



journal of biblical  
perspectives  
in leadership

## GOD'S NATURE AND CHARACTER IN LEADING SOLOMON: A SACRED TEXTURE ANALYSIS OF 1 KINGS 3:5-14

JACQUELINE FAULHABER

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Free will, freedom, and liberty are important values to most people. Important, however, for these values is a foundation of morality. Today, more often than not, the demand for liberty is not constrained by morality. The public decries and defends legalization of immoral behavior under the mask of freedom and liberty. Public leaders can, however, play significant roles in ensuring freedoms and liberties are constrained by morality. Because morality's source is virtue, and virtue's source is God, it is important to gain a Biblical understanding of morality, virtue, and ethics. To gain this perspective, this paper analyzes a dialogue between God and King Solomon. Sacred texture analysis results of 1 Kings 3:5-14 reveal God's wisdom, character, and methods of developing King Solomon. These passages further provide some ethical guidelines for public leaders to carry out their duties in a way that honors God. But most importantly, these passages reveal the virtuous qualities of God that are not only necessary to emulate, but serve as a foundation for one of the most important virtuous qualities a public leader can have, justness.

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### I. INTRODUCTION AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Interest and scholarship in virtue and character in leadership is continuing to grow. Some scholars and authors have utilized Biblical narratives, accounts, and figures to draw their findings on the important foundational factor of virtue that influences the type of leadership a public leader uses. However, not too many authors seek to inquire into the character of the source of virtue, God himself. In Genesis 1:26, we are told that man is created in God's image, of which some assert refers to his moral image. Clearly

comprehending what this image looks like is difficult however, because our understanding is tainted by sin. Those Judean-Christian leaders who desire to emulate God's nature and character can benefit from an analysis of God's character. Findings of these analyses provide greater benefit when texts or narratives of dialogue between God and follower are investigated.

This paper is interested in God's character or virtuous qualities in relationship, as well as his leadership development of public leaders, and therefore, it features an investigation that was conducted into God's leadership of Solomon in 1 Kings 3:5-14. These findings are applicable to public leadership today. We are reminded that God has granted authority of power to all public leaders,<sup>1</sup> necessarily requiring the public leader to lead as God does, thus making worthwhile the application of these ancient principles into today's understanding of leadership. Understanding these principles and the nature of God will better equip leaders to decide on a more effective course of action in solving today's problems.

In some ways, today's problems are no different when they result from sin and vice in society, and this is equally true of the effects of the ungodly public leader in carrying out his or her official responsibilities and duties. What is different, however, particularly in America and over time since her founding, is the forgotten importance of virtue in sustaining freedom and individual rights. Even into the 18th century, great public leaders warned of the importance of virtue in sustaining freedom. As Benjamin Franklin once stated, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters."<sup>2</sup> George Washington, in praising the American Constitution as a "palladium of human rights," also pointed out that it would only survive "so long as there shall remain any virtue in the body of the people."<sup>3</sup>

This analysis, as a result, seeks to recall to memory these important aspects of the proper role of governance in ensuring freedom and liberty that is also a central theme of dialogue between God and King Solomon. The relationship between virtue, freedom, and liberty is sourced in one's purity of heart and motive to lead and govern by walking with God in truth, righteousness, and uprightness of heart with the desire and purpose to understand how to judge justly.<sup>4</sup> Given these results, a sacred texture proved to be the right method of analysis.

### *Method of Analysis*

A sacred texture analysis of 1 Kings 3:5-14 reveals "insights into the relation between human life and the divine." According to Robbins, there are multiple ways of

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 19:11. All scripture references are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> W. Cleon Skousen, *The 5000 Year Leap: A Miracle that Changed the World* (Malta, IDF: National Center for Constitutional Studies, 1981), 49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Kgs 3:6, 9.

exploring the sacred through a text.<sup>5</sup> This analysis focuses on investigating God's character in a way that provides leaders with a better understanding of the image we are to imitate and lead with. Robbins asserts that a sacred analysis of text seeks to describe the nature of God through analysis of the deity himself, reveal how God and other holy persons inspire and influence commitment to divine ways, and draw upon ethics that are concerned with the responsibility of humans "to think and act in special ways in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances."<sup>6</sup>

### *Analysis Findings*

With this focus on an analysis of 1 Kings 3:5-14, it was found that: (1) God asked and listened to Solomon's earnest desires, revealing God's character of care, compassion, and perceptiveness (also known as omniscience); (2) God's leadership development of Solomon was based on free will and liberty, reaffirming that followership occurs without coercion and that God's nature embodies bounded freedom and free will (take note it does not mean acceptance of sin, immoral, or evil ways), affirming his just nature, which is also affirmed in preconditioning Solomon's long life on walking in God's ways; (3) God was most concerned about Solomon's purity of heart, exemplifying a merciful character given the fallen nature of humankind preventing perfection of goodness; and (4) God provided Solomon's desire of just judgment/decision making, understanding that a person is not born into morality and wisdom, but instead requires cultivation of virtue, further exemplifying God's nature as giving, and exhibiting his servant nature to instill justness in his people. These virtuous character and qualities as a result became a model for Solomon to follow in leading Israel. This is with the exception of God's omniscience, but within the more human ability to seek and perceive the needs of those whose heart seeks God.

