



MORAL COMPASS IN MANAGEMENT: WHY EVERY MODERN ORGANIZATION MUST HAVE A CHIEF ETHICS OFFICER, A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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This paper explores the governance of Israel's first four rulers: Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. It highlights the tradition of righteous kings consulting a higher authority, such as a prophet or the high priest, on pivotal decisions. Prophets played a vital role, providing moral guidance and correction to the king. Today, it is crucial for business leaders to have a chief ethics officer to navigate ethical decision-making. The consequences of CEO choices can be dire, with innumerable lives affected by prioritizing profit over human safety and reputation. Just as King David sought advice on significant matters, modern corporate executives should also rely on the counsel of those who understand the ethical implications of their decisions.

Keywords: Bible, leadership, ethics, chief ethics officer, King Saul, King David, King Solomon.

There are various approaches to exploring the impact of ethical leadership. Traditionally, ethics instructors rely on case studies and the analysis of works by various moral philosophers, such as Kant, as primary teaching tools for ethics, including in business contexts. Some scholars propose incorporating literature into ethics education (Clemens & Mayer, 1999; Freeman et al., 2015; Friedman et al., 2023; Shepard et al., 1997; Singer & Singer, 2005). Literature and films have the power to evoke strong emotions. For instance, consider the profound impact of a work of fiction such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Literature can be a credible medium for conveying ethical principles and dilemmas. While it would be an exaggeration to say that Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel directly caused the Civil War, there is no doubt that *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by helping to shape public opinion in the 1850s, was a significant factor in the war (McNamara, 2014).

Recently, there has been growing recognition of the significance of storytelling as a powerful communication tool and an invaluable skill for professionals to develop. Narratives can captivate audiences, explain complex concepts, and foster stronger connections between organizations and stakeholders. As Peter Guber eloquently stated, "Stories have a unique power to move people's hearts, minds, feet, and wallets in the storyteller's intended direction" (Gallo, 2016, pp. 56–57). It has been noted that TED talks stand out because they present big ideas through personal stories (Gallo, 2016, p. 63). The accounting and consulting firm KPMG recognized storytelling's effectiveness as a means for managers to communicate their company's vision and values to employees. This strategic use of storytelling helped reduce employee turnover and increase engagement (Knowledge@Wharton, 2016).

USING THE BIBLE TO TEACH ETHICS AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

When examining the foundations of leadership and its potential pitfalls, the rich tapestry of biblical narratives and characters offers a valuable wellspring of insights, as recent academic works have begun to recognize (Feiler, 2004; Friedman, 2024; Friedman & Fischer, 2021; Friedman & Friedman, 2019; Friedman & Herskovitz, 2019; Friedman & Hertz, 2016; Friedman & Langbert, 2000; Hazony, 2000; Maxwell, 2002; Wildavsky, 1984; Woolfe, 2002). This is a well-founded perspective, given the Bible's unparalleled influence: estimates suggest up to 6 billion copies are in circulation, making it the most widely distributed book in history. It is a repository of narratives, analogies, and scenarios that are invaluable for imparting leadership principles, particularly given that over half of the world's population adheres to the Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which trace their origins to the Hebrew Scriptures.

For individuals not actively seeking leadership roles, examining the actions and shortcomings of biblical figures can provide valuable insights into the importance of ethical conduct. The principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1983; Greenleaf, 1991), covenantal leadership (Pava, 2003), and spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) all trace their origins back to biblical teachings. Lynch and Friedman (2013) illustrate how integrating a spiritual dimension into servant leadership, such as fostering personal development and incorporating social justice principles into the workplace, enriches the paradigm and enhances its efficacy as a leadership model.

The biblical system of checks and balances, where prophets challenged kings and high priests provided divine guidance, offers a timeless model for corporate governance. In ancient Israel, no leader, regardless of wisdom or power, operated without accountability. Nathan's confrontation of David over the Bathsheba affair demonstrates the critical importance of having advisors with the authority and courage to speak truth to power. Today's chief ethics officers must occupy a similar role: independent voices with direct access to the CEO and board, protected from retaliation, and empowered to halt decisions that conflict with organizational values.

