussed some of them in a homily, titled, “Biblical Economics 101.” But, briefly, here are a few of the economic policies that today’s economists would call “unworkable,” and America’s morally bankrupt political right would call, without any sense of irony, “immoral.” They also represent the sorts of policies from which Solomon and, likely, Noah sought to “free” their societies.

#### *Prohibition against usury (interest)*

“If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.”<sup>2</sup>

#### *Cancellation of debt*

“At the end of every seven years thou shalt make a release. And this is the manner of the release:

Every creditor that lendeth ought unto his neighbour shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbour, or of his brother; because it is called the LORD's release... that which is thine with thy brother thine hand shall release; save when there shall be no poor among you...”<sup>3</sup>

#### *law of the harvest*

“And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Exodus 22.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 15.<sup>1-4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Leviticus 19.<sup>9-10</sup>. See also Deuteronomy 24.<sup>19-21</sup>

*year of jubilee*

“In the year of this jubilee ye shall return every man unto his possession.”<sup>5</sup>

This handful of examples of economic policies are just a few of those found in the Bible. They are, however, more than “economic.” They possess a deep spiritual dimension. The Psalmist describes those who are worthy to enter the temple. We could likely predict a few of the requirements. We are not surprised to learn that the prospective devotee must “walketh uprightly.” But we may be startled to learn that one of the characteristics of those who “walketh uprightly” and are thus temple-worthy Hebrews is “that [he] putteth not out his money to usury,”<sup>6</sup>

Jeremiah, under attack, offers a defense against the hatred and unjust persecution heaped upon him. Interestingly, one of, in fact his principle defense is that “I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury...”<sup>7</sup> In other words, he is innocent, partly because he has not engaged in the morally questionable and corrupting practice of usury—lending or borrowing money at interest.

Though it be somewhat anachronistic, it is not too large a stretch of the imagination to suggest that questions concerning compliance to all the economic policies mentioned above, were associated with the ancient “temple-recommend interview”—here, of course, I speak poetically not literally.

It should be obvious to any thoughtful person that the handful of economic policies mentioned above represents a radical “redistribution of wealth” policy. The redistribution is intended to maintain a certain economic equality between wealthy and poor. In it, resources are sent from the top (the land owner, the loaner, etc.) down (the poor and vulnerable).

But, not all Biblical characters were “Biblical.” King Solomon, for example, had other ideas

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<sup>5</sup> Leviticus 25.<sup>13</sup>. The policies surround the year of Jubilee are many and varied. No doubt their administration was complicated. And controversial. However, the upshot of the Jubilee year—every 50<sup>th</sup> year—was, essentially, that all economic losses and gains over the past 50 years were to be cancelled, allowing all, rich and poor alike to go back to a kind of equilibrium.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 15.<sup>5</sup>

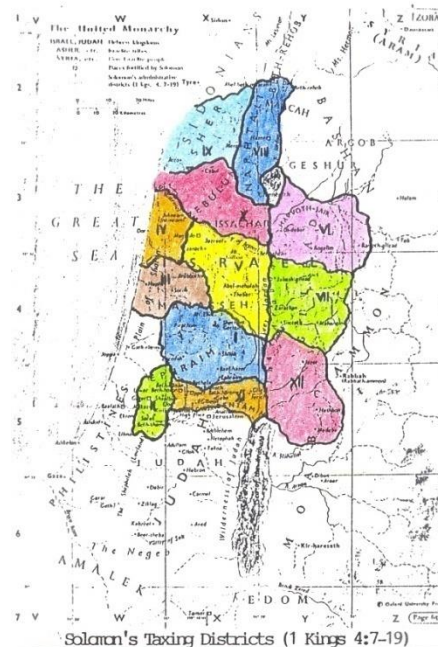
<sup>7</sup> Jeremiah 15.<sup>10</sup>

about the distribution of financial resources. He had a different economic theory and instituted opposing economic policies to those claimed in the text to have been revealed to and instituted by Moses. This was one of several features of his societal transformation. And, again, though we cannot say with certainty that Noah was engaged in challenging the same sorts of economic policies, it seems likely. He certainly created a very similar economic environment to that found in Solomon's Israel.

With all this in mind, now turn our attention to the interesting, and, I maintain, often misunderstood and over-rated monarch, Solomon. For the most part, we will limit ourselves to the economic transformations he brought to ancient Israel.