## II. GOD'S CARING, COMPASSIONATE, AND PERCEPTIVE (OMNISCIENT) CHARACTER: PERCEIVING AND LISTENING TO SOLOMON'S (FOLLOWER'S) NEEDS AND REQUESTS

"Silence and retirement befriend our communion with God. His kindest visits are often in the night."<sup>7</sup> A similar visit, although this one to Solomon, is noted in 1 Kings 3:5 and marks the beginning of a dialogue between God and Solomon. Here, Solomon considers his lack of experience (calling himself "but a little child"<sup>8</sup>) in his reign over Israel. At this time, it was the close of the sacrificial ceremonies and Solomon's mind may have "been elevated into a high state of religious fervor by the protracted

<sup>5</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 120-121, 126, 129-130.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Henry, "1 Kings 3:5-15," in *Mathew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, e-Sword*, version 9.9, Rick Meyers, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kgs 3:7.

services.”<sup>9</sup> *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown’s Commentary* notes that while awake, Solomon may have felt an intense desire to petition God for the gift of wisdom, but in his sleep was granted his request; in other words, Solomon’s dream may have been an imaginary repetition of his former desire, yet God’s granting of it was real.<sup>10</sup> While Solomon’s “bodily powers were locked up in sleep, the powers of his soul were strengthened; he was enabled to receive the Divine vision, and to make a suitable choice” when the powers of reason were least active, revealing the grace of God at work.<sup>11</sup>

Yet, Solomon’s sovereign God over heaven and earth reached down into the human realm to guide his child in the way he ought to go. How significant this event must have been in a world where the gods were not reachable, especially one in which a close relationship and friendship could evolve. Long has human history revealed man’s desire and effort to approach and please the gods. Solomon’s God, however, was willing to offer a gift to Solomon. God in these passages takes on a servant’s heart. His nature is revealed as warm, compassionate, and caring in relationship to his creation. While one could never imagine the feelings of God in this moment of interaction, one might estimate an understanding through the tender love and care a parent gives their child when that child yearns for help from his or her parents. Just as the caring parent listens intently to a concerned or worried child, God listened intently to the cares of Solomon’s heart. God exhibits the skill of authentic listening, allowing Solomon to express and place his needs before him. And this exchange of relation begins with God merely asking King Solomon what he desires.<sup>12</sup>

### *Leading Solomon to Emulate God and David’s Leadership and Character*

As leader, God in his perceptive knowledge of Solomon’s need for guidance is also discipling or developing Solomon’s leadership through example of the way in which Solomon should lead. God’s first interaction with Solomon immediately sets him on a path of duplicating leadership that he has learned through this interaction with God. This is a great witness to God’s grace to Solomon who loved the Lord and walked in the statutes, truth, righteousness, and uprightness of heart as his father David did,<sup>13</sup> reflecting God’s love toward the humble, meek, and pure in heart. It is not, however, the unrighteous that God bestows his offer of request to, but the righteous—one of uprightness of heart, who follows God’s statutes and lives in truth—that God seeks. He offers his help of wise counsel and guidance to the pure of heart, of who are discussed in greater detail later.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, “1 Kings 3:5-15,” in *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, e-Sword, version 9.9, Rick Meyers, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Henry, “1 Kings 3:5-15,” in *Mathew Henry’s Commentary*.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Kgs 3:5.

<sup>13</sup> Henry, “1 Kings 3:1-4,” in *Mathew Henry’s Commentary*.

Before offering analysis on Solomon's purity of heart and its relationship to God's request of provision, it is important to seek further clarification of the principles inherent in God's request, "Ask what I shall give thee."<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew word for *ask*, *shâ'al*, means "by extension to demand."<sup>15</sup> God does not tell Solomon what to ask for, but requests that Solomon does ask. While a somewhat demanding question, it leaves the request itself wide open to the possibility of a variety of answers. It is an offer to hear what Solomon desires. Questioning without condition of an appropriate response reflects God's nature of free will to answer according to Solomon's desire; in essence, valuing liberty and freedom to choose the answer or the gift, not necessarily that he was free not to answer at all. This would be in accordance with the idea that no one is free from responsibility and accountability to answer God. It is with free will, liberty, and followership, as well as the value God places upon freedom bounded by accountability and morality, which this discussion turns to next.