The absence of such mechanisms leads to predictable disasters: the Volkswagen emissions scandal, Wells Fargo's fake accounts scheme, the opioid crisis driven by Purdue Pharma's deceptive marketing, Facebook's mishandling of user data, FTX's multi-billion-dollar fraud that deceived investors and customers, the Theranos

blood-testing deception, and the 2008 financial crisis precipitated by reckless mortgage lending and derivatives trading all occurred in environments where ethical guardrails were either absent or easily circumvented. The United States has filed lawsuits against Southern California Edison Co. (SCE), alleging the utility's gross negligence sparked the devastating Eaton and Fairview fires. These fires ravaged tens of thousands of acres of National Forest System lands, claimed 21 lives, and resulted in the destruction of thousands of buildings.

This paper examines the concept of ethical leadership through the lens of biblical narratives, highlighting the importance of leaders having ethical advisors to provide counsel on specific decisions. Some organizations employ corporate ethics officers who guide chief executives in considering ethical factors in critical business decisions. However, the effectiveness of these positions varies dramatically based on their structural authority and organizational culture, key issues that the biblical model directly addresses.

We demonstrate that even the most revered biblical figures required counsel to navigate ethical dilemmas. This need is exponentially greater in today's complex business environment, where decisions impact millions of stakeholders across global supply chains. The tale of King Solomon is particularly instructive, illustrating that the absence of an ethical advisor can lead even the most sagacious ruler astray, ultimately leaving a legacy marred by poor leadership. Similarly, modern executives face vulnerabilities, as exceptional intelligence and business acumen provide no immunity against ethical blind spots, conflicts of interest, or the corrupting influence of unchecked power and wealth accumulation.

Furthermore, we posit that the prophetic and priestly accountability structures surrounding ancient Israel's monarchy provide a clear biblical analog for independent ethical authority in contemporary organizations. The argument develops in three stages. First, the paper examines the biblical structures themselves, tracing how prophets and high priests functioned as independent moral counsel to Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam, and how the fortunes of each reign rose or fell with the ruler's willingness to seek and heed that counsel. Second, it then connects these structures to contemporary scholarship on organizational ethics and governance, which has documented both the role-performance conditions facing ethics officers and the broader antecedents, outcomes, and moderators of ethical culture in organizations (Adobor, 2006; Roy et al., 2024). Finally, it distills both the biblical and organizational evidence into a six-element model for structuring the chief ethics officer role.

RULES FOR KINGS

In antiquity, it was common for monarchs and emperors to exhibit arrogance, with some even claiming divinity. Humility was a rare trait among rulers. The Torah (Pentateuch) addresses the dangers of a king's pride and avarice, mandating that he always carry a copy of the Torah to prevent his heart from becoming haughty "above his brethren" and to ensure he does not deviate from the commandments, thereby securing a long reign (Deut. 17:20). The Torah scroll had to be in the monarch's presence, and he was supposed to read it daily throughout his life and reflect upon it constantly (Deut. 17:19; Josh. 1:8). The Torah cautions that arrogance poses a significant risk for those in

authority. To curb such pride, restrictions were placed on the king's accumulation of wealth, the number of his wives, and the number of horses he owned (Deut. 17:16–17).

Sacks (2020) underscores that the Torah established the principle that even kings were bound to obey its laws and that any ruler who failed to behave correctly could be challenged, as evidenced by numerous examples of kings, such as Saul, David, Solomon, and Ahab, who were reprimanded by prophets for disobeying God's commands. Thus, the midwives Shifra and Puah refused to commit infanticide because they "feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them" (Ex. 1:17). The servants of Saul refused to annihilate Nob, the city of priests, because they knew it would be a crime against God to kill innocent people (1 Sam. 22:17). The prophet Nathan rebuked David for his adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah (2 Sam. 12). Elijah boldly admonished King Ahab for having Naboth murdered to steal his vineyard, asking rhetorically, "Have you murdered and also inherited?" (1 Kings 21:19). All of the above examples highlight that those who believe in the laws of the Torah understand that might does not make right and that even the most powerful leaders are accountable to a higher moral authority.