#### Solomon's "neoliberal" redistribution of wealth scheme

Famed King Solomon engaged in a massive redistribution of wealth project. One means he used was to redraw the old tribal boundaries into new taxing districts. If one looks carefully at Solomon's new tax districts on the map below, one is immediately struck by the fact that Judah is not one of the twelve tax districts.<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> 1 Kgs. 4:7-19

This redrawing of boundaries for tax purposes represented a major plan for the redistribution of wealth. Obviously, this administrative change would have taken additional economic resources out of the hands of northern Israel and, while taking none out of the hands of Judah, distributed the north's resources toward the south.

There is little doubt that this policy reverberated with consequences. For example, Judah, with the capital in its territory, would have seen a massive influx of revenues from the north. As many of the wealthy and powerful gravitated to the capital city, as they most certainly would have done in their search for "lobbying" influence, resources gleaned from the north would have poured into the purses of the wealthy and powerful. At the same time, of course, resources would have drained from others, particularly northerners. No wonder the north protested and ultimately rebelled against his and his successor's policies—we will have a little to say about that rebellion later in the homily.

Not only did Solomon redistribute wealth from Israel to Judah through his reworked tax policies, he targeted himself and his cronies as the greatest beneficiaries of the new policies (no doubt arguing through his press secretary that if he and his buds became famously well-to-do, more money would trickle down to the masses).

When we read accounts of Solomon's numerous and massive building projects or of the daily provisions needed to supply the royal court, we might be tempted to read them as evidence of Solomon's "blessedness" and acceptance by God. They could just as easily, however, be read as subtle criticisms of his extravagance, enjoyed through the oppression of the poor and powerless masses, particularly those in the north—the prophets, as we have discussed elsewhere, often attribute the possession of wealth to the wealthy's penchant to exercise power, and their immoral and unethical attitudes and practices.

Our suspicion of Solomon ought to have already been triggered. In his "first 100 days," Solomon conducted a purge of those whom he viewed as a threat to his power by assassinating or ordering the assassination of one individual after another.<sup>9</sup> It was an blood

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<sup>9</sup> See 1 Kings 1. We can read this text in a "minimalistic" way in which we understand that Solomon killed the individuals mentioned, and only the individuals mentioned. Or, we can read it in a more "wholistic" manner and understand that the individuals reported to have been assassinated are



bath that would make any tyrant proud. Thus, he demonstrated right off the bat that he would countenance no resistance and would act brutally whenever challenged. He would do what he wished.

Undoubtedly, then, any criticism of Solomon needed to be made artfully subtle. This, in part, explains the ambiguity about Solomon that one finds in the Bible's chronicling of his reign—the same ambiguity, by the way, that we find in regard to his father, David.

The possibility that the Biblical text employed subtle means to criticize rather than laud Solomon, his policies, and his lifestyle is strengthened, I suggest, when we compare the Book of Mormon narrative that reported on King Noah, who was, obviously, wicked, and who developed his own version of ancient “neoliberal” economic theory and practice. We are fond of claiming that the Book of Mormon clears up matters that the Bible leaves muddled—like the necessity of baptism for those accountable and the prohibition against the baptism of children, not accountable. Well, I suggest that the evils on which the Book of Mormon choose to focus when reporting on King Noah were selected because they almost exactly matched the activities of King Solomon, which the Bible had been so cautious to criticize.

With this in mind, we will have a look at the Book of Mormon narrative that reports on wicked King Noah and his reign. As we do so, we will compare what we learn of his evils with what we know of Solomon. This, then, is what I see and how this hermeneutical approach works.

Solomon and Noah: parallel tracks

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When the Book of Mormon chronicler turned his attention to King Noah and his administration, all ambiguity, compromise, or caution was thrown to the wind. The text is boldly and brutally clear. The man, Noah, king or not, was a scallywag: as immoral, as unethical, as deviantly antisocial as they come (well, O.K., America's Caligula currently

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representative of a much broader purge. Given the history of authoritarians, and their relationship with their subjects, the latter reader seems more likely.

sitting in the White Outhouse is giving him a run for his money and will almost certainly surpass him if given enough time).

No doubt, Noah and his administration committed many errors. But the Book of Mormon chronicler makes a selection of them; focusing on some and ignoring others. How does he make his selection? Though he does not explicitly say so, I suggest that Noah's Book of Mormon chronicler took what he knew of another king who was clearly considered an immoral and ethical scallywag in its tradition and utilized that knowledge as a sort of templet or pattern next to which he placed Noah for comparison. That king was Solomon. "You want to know how wicked Noah was?" the Book of Mormon chronicler says, "Well, I'll show you. He was as wicked as King Solomon!"

That the Book of Mormon chroniclers considered Solomon a poor excuse of a king is, it seems to me, evident throughout the Book of Mormon—we will mention a few specific memorable mentions Solomon gets as we proceed. But, we will here make a few general observations.