### III. GOD'S NATURE OF UPHOLDING BOUNDED FREEDOM: BASED ON SOLOMON'S (FOLLOWER'S) FREE WILL AND LIBERTY

God's leadership development of Solomon is based on free will and liberty, reaffirming that followership occurs without coercion and that God's nature embodies bounded freedom and free will (take note that freedom and free will does not mean acceptance of sin, immoral, or evil ways). It also affirms God's just nature and the precondition of Solomon's long life on walking in God's ways.

The context which these particular passages operate in is within the sphere of public governance and leadership. God is the wise counsel that Solomon seeks in carrying out his duties as a just king. Solomon is well aware of his responsibility to provide ethical and just judgments.<sup>16</sup> Just judgment is an ethical imperative, if as Robbins notes, God calls for "human commitment to divine ways," having also the responsibility to "think and act in special ways in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances."<sup>17</sup> Ethics is always lived out and has implications or impacts on others; it is very social in nature. And, as ruler, king, or public leader, the ethical imperative weighs heavily upon Solomon's shoulders. It would seem a plausible reason for Solomon to lead with a heavy hand in upholding justice, but given God's model and example in verse 5 (character of care, compassion, perceptiveness, and a call for free will and liberty), a coercive approach to governing the people would not be appropriate. Instead, Solomon would need wisdom to lead as God leads, to have the same character, governance, and leadership approach God would. While coercion, a typical approach of governance today, may be considered a perfectly appropriate employable method of ruling, it does not mean that liberty and freedom will not succumb to

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Kgs 3:5.

<sup>15</sup> James Strong, "1 Kings 3:5," in *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary, e-Sword*, version 9.9, Rick Meyers, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Kgs 3:9.

<sup>17</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 120-121, 126, 129-130.

immorality. In fact, many would assert that immorality is certainly on the decline, and as Franklin quoted earlier, it has resulted in an increased need of masters.<sup>18</sup> This twofold issue of ethical/moral and social responsibility toward those who are ruled and ensuring that God's moral code prevails in the society through free will and liberty (e.g., bounded freedom) seems to be of concern in verses 6-14. Free will and liberty appears to be bounded by freedom that is based in morality—understanding what is good and evil within the society—in the midst of relationship between and among people in that society. Yet the rightness of these societal relationships begins with a right walk with God; a walk that David walked.<sup>19</sup> It is with this overview that free will, free will's association with a social contract, considering oneself as a servant and follower, and its ethical implications is discussed next.

### *Free Will*

In 1 Kings 3:5, God asks Solomon what he should give him. God does not provide what he feels Solomon needs, but allows Solomon to choose. Choice and free will are part of God's nature. Quoting Maimonides in *The Rules of Repentance*, Joseph Telushkin asserts, "Judaism teaches that God endowed human beings with free will, which is what enables each person—despite her heredity and environment—to *choose* to do good or evil: 'If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his.'" <sup>20</sup> Free will, in essence, bears the ability to make the right choices. Teleshukin, quoting *The Ethics of the Fathers*, notes that human beings have a considerable ability to affect their destiny, and its medium is wisdom. *The Ethics of the Fathers* states, "Wisdom: 'Who is wise? One who learns from every person.' While our intellectual attainments may be restricted to by innate limitations, the Rabbis teach that wisdom is available to everyone."<sup>21</sup> In *Adversus Haereses*, Irenaeus notes, "For because of his kindness he bestowed his gift upon us, and made men free, as he is free" and man became "conformed to the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil."<sup>22</sup> He continues on to state that when "God showed his kindness, man learned the good of obedience and the evil or disobedience; his mind perceived by experience the distinction between good and evil, so that he might exercise his own decision in the choice of the better course."<sup>23</sup>

But because man is from the first possessed of free decision, and God, in whose likeness he was made, is also free, man is counseled to lay hold of the good, the

<sup>18</sup> Skousen, *The 5000 Year Leap*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> 1 Kgs 3:14.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Telushkin, *A Code of Jewish Ethics: You Shall Holy*, vol. 1 (New York: Bell Tower, 2006), 29.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses, The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius*, trans. and ed. Henry Bettenson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 69.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

good which is achieved in the fullness as a result of obedience to God. And not only in actions but in faith also God has preserved man's free and unconstrained choice. For he says, "Let it happen to you according to your faith," thus showing that faith is something which a man has as his own, as he has his own power of something which a man has as his own, as he has his own power of decision.<sup>24</sup>

One cannot, however, dismiss the power of sin over accurate perception of good and evil, for if it were possible to correctly perceive which direction to go, Solomon would not have yearned and asked God for his help.