The Torah's design for governance in ancient times, as depicted in the Hebrew Bible, intentionally distributed power among three separate roles: the king, the high priest, and the prophets. This tripartite structure ensured a balance of power, with each role serving a distinct purpose: the king for political leadership, the high priest for religious duties, and the prophets for their foresight and moral guidance (Sacks, 2012). The high priest and prophets played a crucial role in advising the king, ensuring that his decisions aligned with the Torah's ethical teachings.

The high priest used the *Urim V'Tumim* ("lights and perfections"), a parchment likely bearing God's name, placed in the *choshen* (breastplate of judgment) and securely fastened to the *ephod* (a vest-like garment), to function as an oracle for the Jewish king or high court. By entering deep contemplation, the high priest would receive a divine response.

This paper will examine the dynamics of this system and its role in maintaining ethical governance. It will also demonstrate how the high priest in ancient Israel served a purpose that extended beyond performing religious rituals. He served as a conduit between God and the leadership, offering guidance on intricate ethical matters and quandaries. The prophet's role was pivotal in holding the monarch accountable. Regarded as the voice of God, prophets fearlessly faced rulers who deviated from divine commands. They admonished the sovereign, calling them to repent and exhorting them to govern the people with truth, justice, and righteousness.

KING SAUL

Samuel, the prophet, was Saul's principal ethical advisor; Samuel crowned Saul as the first king of Israel. Sadly, Saul made several serious blunders that ultimately led to his losing the throne. Saul was instructed to wait seven days for the prophet Samuel to arrive before offering sacrifices to God, in preparation for a battle with the Philistines. Saul's impatience led him to sacrifice the burnt offerings to God himself. The following verses indicate what Samuel told him:

Samuel said to Saul, "You have acted foolishly! You have not kept the commandment the Lord, your God, commanded you; if you had, the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever, but now your kingdom shall not endure." (1 Sam. 13:13–14)

Saul persisted in his sinful ways, displaying arrogance and failing to obey God's directives. Although commanded to annihilate the Amalekites and their animals, Saul defied these orders. He chose to spare Agag, the king of the Amalekites, along with the finest livestock. Saul later rationalized, likely as a feeble justification, that the prime animals were saved to be sacrificed to God. In response, Samuel conveyed to Saul the following message:

But Samuel replied, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than a choice offering, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of sorcery, and insubordination is like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king." (1 Sam. 15:22–23)

Saul appeared contrite and admitted to Samuel that he had sinned and transgressed the Lord's word (1 Sam. 15:24). After the incident with Agag, Samuel never visited Saul again. However, he did call him up after he died with the help of a sorceress. Saul did go to see him once in Ramah (1 Sam. 19:23). Saul may have stopped consulting the prophet but became a temporary prophet himself after the "Spirit of God came on him" (1 Sam. 19:23–24). It was so incredible that the question "Is Saul also among the prophets?" became a proverb. Unfortunately, Saul continued his unjust attempt to kill David even after experiencing this amazing transformation.

Saul's intense envy of David led him to conspire against his own son-in-law. Discovering the deep friendship between his son Jonathan and David, Saul attempted to harm Jonathan with a spear (1 Sam. 20:33). Furthermore, Saul ordered the destruction of Nob, the priestly city, for aiding David, who was fleeing from Saul's wrath. The priests, unaware of the strife between Saul and David and knowing that David was the king's son-in-law, aided David in good faith. The only one Saul consulted about what to do to the Nob priests was the evil Doeg the Edomite, who slandered the high priest Ahimelech and made it seem as if the priest was helping David the fugitive. Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests of Nob, but they refused, knowing it was wrong (1 Sam. 22:17). Doeg then went and killed the residents of Nob—men, women, children, and even the livestock. It is ironic that Saul, who showed compassion for Agag and the best cattle, showed no mercy to the inhabitants of Nob.