The Book of Mormon has nary a good word to say about Solomon—or his father, David either, for that matter. It only and always speaks of Solomon in the most uncomplimentary of terms. In fact, the Book of Mormon seems to view the entire dynasty with great skepticism. Solomon's father, David, one of the Bible's favorites, is hardly even a footnote in the Book of Mormon. The "Davidic Covenant" that plays a huge and central role in the Bible and in Judah's understanding of its monarchy, is nowhere to be found in the Book of Mormon.

Interestingly, the promised Messiah, who is, the Bible repeatedly emphasizes, a son of David, is not to be found in the Book of Mormon—outside of one Isaiah passage. Messiah, yes. He is found everywhere. But, the Book of Mormon seems to go out of its way to avoid any suggestion that he is the son of David. Rather, in the Book of Mormon, Messiah is ever and always the Son of God.

Based upon the Book of Mormon's negative references to Solomon and David and the absence of all Davidic theology, we can justifiably conclude that its writers did not think

well of Solomon or the dynasty of which he was a part. Rather, they found Solomon to be the arch-typical evil king. Thus, when faced with a wicked king, Noah, it came naturally to them to pattern their description of him after Solomon.

The similarities between the two kings are, indeed, numerous and uncanny. These similarities, I suggest, shed light on both men and their administrations. Of particular interest for the purposes of this homily is the manner in which they distributed economic resources within their realms.

The Book of Mormon's chronicler begins his criticism of Noah with this general observation.

“Noah began to reign... and he did not walk in the ways of his father. For behold, he did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart.”<sup>10</sup>

He then turns to cataloguing specific examples of Noah's wickedness. Here is item one on the list

“He had many wives and concubines.”

Now, it is true that nothing seems to grab our attention and get headlines quite like aberrant sexual behavior. And few things are of more importance and consequence than the marital contract and covenant. But, I think, this beginning is significant for another, more pertinent reason.

The Book of Mormon has already been clear about its feelings for the wicked marital practice into which Noah entered. And, in describing the wickedness of the practice, it had used Solomon as a parade example of one who fell under the spell of its evils. Book of Mormon authors know what the Bible tells us about Solomon's marital practices.

“Solomon loved many strange women... He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and

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<sup>10</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>1-2</sup>

three hundred concubines.”<sup>11</sup>

And this is what the Book of Mormon chronicler thinks about Solomon’s marital practices.

“For behold, thus saith the Lord: ‘This people begin to wax in iniquity; they understand not the scriptures, for they seek to excuse themselves in committing whoredoms, because of the things which were written concerning David, and Solomon his son. Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives and concubines, *which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord.*’”<sup>12</sup>

The Bible also condemns this aberrant behavior on the part of Solomon, albeit cautiously. Thus, the Book of Mormon chronicler begins his list of criticisms of Noah with a known commodity. The knowing Nephite could appreciate right off the bat that Noah, with his new-fangled marital practice, was like Solomon in his ancient and well-versed wickedness. The two men were two peas in a pod. As we go along, we become more and more convinced that Solomon’s reign is shaping the Book of Mormon chronicler’s narrative descriptions of Noah and his wickedness.

Here is the next tangible sin that the Book of Mormon chronicler adds to his catalogue of Noah’s wickedness? It gets to the heart of our interest in the redistribution of wealth.

“And he laid a tax of one fifth part of all they possessed, a fifth part of their gold and of their silver, and a fifth part of their ziff, and of their copper, and of their brass and their iron; and a fifth part of their fatlings; and also a fifth part of all their grain. And all this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines; thus he had changed the affairs of the kingdom.”<sup>13</sup>

Sound familiar. It should. We have already briefly discussed Solomon’s transformed tax policies.

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 11.<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Jacob 2.<sup>23-24</sup>, emphasis added.

<sup>13</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>3-4</sup>

Having lots of wives is expensive. Heck, sin is expensive. The really juicy sins are the rich man's luxury, as Paul reminds Timothy.<sup>14</sup> The sin of the poor is a trifle by comparison. The Hebrew Bible repeatedly affirms this reality. One is hard pressed to find the poor criticized in scripture. The handful of passages that are critical of them are, unsurprisingly, blown all out of proportion by readers trying to justify their gross materialism—this constant attack against the poor is one of the hallmarks of our vile Neoliberal theories, or, better, prejudices.

Anyway, Noah and his administration were in need of more money. We now know how he intended to obtain the needed resources.