In light of God's answer to Solomon's prayer, it is conceivable and accurate to say that God provides the necessary ability to make just decisions, as noted in 3:13. It is also interesting that the same free will, which allows one to choose his or her course and risk the straying into sin,<sup>25</sup> is also in the same context that God reveals his blessings or provision for choosing to do good, as seen in verses 11-14. In the making known of God's provision and blessing of a long life if one walks in his ways and keeps his commandments,<sup>26</sup> we get a glimpse of a social contract, per se, between God and Solomon. Long life would be predicated upon Solomon's walking in God's ways and keeping his statutes and commands.<sup>27</sup> According to Gill, riches would occur through the presents and tribute of the nations to Solomon and Solomon's trading to the nations; honor would result from the fame of his name spread about because of his wisdom. A long life—the result of walking in God's ways, statutes, and commands—the Jews claim he failed because of the young age at which Solomon died.<sup>28</sup> Solomon today is still known for his wisdom and his wealth, but also is known according to scripture to have later failed to walk in God's statutes, dying at an early age. Could Solomon's eventual failure have been important enough in God's eyes, due to his status as a king, because his actions had the potential to influence subsequent generations if he was allowed to continue to sin? This moral and social responsibility of the ruler/public leader toward its citizens is important to God. As well, it is important between God and man.

### *Social Contract*

A social contract pertains to the "view that a persons' moral and/or political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement among them to form the society in which they live."<sup>29</sup> A view and definition of social contract, very similar to

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Kgs 3:5.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Kgs 3:14.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> John Gill, "1 Kings 3:14," in *John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible, e-Sword*, version 9.9, Rick Meyers, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Celeste Friend, "Social Contract Theory," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (October 15, 2004). <http://www.iep.utm.edu/soc-cont/>.

bounded freedom, that seems to exemplify the exchange between God and Solomon is that of John Locke.<sup>30</sup> In writing about Locke, Friend states:

According to Locke, the State of Nature, the natural condition of mankind, is a state of perfect and complete liberty to conduct one's life as one best sees fit, free from the interference of others. This does not mean, however, that it is a state of license: one is not free to do anything at all one pleases, or even anything that one judges to be in one's interest. The State of Nature, although a state wherein there is no civil authority or government to punish people for transgressions against laws, is not a state without morality. The State of Nature is pre-political, but it is not pre-moral. Persons are assumed to be equal to one another in such a state, and therefore equally capable of discovering and being bound by the Law of Nature. The Law of Nature, which is on Locke's view the basis of all morality, and given to us by God, commands that we not harm others with regards to their "life, health, liberty, or possessions" (par. 6). Because we all belong equally to God, and because we cannot take away that which is rightfully his, we are prohibited from harming one another. So, the State of Nature is a state of liberty where persons are free to pursue their own interests and plans, free from interference, and, because of the Law of Nature and the restrictions that it imposes upon persons, it is relatively peaceful.<sup>31</sup>

Exemplifying Locke's ideas above and congruent with the exchange between God and Solomon in this verse is the free will to make a decision, exhibiting liberty, but not without moral constraints, or according to Locke, "licentiousness." The constraint operating within free will then is morality, of which is further established by God's divine and natural laws. Paradoxically, again, free will cannot last without a foundation of morality. Because God appears to be leading and teaching Solomon to be king, ruler, and leader of his people, and has through his authority established societal rules and ethical climate per se, it cannot be dismissed that the message underlying God asking Solomon what he should give him provides precedent for a social contract that Locke envisions for a republic. Wisdom would occur through abiding by a social contract based on free will and liberty that is founded upon morality or God's divine and natural laws. King Solomon's wisdom, known as the wisest ruler of all times, is evidenced in the very next passages, 1 Kings 3:16-28, in his judgment of two women who each argue that the child before Solomon is theirs. Free will then requires a social contract bounded morality, which is again supported by walking in God's ways and following his statutes and commandments.<sup>32</sup>

### *Followership as Servanthood*

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<sup>30</sup> John Locke was an English philosopher of the 1700s. America's Founding Fathers incorporated his thoughts into their philosophy of how states should be governed.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> 1 Kgs 3:14.



Solomon states that David is a servant and reaffirms in verses 3:8-9 that he too is a servant to God, particularly in his role as king. To be an *ebed*, or “a servant,” is to be in bondage to another. To be a servant of God is to follow him (e.g., walk in his ways) in truth (*emeth* in Hebrew meaning “trustworthiness, certainty, faithful”) and in moral virtue and objectivity with justice as guide (Hebrew *ts<sup>e</sup>dâqâh* for “righteousness”). This would then extend to *yishrâh of lëbâb* (Hebrew for “uprightness of heart”) to emotions, will, and intellect, toward everything and anything.<sup>33</sup> The servant of God as public leader and ruler, furthermore, was to be done in the midst of his people in terms of the consideration and care he would show to the people as a result of his office. The Hebrew word *tâvek* for “in the midst of the people” means “center, among, between.”<sup>34</sup> According to Gill, this is not understood as locally where his palace in Jerusalem was, but instead pertained to the exercise of his office. In his role as king (positionally placed over the people), he was to lead among them and have care for and inspection of them as a great people as God had promised,<sup>35</sup> particularly as it concerned the carrying out of his official duties to administer justice.<sup>36</sup> In other words, Solomon as servant to God is a follower of God who: (1) obeys and lives according to God’s ways; (2) does so with faithfulness and in a trustworthy manner (this aspects defines character or disposition of heart toward virtuousness); and (3) is guided by moral virtue to include justice, and manifests itself in the person’s will, intellect, and emotions (in other words, his or her entire being).

Followership as a result exhibits itself as following after moral virtue; objectivity as in carrying out justice that submits one’s entire being, that of the emotions, will, and intellect to virtue, particularly justice. To be an effective king as a servant (follower) of God, Solomon would have to devote his entire being faithful to virtuousness.<sup>37</sup> Ultimate authority and sovereignty would reside with God and not with Solomon. Solomon is to carry out justice as God does. He is to imitate God’s actions. Serving in this capacity would require humility toward God in all times and situations, for Solomon is a bondservant to God, just as his father David was. It is not the people that are prioritized higher than God for which Solomon is responsible toward, but in relation to God alone. When a king or ruler follows God, however, the king will place the best interests of the people ahead of his own (as God does) and serves as conduit for God’s character to the people. God’s power flows through the king to the people. God is pleased that Solomon’s heart is after the good of the people governed, rather than his own. This is completely contrary to how the world views a king, as one who rules over others, and not necessarily considers the interests of those he or she is responsible to. History is replete with numerous accounts of the king wielding power over the people.

### *Ethical Implications for Public Leadership*

<sup>33</sup> Strong, “1 Kings 3:6,” in *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary*, H6666, H3483, H3824.

<sup>34</sup> Strong, “1 Kings 3:8,” in *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary*, H8432.

<sup>35</sup> Gill, “1 Kings 3:8,” in *John Gill’s Exposition*.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Kgs 3:9, 11.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Kgs 3:6.

Given these passages, there are many ethical principles public leaders can draw from. They include: the public servant or leader ought to serve the people with right of free will to make decisions (not control over and in coercion), adherence to a social contract (yet not allowing licentiousness rule under the guise of freedom and liberty), continuously perceiving the needs of the people (asking the people what they need and are concerned with), providing for those needs that are godly in nature and for those walking in his way, and recognizing the sovereignty of God and maintaining a close relationship that includes walking and following in his ways. In other words, within one's proper recognition of his or her status in relation to God, free will of decision, upholding a social contract, and providing for needs are predicated upon the recognition of God and his ways as sovereign over all. This worldview no matter how vital and important it is, must still deal with the fallen nature of man. It is in God's relationship to fallen man that his mercy is revealed, but in response to not Solomon's actions, but the purity and earnest desires of his heart. And, one's disposition of heart is properly placed within the context of a child seeking to understand how to properly govern,<sup>38</sup> not knowing how to come in or go out.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV. GOD'S MERCIFUL CHARACTER: BASED ON SOLOMON'S (FOLLOWER'S) PURITY OF HEART

God is most concerned about Solomon's purity of heart; exemplifying a merciful character given the fallen nature of man preventing perfection of goodness. Not being "but a little child,"<sup>40</sup> refers not so much in age and stature, but more in "knowledge and understanding."<sup>41</sup> Although his father deemed him a wise man—was judged as so by others and as such was so—in his estimation (showing modesty and humility), he felt he was weak in understanding governance, of how to executive his office; he did not "know how to go out or come in."<sup>42</sup> It does not seem that Solomon exhibits the same characteristic of a child that Irenaeus notes in *Apostolic Preaching*; that a child was one whose "mind was not yet fully mature, and thus was easily led astray by the deceiver."<sup>43</sup> As mentioned already, David and others deemed Solomon wise. Clarke provides another view of Solomon's feeling: "I know not how to go out or come in—I am just like an infant learning to walk alone, and can neither go out nor come in without help."<sup>44</sup> Solomon recognizes that he cannot lead without God's provision of wisdom and guidance to understand and administer justice in his public office. Solomon's humility before God seems to deem him pure of heart. This disposition of heart is rarely seen in

<sup>38</sup> Gill, "1 Kings 3:9," in *John Gill's Exposition*.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Kgs 3:7.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Gill, "1 Kings 3:7," in *John Gill's Exposition*.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 68.

<sup>44</sup> Adam Clarke, "1 Kings 3:7," in *Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Whole Bible, e-Sword*, version 9.9, Rick Meyers, 2011.

those who possess much power, particularly politically. This becomes a plausible reason as to God's declaration of Solomon's unique characterization as the wisest to live.<sup>45</sup> God granted Solomon's request for a wise and understanding heart immediately upon request.