Now, before moving on, I have learned that, in America, though it might detract from the flow of the discussion, this must be said. Noah's sin is not found in the taxation itself. Nor is it found in the level of taxation. Noah's level of taxation, 20%, is exactly the same as that institution by Joseph of Egypt fame, and *Joseph was commended for the wisdom of his taxation policies!*

“And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth part; except the land of the priests only, which became not Pharaoh's.”<sup>15</sup>

Noah's tax system, then, was a major wealth grab. It was the most common of all redistribution of wealth schemes—the kind Americans seem to love—one in which wealth flows from the bottom to the top.

“...this did he take to support himself, and his wives and his concubines; and also his priests, and their wives and their concubines.”

Noah's tax policies, then, served his needs and the needs of his supporters. And this is precisely what we find in the case of Solomon and his tax policies.

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 6.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 47.<sup>26</sup>. Note, too, that Joseph maintained a separation between “the church and state,” almost certainly a radical change from what had been previous practice. In the ancient world ‘church and state’ were often viewed and treated as if they were one and the same.

Remember, first, that, as we have already noted, Solomon’s increased revenue through taxation was accomplished by redrawing the old tribal maps. Solomon’s Judean cronies and wealthy officials/lobbyists were exempt from taxation while the northern tribes experienced increased taxation to make up the difference. We might say, in Book of Mormon language, that Solomon “changed the affairs of the kingdom.”<sup>16</sup> But, in so saying, we have only addressed how he acquired his revenues. We have not addressed what he did with them.

“And Solomon had twelve [taxation] officers over all Israel, which provided victuals for the king and his household: each man his month in a year made provision.” (See map above for the districts).<sup>17</sup>

Now, according to 1 Kings 4.<sup>22-23</sup>, the daily—and by calculation, yearly—provisions that the other 11 tribes provided for Solomon’s court without the aid of Judah’s contribution were as follows:

- 185 Bushels of fine flour per day (67,525 Bushels per year)
- 375 Bushels of meal per day (136,875 Bushels per year)
- 10 Stall-fed cattle per day (3650 Stall-fed cattle per year)
- 20 Pasture-fed cattle per day (7300 Pasture-fed cattle per year)
- 100 Sheep and goats per day (36,500 Sheep and goats per year)
- +Various numbers of deer, gazelle, roebuck, and choice fowl per day.

That’s a lot of “bread”! These commodities represent only a small portion of all that was needed to support Solomon, his family, his government officials, their families, etc—what about “mortgages,” “utility bills,” “transportation costs,” etc.? His administration would have constituted a sizable population. Now, of course, government officials need to eat too. But, remember, all revenues for such needs came from Solomon’s new and inequitable taxing system in which Judah was exempt from taxation while northern Israel bore the brunt of the taxation.

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<sup>16</sup> See Mosiah 11.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 4.<sup>7</sup>

The Bible seems to report on Solomon’s new taxation scheme, the massive amount of revenue that it brought under the control of Solomon’s administration, and the purposes to which the revenues were put, without judgement. Many readers, however, read this reporting on taxation policy and revenue use and understand the text to be boasting about Solomon, hoping to impress us with his grandeur. “Wow! The fellow was a skilled administrator.” “Wow! The fellow was rich—thus, surely, he must have been blessed by God.” “Wow! Look at the sumptuousness of his court.”

But, surely, in light of the Book of Mormon’s perspective on those same behaviors as practiced by Noah, we must at least reconsider the Biblical text’s purposes and our evaluation of Solomon. Perhaps the Bible’s reports of Solomon’s administrative decisions, the revenues he enjoyed, and his daily “grocery list” are *not* meant to impress—“Look how wise and rich Solomon was”—but to repel—“Look how oppressive he was in his rule and how extravagant he was in his private life style and in supporting the extravagant life style of his officials.”

As we have said, this is certainly the view that the Book of Mormon chronicler held of Noah and his tax policies, so similar to those of Solomon.

Noah “changed the affairs of the kingdom” in another way that would have long-lasting and profound consequences for the nation.

“He put down all the priests [understand, these “priests” have more than a religious role, they have a political role as well] that had been consecrated by his father, and consecrated new ones in their stead, such as were lifted up in the pride of their hearts.”<sup>18</sup>

Noah was making radical changes to the fabric of society. All the old norms were under assault. Those who wished to maintain the norms and resist the revolution must be eliminated and be replaced by willing and loyal accomplices; unscrupulous and opportunistic yes-men.

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<sup>18</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>5</sup>

One can imagine the push back Solomon would have experienced from something as radical as redrawing the tribal maps to change tax policy and exempt his own tribe from taxation—actually, one does not have to image it, for we will see the reaction in a few moments. So, it is likely that Solomon, like Noah, would have been in need of a loyal cadre of royal sycophants.

“Unto Abiathar the priest said the king, ‘Get thee to Anathoth, unto thine own fields; for thou art worthy of death: but I will not at this time put thee to death, because thou barest the ark of the Lord God before David my father...’ So Solomon thrust out Abiathar from being priest unto the LORD ... and Zadok the priest did the king put in the room of Abiathar.”<sup>19</sup>

Abiathar, of well-established priestly lineage, was removed from his position over unsubstantiated concerns about his loyalty, and replaced by Zadok, a mysterious man of unknown or questionable priestly lineage.

Solomon, of course, claimed to have justification from God for his overt political move. But then again, what monarch or other authoritarian ruler worth his salt hasn’t claimed some god or other to justify even the most egregious wickedness? It is impossible to calculate the number of lives that have been violently snuffed out in the name of Jesus or Allah. In Solomon’s reign, Abiathar was but one on a long enemies list of individuals whom Solomon dispatched, often violently and murderously, as we have seen,<sup>20</sup> over uncorroborated disloyalty to his royal person.

Does anyone doubt that if we possessed King Noah’s press release at the time of his priestly reshuffling we would hear a divine justification for the move? It is beyond the proverbial shadow of a doubt that the Book of Mormon judges Noah’s changes to the government, including the change in personnel, to be utilitarian—and act intended for the advancement of his wicked plans.

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<sup>19</sup> 1 Kings 2.<sup>26-27, 35</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See 1 Kings 2.<sup>23-24</sup>, 2.<sup>29-34</sup>, 2.<sup>46</sup>



As we consider the growing list of resemblances between Noah and Solomon, we must consider it almost certain that the Book of Mormon chroniclers felt exactly the same about Solomon and the changes he instituted in Judah so many years previous as they did about Noah and his changes. In addition, we must consider the strong possibility that the Bible's reportage of Solomon and the changes he made is meant to suggest, subtly, that in Solomon, Judah had finally acquired, in spades, what they requested many years earlier: a king like unto all the other kings of every other nation?<sup>21</sup>

The two kings' coffers were newly full. They had surrounded themselves with sycophants. The stage was now set for the next phase: winning over the populace. How does one do this? The ways are many and varied.

“King Noah built many elegant and spacious buildings; and he ornamented them with fine work of wood, and of all manner of precious things, of gold, and of silver, and of iron, and of brass, and of ziff, and of copper.”<sup>22</sup>

“He also built him a spacious palace... (11.<sup>9</sup>)

As for Solomon, he

“built also the house of the forest of Lebanon; the length thereof was an hundred cubits, and the breadth thereof fifty cubits, and the height thereof thirty cubits, upon four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams upon the pillars. And it was covered with cedar above upon the beams, that lay on forty five pillars, fifteen in a row.... And he made a porch of pillars.... He made a porch for the throne where he might judge.... His house where he dwelt had another court within the porch.... Solomon made also an house for Pharaoh's daughter.... All these were of costly stones... the foundation was of costly stones... and above were costly stones.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See 1 Samuel 8.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>23</sup> 2 Kings 7.<sup>1-11</sup>

“Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.”<sup>24</sup>

First, we should note that the construction projects so far enumerated were for the use of the royal person. Second, we must remember that “a man’s home is his castle.” In like manner, a king’s palace complex is a major source of propaganda. It speaks to the king’s wealth, power, and wisdom. However absurd, it claims to speak to the affection that his people have for him.

The text’s contempt for the “improvements” that Noah made to the nation’s infrastructure is palpable. How the Bible’s chronicler felt about Solomon’s infrastructure “improvements” is less clear. Again, the Bible’s criticism of Solomon is always more cautious, but may be discerned in some of the information it shares.

For example, we are informed that Solomon spent twice as long working on his house than he did in the construction of the temple. Why add this? What does it mean to convey? Is it mere “objective, historical” reportage, or something more meaningful? Surely the writer would be aware that this notice could be subject to different interpretations: 1) “Wow, that palace was impressive;” or 2) “Hmmm... Solomon seems to have been more concerned about his own comfort than the worship of God.”

And again, Solomon’s palace and greater royal complex is reported to be 5 to 6 times larger than the temple. Again, this may be objective reportage and mean nothing more than that the complex was HUGE. On the other hand, it may mean something less complimentary: “Solomon made himself more comfortable than God.”