God's response to Solomon's plea in verse 3:12 reveals God had already begun to give Solomon a wise and understanding heart in not only the political things respecting civil government, but also to those pertaining to the natural world.<sup>46</sup> But God only grants Solomon these things "because"<sup>47</sup> of the disposition of his heart, for asking of those things that mattered most in light of God's own character and knowledge of right and wrong. For God, according to Buber, reveals to those who are pure in heart his goodness, and of whom then experiences God's goodness.<sup>48</sup> The dividing line according to Buber is not between men who sin and who do not sin, but between those who are impure in heart and pure in heart.<sup>49</sup> He states, "Even the sinner, whose heart becomes pure, experiences God's goodness as it is revealed to him. As Israel purifies its heart, it experiences that God is good to it."<sup>50</sup> God's mercifulness (*chêséd* in Hebrew meaning "kindness and favor") manifests itself in verses 11 and 12.<sup>51</sup> Humans only know God through his acts of mercy, his kindness, and granted favor. As Irenaeus asserts, "We cannot know God in his greatness, for the Father cannot be measured. But by his love (for this it is which leads us to God through the agency of his Word) we ever learn, in obeying him, that this great God exists, and that he himself by his own will and act disposed, ordained, and governs all things."<sup>52</sup> He goes on to state that it is through "his love and infinite kindness God comes within the grasp of man's knowledge."<sup>53</sup> God's love intertwined in mercy appears to be how Solomon came to know God. Realizing his own complete lack of wisdom and ability for just decision making on his own without God's help was the recognition that understanding how to be just and know good from evil was sourced in God. This context seems to be the proper context within which purity of heart could be understood.

Using Psalms as support for this view, the "wicked" would be those "who deliberately persist in impurity of heart," thus becoming "confused with the illusion that God is not good to him."<sup>54</sup> For the wicked walk away from God's grace and mercy rather than draw near to him because of his mercy and grace. The consequences of doing so are significant, as they find their selves void of God's guidance, wisdom, and help. Instead, Solomon's purity of heart impresses upon God enough for him to declare that

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<sup>45</sup> 1 Kgs 3:12.

<sup>46</sup> Gill, "1 Kings 3:12," in *John Gill's Exposition*.

<sup>47</sup> 1 Kgs 3:11.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Buber, *Good and Evil* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1997), 34.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Strong, "1 Kings 3:6," in *Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionary*, H2617.

<sup>52</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 66.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Buber, *Good and Evil*, 34.

“there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall arise unto thee.”<sup>55</sup> This declaration, however, was limited to political and natural knowledge, not divine knowledge as manifested with the New Testament apostles and Jesus Christ himself who is in essence an antitype of Solomon.<sup>56</sup>

### *Ethical Implications for Public Leadership*

Drawing the sacred and ethical implications out of verses 11 and 12, investigation into these verses supports Robbins’ view that “divine benefits must come from the divine through divine ways.”<sup>57</sup> These benefits or rewards from God could come from no other way than through a desire to follow and live out the will of God not necessarily in outward action, but by being pure in heart. And purity of heart was modeled to Solomon through his father David. God works through his children to teach others his ways to walk in. Solomon’s desire to seek out God’s character and nature is out of genuine desire to follow God as his father did, in truth, righteousness, and uprightness of heart.<sup>58</sup> In other words, Solomon understood the connection between David’s character and actions, God’s character, what God looks for in requests, and the answering of requests that seek out God’s own character. It was not worldly needs and wants that impressed God, but a genuine and heart-filled desire to lead and judge as God would. What desires and motivations the world would seem to think important is not what God thinks is most important. Solomon drew near to God, resulting in guidance, which is completely contrary to Buber’s reflections on Psalms noting that the bad are those who are from God.<sup>59</sup>

## V. GOD’S SERVANT NATURE AND JUST CHARACTER: OFFERING AND ANSWERING SOLOMON’S (FOLLOWER’S) REQUEST

God grants Solomon his desire of just judgment/decision making, understanding that a person is not born into morality and wisdom, but instead is cultivated into it. This further exemplifies God’s nature as giving, revealing his servant nature to instill justness in his people.

God provides Solomon’s desire of just judgment/decision making, understanding that a person is not born into morality and wisdom, but instead requires cultivation, and further exemplifying God’s nature as “giving,” exhibiting his servant nature to instill justness in his people. In 3:9, Solomon asks for the ability to “discern between good and bad,” predicated upon “an understanding heart” (*shâma*, “the ability to listen and hear”) to judge (*shâphaṭ*, “vindicate, punish, judge, govern, rule, decide controversy”).<sup>60</sup> God’s

<sup>55</sup> 1 Kgs 3:12.

<sup>56</sup> Mt 3:12; Gill, “1 Kings 3:12,” in *John Gill’s Exposition*.

<sup>57</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 129.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Kgs 3:6.

<sup>59</sup> Buber, *Good and Evil*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Strong, “1 Kings 3:9,” in *Strong’s Hebrew and Greek Dictionary*, H8085, H3820.

response to this request must be consistent with his just character. In light of this passage, what is good (Hebrew *ṭôb* for what *is* “beautiful, better, bountiful, etc.”) and bad, synonymous with evil (Hebrew *raʿ* for what *causes* adversity, affliction, distress, etc.), reveals what is consistent and not consistent with God’s character. Discerning, (*bīyn*, Hebrew for “separating mentally, distinguishing, or having intelligence”), would guide Solomon to understand and perceive those causes that would lead to something *being* beautiful, bountiful, and that which would *cause* affliction, calamity, hurt, wickedness, or wretchedness.<sup>61</sup> Because Solomon asks God for discernment, he is asking God to reveal to him, as well as to think intellectually with his cognitive capacity for understanding, what is good and evil; that is what is good and evil in God’s view and within the confines of what God’s character is or is not. This is consistent with God creating man in the image and likeness of himself.<sup>62</sup> This image according to *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* is denoted metaphorically as “only a shadow in the glass, consisting of three things: (1) “in his nature and constitution, not those of his body (for God has not a body), but those of his soul”; (2) “in his place and authority: Let us make man in our image, and let him have dominion”; and (3) “in his purity and rectitude.”<sup>63</sup> Solomon may be asking what Buber rightfully states is a direction in which way he should choose to go; that is the right path over the wrong path. These verses<sup>64</sup> then provide the context for Solomon’s creative and innovative approach to his judgment of the two women brought before him in 1 Kings 3:16-28.

According to Buber, just as Adam and Eve become cognizant or aware of good and evil when they ate from the tree of knowledge of good and evil,<sup>65</sup> Solomon too is very aware of the reality of good and evil. To not be aware of these opposites is to be deceived and incognizant that he or she lives in an illusionary world; they would not have in other words, a sense of reality. This sense of reality includes the ability to understand the characteristic and consequence of good—that it *is* beautiful and that it produces bountifulness—and that which is evil—characteristically wicked and that which leads to affliction and calamity. In the words of Buber in analysis of the first human murder (e.g. Cain), he writes:

Not until we deal “with the lack of direction towards God, do we penetrate to the chamber of the soul at whose entrance we encounter the demon. Not till then are we dealing with the true dynamic of the soul as it is given by the “knowledge of good and evil,” and by man’s self-exposure to the opposites inherent in existence within the world, but now its ethical mould. From quite general opposites, embracing good and evil as well as good and ill and good and bad, we have arrived at the circumscribed area peculiar to man, in which only good and evil still confront each other. It is peculiar to man—some may we late-comers formulate it—because it can only be perceived introspectively, can only be recognized in

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., H2896, H7451, H995.

<sup>62</sup> Gn 1:26.

<sup>63</sup> Henry, “Genesis 1:26,” in *Mathew Henry’s Commentary*.

<sup>64</sup> 1 Kgs 3:5-14.

<sup>65</sup> Buber, *Good and Evil*, 83.

the conduct of the soul towards itself: a man only knows factually what 'evil' is insofar as he knows about himself, everything else to which he gives this name is merely mirrored illusion; but self-perception and self-relationship are the peculiarly human, the irruption of a strange element into nature, the inner lot of man.<sup>66</sup>

Solomon himself was aware of the bad and evil that could exist in his heart. He realized that his own perception of how to administer justice could lead him away from doing God's will. He understands that it is God himself that will give guidance that is not plagued by the philosophies and worldview of those around him, a potential reason for Solomon's request in 1 Kings 3:6.

### *Ethical Implications for Public Leadership*

In the modern day of moral relativism and postmodernism, the former might argue that no group holds the truth, and for the postmodern person, he or she would attest that what is good or evil may not even be reality. Numerous examples exist today of political and public leaders refusing to call evil as evil and good as good. Instead they call what is good "evil" and what is evil "good." It means the difference between administering justice and injustice. Even with these concepts, a firm Biblical understanding of justice needs careful consideration, as even godly justice has been overtaken by the current-day social justice movement taking hold not only in the public sphere, but also in the business, nonprofit, and ecclesiastical spheres. Postmodern and relativistic worldviews are dangerous for public leaders in that they have the potential to guide a leader in the wrong direction and onto the wrong path. Programs, policies, laws, and regulations then become inconsistent with Biblical precepts and principles. The public leader who is a servant of God is to instead seek God to understand what is good and what is evil, and then set their feet to the path of goodness, which is found in walking with a God who is equitable. It is further with an equitable character that God gives not only wisdom, but honor and riches.<sup>67</sup> The same wisdom that God expounded and disciplined Solomon with is needed very much in our own day. Found in this analysis is a wealth of information on ethical public leadership.