Every great Palace needs a great throne. It too is of immense propaganda value. So, Noah also built, or had built

*“a throne in the midst thereof, all of which was of fine wood and was ornamented with gold and silver and with precious things.”<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> 1 Kings 7.<sup>1, 7-10</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>9</sup>

Halfway around the world and a millennium earlier, Solomon

*“made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with the best gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round behind: and there were stays on either side on the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the stays. And twelve lions stood there on the one side and on the other upon the six steps: there was not the like made in any kingdom.”<sup>26</sup>*

For the Book of Mormon chronicler, Noah’s throne was a clear sign of his gross and self-serving opulence, his will to power, and his thirst for prestige. Tell me, why should we think differently about Solomon’s throne than we do of Noah’s? To me, the answer is simple: we shouldn’t.

The mounting parallels between wicked King Noah and Solomon are making it increasingly difficult to understand Solomon as anything other than an earlier and more distant version of Noah in the eyes of the Book of Mormon chronicler.

If you want to win over the populace, don’t forget about national security. People love a good war. Nothing unites people like an enemy—real or imagined, it’s all good. And besides, blood and horror are good for the economy. Quite the job’s creator. So, Noah

*“built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower.”<sup>27</sup>*

As for the earlier Solomon, He

*“built Millo, and repaired the breaches of the city of David his father.”<sup>28</sup>*

“Now, the exact nature and purpose of Noah’s tower and Solomon’s Millo are not specifically

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Kings 10.<sup>18-20</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Mosiah 11.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>28</sup> 1 Kings 11.<sup>27</sup>

address in the texts. The nature of the Millo has been much debated in the circles of Biblical studies. Without being too dogmatic, we can make the following observations.

Some years after the construction of Noah's tower, Noah found himself engaged in a civil war. In the course of hand to hand combat, Noah made a quick retreat to what appears to be the same tower mentioned above. Unexpectedly, from this vantage point, he was able to see far into the distance where he discovered an invading Lamanite army. Two points, then. Noah used the tower as a place of retreat in battle. In addition, Noah was able to use the tower as a defensive watchtower from which he could spy invading armies. Thus, it is not unreasonable to assume that the tower was a strategic military installation.

As to Solomon's "Millo," we can say that the Hebrew word, at least to this reader, suggest the possibility that it represented some form of enhancement or strengthening to Jerusalem's existing fortification system. Its association with a repair to the old city's walls strengthens this sense. In addition, it is mentioned elsewhere in relation to "the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer," the last of which had been burnt to the ground by Pharoah and was thus in need of reconstruction.<sup>29</sup>

The Book of Mormon reporter gave Noah no positive press coverage for his work on the piece of towering infrastructure. Rather, there seems something... what? Menacing? Conspiratorial? about this project. How about Solomon's Millo? Well, we do know that its construction represented the first reported breach between King Solomon and one of his highest officials, Jeroboam, governor over the northern tribes of Israel.<sup>30</sup>

But Noah was no idiot. He knew enough to give the people a trickle.

"He caused many buildings to be built in the land Shilom."<sup>31</sup>

As for Solomon, he raised a "levy" or "work gangs"

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<sup>29</sup> See 1 Kings 9.<sup>15-16</sup>

<sup>30</sup> See 1 Kings 11.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Moses 11.<sup>13</sup>

“for to build the house of the LORD, and his own house, and Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. *For* Pharaoh king of Egypt had gone up, and taken Gezer, and burnt it with fire, and slain the Canaanites that dwelt in the city, and given it *for* a present unto his daughter, Solomon’s wife.

“And Solomon built Gezer, and Beth-horon the nether, And Baalath, and Tadmor in the wilderness, in the land, And all the cities of store that Solomon had, and cities for his chariots, and cities for his horsemen, and that which Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.”<sup>32</sup>

There can be little doubt that both kings used such building projects as propaganda, evidence of a booming economy, and reason for national pride. Few have done this better than Germany’s Hitler. In addition, many served national security needs. But, clearly we are meant to see the truth; see the lie behind any propaganda that undoubtedly flowed from both administrations. Ultimately, the Bible’s notice that much was done with forced labor gangs certainly does not bode well for Solomon’s reputation—either anciently or today.

In our brief survey of Noah’s actions, taken in the order in which they appear in the text, we did skip one item. Noah

*“also caused that his workmen should work all manner of fine work within the walls of the temple, of fine wood, and of copper, and of brass.”*<sup>33</sup>

Of course, we are intimately familiar with Solomon’s plans for and actual construction of his famous temple as reported in 2 Kings 5-7.