## VI. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PUBLIC LEADERS TODAY?

To help combat today's issues in the public sphere are findings from this sacred texture analysis of 1 Kings 3:5-14. These include:

1. Public leaders emulate God's leadership and virtuous character of care and compassion, which may also require the emulation of other godly leaders such as those before the leader. Investigating and emulating these leaders brings awareness that God can and does develop his children into godly

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 87-88.

<sup>67</sup> 1 Kgs 3:11-14.

- leaders. *Public leaders do not believe that they are the only model of virtue, but that God provides examples of virtuous leadership in others so we may be inspired to emulate.*
2. A public leader views his or her relationship with those he or she governs in light of a social contract. Some of these principles would include: a leader's ability to seek understanding, listen, ask (reflective of free will), and answer requests if they have the power (revealed in these particular passages to include providing time, wisdom, help, council, etc., to do what is right—although recognizing that leaders cannot give others what God can only give) to do so, and when followers seek after what is moral and right in the eyes of God (recognizing that it is not the leader's values one must align with, but God's, which would hopefully be the leader's values as well). *Public leaders as a result do not coerce or lord over others.*
  3. Public leaders should be perceptive to the needs of others, asking others of their needs and providing that which is godly and within their authority, power, and means. For God may give riches, honor, and wisdom, but man's provision to other men is more limited without following God, his ways, and maintaining a relationship with him. *Public leaders do not refuse godly provisions. Warning is also taken here that only what is godly may be provided, and this requires close study of scripture of what a public leader authoritatively granted to the people. For example, what is given through immoral and ungodly ways (e.g., bribery, corruption, stealing, lying, unjust means), to meet the needs of the people would not be Biblical.*
  4. Public leaders relate to followers with a genuine spirit of concern, care, and love as God's nature and character exhibits with King Solomon. The dialogue is not meted out with a dry form of contractual or transacting motives. *The public leader's motivation is not driven by self-service and maintaining one's power.*
  5. Public leaders are servant leaders who serve God first, imitate God's character, and consider the deepest needs of those who walk in God's ways. They therefore cannot support licentiousness and immorality within the guise of liberty and freedom. *Public leaders do not excuse immorality for the sake of freedom and liberty. Libertarianism and any other form of political affiliation that reinforces liberty without morality or allowing licentiousness for the sake of liberty could be construed as nonbiblical.*
  6. Public leaders who seek to imitate God's character are to have a pure heart, knowing that purity is not completely sinless (as this cannot occur in man's fallen state), but one that wants and seeks understanding and guidance on how to judge rightly in their official duties and responsibilities. God's merciful nature is revealed by blessing, not condemning those who are not sinless, but desiring to know and understand what is most important to God. In other words, the public leader desiring God's mercy and guidance must draw near to God with the deepest sincerity and authenticity of heart to want to walk

before God in truth (e.g., trustworthiness, certainty, and faithfulness), righteousness (e.g., moral virtue, objectivity, and justice), and uprightness of heart (e.g., in everything—emotions, will, intellect, etc.). *Public leaders do not inconsistently practice virtue or compartmentalize virtue only one part of the leader's being.*

All of these points are predicated upon the recognition of God and his ways as sovereign over all. To recognize his sovereignty over all rulers and public leaders is the first step towards the humility of heart that God desires in his servants and in his leaders. It is the type of leadership that humanity longs for in its public leaders; the type of leader who is accountable not just to the people, but by a forever wise and gracious God. Only when public leaders begin to seek God with the purest intentions and purity of heart, the longing to do God's will, and the exercise of free will, will we see true freedom and liberty flourish within society. Freedom and liberty bounded by morality will replace the desire of man to demand for liberty at the expense of others. Instead, abiding and walking in God will lead to citizens defending the rights of others. May it be for these reasons that the Apostle Paul states in Galatians 5:13, "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."<sup>68</sup> For the public leader to do otherwise, as with the forewarning to Solomon and his own eventual demise along with the splitting of Israel, God keeps his promises as that which is noted in 1 Kings 3:14; the lengthening of Solomon's life and days of rule alongside Israel's rule was short lived. God allows free will to choose his ways, but allows consequences to come for those who do not choose to rule as he does. This is equally true for today's public leaders and the country supporting the leader.

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### About the Author

Jacqueline A. Faulhaber, Doctor of Strategic Leadership, is an adjunct professor at the University of South Dakota, Johnson University, Mid-America Christian University, and Black Hills State University within their graduate programs. She also has several years of experience helping organizations in nonprofit, for profit, government, and church sectors become more effective in reaching their vision, mission, and goals. Her research interests include character, virtuousness in public leadership, citizenship, and global leadership from a Christian worldview.

Email: [jfauL33@gmail.com](mailto:jfauL33@gmail.com)

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<sup>68</sup> Robert Hoerber, Horace Hummel, Walter Roehrs, and Dean Wenthe, eds., *Concordia Self-Study Bible: New International Version* (Saint Louis, MO: CPH, 1973).