Even though the notice about the temple came earlier in both narratives, we left it for last because of the potentially controversial nature of the parallelism. It is clear that, because of his character and motivations, the Book of Mormon chronicler gave Noah no “credit”

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<sup>32</sup>1 Kings 9.<sup>15-19</sup>

<sup>33</sup>Mosiah 11.<sup>10</sup>

whatsoever for his renovation of the temple. It was not a moment, however fleeting, of goodness. It was part and parcel of Noah's wickedness. The money used for the renovation was ill-gotten. What took place there was a sham as Noah's priests sat comfortably upon their upraised gold covered seats, their bodies at rest, and their mouths spewing lying and vain words.<sup>34</sup>

Should Solomon get "credit" for his construction of the temple? Maybe. It does seem that all positive assumptions that are made about Solomon are based on the fact that he built the Jewish temple. "Surely, God would not use an evil man to build his holy temple. Thus, all else that Solomon did must be right and good."

But I, for one, am skeptical. Based on the unjust and inequitable tax system with its ill-gotten financial resources, a portion of which undoubtedly went into the temple's construction and maintenance, we should be suspicious. Additionally, the paint on the temple walls was hardly dry before Solomon was found worshipping idolatrous gods. Just to be safe, the author seems to lay the blame on Solomon's wives rather than the king himself—poor Eve, always being blamed. It is certain that the Hebrew prophets were, in fact, not all that enamored with Jerusalem's temple, one going so far as to call it a *bama*, "high place!"<sup>35</sup>

In the ancient world (and perhaps in the modern?) temples were, like a king's palace and throne, dedicated to political purposes and propaganda as much as to spiritual purposes. In fact, the temple was simply an extension of the king's domain. This is certainly true in Israel and Judah, and no less likely in Noah's Nephite realm.

Warning Amos to cease and desist in his derisive criticisms of Israel's king and temple, the false prophet Amaziah confirmed that the temple at Beth-el was "the king's chapel, and it is the king's court."<sup>36</sup> There is no doubt that King Noah's temple served the same role. It is equally certain that Solomon's temple was so built, so intentioned, and so used.

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<sup>34</sup> See Mosiah 11.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Micah 1.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Amos 7.<sup>13</sup>

The parallels we have drawn between the two kings and their administrations are striking. Identifying the meaning of the parallels, of course, is more difficult than identifying the parallels themselves. Nevertheless, I have suggested that the Book of Mormon chronicler made a selection of Noah's actions such that they could be compared to those of Solomon. This parallelism demonstrates just how wicked Noah was. He was as wicked as King Solomon.

## Conclusion

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The point of our extended discussion on the comparisons between Noah and Solomon is meant to show that Solomon and Noah were engaged in the same wicked practices. The Old Testament is cautious in its criticism of Solomon, while the Book of Mormon is straightforward and brutal in its criticism of Noah. But the two men, the Book of Mormon would have us learn, were two peas in a pod.

Of special interest to us in this homily is the “neoliberal” economic scheme into which both kings entered in order to redistribute wealth upwards from the poor to themselves, their administrations, and their rich, powerful, and lobbying supporters. This scheme was at the heart of all their other sins. Though we do not have good information as to Nephite economic policy before Noah, we have clear, abundant, and decisive information concerning Yahweh's “progressive” economic policies as revealed to and through Moses. It seems fair to think that the Nephites were aware and respectful of this Mosaic tradition. Thus, we can judge both men's economic policies not only as personal moral failures, but as willful rebellion against the just wishes of a holy God.

Solomon accomplished many of his twisted goals through unjust tax policy—taxing most of the nation at one rate and his closest allies at, not another rate, but at no rate at all. These allies became wealthy through his policies. Others were impoverished. Noah accomplished his goals, not simply by increasing tax rates, but, more importantly, making sure that all revenues flowed into his and his political ally's coffers, thus, again, impoverishing large swaths of the population through the redistribution of wealth from

the poor and vulnerable to the wealthy and powerful.

The reactions to these unfortunate affairs were predictable. The Book of Mormon introduces us to one of Noah's priests, Alma, who rebelled and began a protest movement against Noah's wicked rule. As the government's push back against this movement became more and more extreme and violent, Alma officially "succeeded from the union," leading, like Moses, his fellow oppressed protesters out into the unknown wilderness with him.

In the Bible, Solomon, like a modern-day Bashar-Al Assad, seems to have kept an iron-fisted police grip on the domestic front and a robust surveillance system on the international stage in order to detect and quell any potential uprisings against his power, of which there were several.<sup>37</sup> His "vigilance" was effective. No protests against Solomon's policies seem to have succeeded until after his death. But with his death, things unraveled quickly. The most dangerous domestic protest came, unsurprisingly, from the north, where his tax policies were most harmful and had rankled for decades.

Jeroboam, an old nemesis who had sought and been granted political asylum in Egypt during Solomon's reign, came home to resist the new Davidic King, son of Solomon, Rehoboam. Speaking for all Israel, he laid out the north's petition.

"Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee."<sup>38</sup>

Interestingly, the Bible, for all its love of David and the Davidic Covenant, offers no comment to contradict this protest. Rather, the Bible seems to confirm the complaint against oppressive Solomonic measures. It does so by reporting Rehoboam's gross and hubris laced response to Jeroboam's request that the long-lasting oppression of the north be ended.

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<sup>37</sup> See 1 Kings 11.

<sup>38</sup> 1 Kings 12.<sup>4</sup>



“And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying,

‘My father made your yoke heavy,  
and I will add to your yoke:  
my father also chastised you with whips,  
but I will chastise you with scorpions.’”<sup>39</sup>

No indeed. No Biblical, “Na ah! Solomon didn’t apply a heavy yoke or brutal whips to maintain his unjust system of oppression.” The editor’s silence here is deafening.

Even though Rehoboam was following the political advice of the young, spoiled, fanatical power elites of his administration—I can’t read about these young pups without seeing the ugly image of Tucker Carlson in my head—his answer was dressed up in poetic cadence, the adopted form of prophets. No doubt, Rehoboam had learned from his father how to maximize the mixing of church and state for political purposes. His reply to Israel’s call for justice unabashedly confirmed the injustices of Solomon, and Rehoboam’s intention to continue, strengthen, and leverage (a wonderfully ugly modern word) such injustice. He did so by invoking the will of God through the use of a favorite tool of prophets: poetic form.

Like father, like son.

To make a long story short, Israel succeeded from the Judean union and remained a nation apart from Judah ever after.

Thus, while Rehoboam’s vile use of the prophet form was blasphemous, it stands as a prophetic proof of God’s wisdom. God had instructed Israel concerning the establishment, maintenance, and endurance of a secure society. The only way to secure society was to practice justice and equity, including just and equitable economic policies and practices. One of the just economic principles upon which a truly free and secure society is based

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<sup>39</sup> 1 Kings 12.<sup>13-14</sup>

revolves around how economic resources are apportioned and distributed. Through numerous policies, God had revealed a plan for redistributing wealth. This redistributive pattern was to be from the top down. Solomon and Noah rejected this divine guidance. Their willful rebellion against the just redistribution of wealth was another huge nail in the coffin of chaos, confusion, and collapse. It represented the beginning of the end of national life as they knew it.

As we have said, we need not, probably cannot institute the Bible's laws for the redistribution of wealth from the wealthy to the poor. But we can apply the principles found in them. For example, in the case of the law of the harvest and the stipulation that farmers not harvest all their crop, there is an implicit assumption that the farmer will be driven by concerns other than that of profit margins only. They will also be aware and concerned about the needs of the poor. It is expected, in fact, that the farmer be prepared to accept a small "loss of profit" in order to care for the poor—we can almost hear Milton Friedmann gasp from hell as we utter such blasphemous words against the false doctrine of the Neoliberal god. By this means, the wealthy land owner can assist the poor so that they are assured the basic necessities of life.

All this can be applied by any modern American farmer, small business owner, corporate CEO, banker, or elected official—local, state, and federal. It can, in fact, be applied to each of us. We can "to day, after so long a time; as it is said, 'To day if [we] will hear his voice,' harden not [our] hearts"<sup>40</sup> against godly principles so graciously revealed. We can act to redistribute wealth in a way that demonstrates our awareness and appreciation for the fact that we are more than fellow-citizens. We are brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of a wise and caring God. When we do not act upon this truth, we "hate [our] own blood,"<sup>41</sup> break the heart of a loving God and Father, and set ourselves up for fiery indignation.

In the end, the manner in which economic resources are distributed within in society proves to be much more than the mundane, temporal economic matter so many imagine it to be. It is, in fact, one of the most deeply spiritual aspects of life; one that determines our spiritual

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<sup>40</sup> Hebrews 4.7

<sup>41</sup> Moses 7.33

character and our eternal destiny.

“It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin.”<sup>42</sup>

Nevertheless, in your temporal things you shall be equal, and this not grudgingly, otherwise the abundance of the manifestations of the Spirit shall be withheld.”<sup>43</sup>

We can learn from and act upon that which we learn from Solomon’s and Noah’s tragic apostasy from divine principles, including those of economic distribution of wealthy, for this is why heaven preserved the inspired texts.

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”<sup>44</sup>

Even more powerfully, we can act upon the principle best exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth, God Himself: atonement. This is the revelation of our unavoidable connectedness; that we all live together or die together. There are no other options.

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus.”

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<sup>42</sup> DC 49.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>43</sup> DC 70.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>44</sup> 1 Corinthians 10.<sup>11</sup>