Saul's transgressions culminated in his consultation with a medium to summon the spirit of the late Samuel, a violation of Torah law (Lev. 19:3). The apparition of Samuel prophesied that the Philistines would triumph over Israel and that Saul, along with his son, would perish in battle (1 Sam. 28). Interestingly, while evading Saul's pursuit, David came to the aid of Keilah's inhabitants when they faced an assault from the Philistines. Saul heard that David was in Keilah, a walled city; he thought he could trap and kill him there. Unlike Saul, David consulted with Abiathar, son of Ahimelech,

the lone survivor of Nob, who was now serving as a high priest. David inquired whether he should rescue Keilah (1 Sam. 23:4). After rescuing Keilah, David asked Abiathar whether Saul would attack and whether the people of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. He was told the inhabitants would hand him over to Saul, so David left Keilah.

KING DAVID

Even when fleeing Saul, David often consulted the prophets Samuel and Gad, as well as Abiathar, the high priest. David understood the importance of having someone around to challenge him when he committed a misdeed and the necessity of consulting the high priest for divine authorization. For example, David asked Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, to bring the *ephod* so he could ask God whether to pursue the Amalekite marauders who had attacked Ziklag and captured the women in it. He was told to "Pursue, for you will surely overtake them and you will surely rescue" (1 Sam. 30:7–8).

After Saul's death, David consulted with God and asked whether he should go to one of the cities of Judah and reign as king. After being told to go, David asked which city and was told Hebron (2 Sam. 2:1). Before fighting the Philistines, David also inquired of God whether he should go to war (2 Sam. 5:19). When David planned to construct a temple for God, Nathan informed David that he had not been chosen to build the First Temple. Instead, it would be David's son, Solomon, who would be tasked with this sacred undertaking (2 Sam. 7:1–17).

David's sin with Bathsheba (and triggering the death of her husband, Uriah the Hittite, by arranging to have him sent to the front) is well known and described in 2 Sam. 11. The prophet Nathan rebuked him using a parable involving a rich man, a poor man, and an ewe. David confessed, repented, and admitted (2 Sam. 12:13), "I have sinned against God." One of the most eloquent Psalms concerning repentance is Psalm 51: "A Psalm of David when Nathan came to him after he had gone in [i.e., committed adultery] to Bathsheba." David acknowledged his wrongdoing and said, "For of my transgressions I am cognizant, and my sin is before me always" (Ps. 51:5).

The Babylonian Talmud (Shabbos 56a) asserts that soldiers who served in King David's army divorced their wives. This was because if they went missing in action or were captured, their wives would be allowed to remarry. According to this view, David was not guilty of the sin of adultery. Everyone, however, agrees that David's repentance was sincere and accepted by God.

David consulted with God during a three-year famine to discover its cause (2 Sam. 21:1–2). David was told that it was a punishment for Saul's killing of the Gibeonites.

The Torah permitted a census to be conducted indirectly by asking everyone to donate a half-shekel (Ex. 30:12); otherwise, a plague would occur. David decided to take a census using a direct count for no apparent reason (2 Sam. 24). Joab, his general, attempted to get David to reconsider conducting a census, but "Nevertheless, the king's order prevailed against Joab and the officers of the army" (2 Sam. 24:4). For some reason, David did not consult with the high priest or a prophet, asking whether a census should be taken.

Some commentators posit that an unnecessary census is also a sin, even if done indirectly with a half-shekel. This census was unnecessary and was done directly.

After the census was completed, David realized he had sinned and asked God to forgive him (2 Sam. 24:10). The prophet Gad presented David with three options for punishment. David chose a plague lasting for three days. He said, "Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are great; but do not let me fall into the hand of man" (2 Sam. 24:14).

When David was old and sick, his fourth-born son, Adonijah, declared himself crown prince and successor to David. Knowing that God wanted Solomon to succeed David, the prophet Nathan advised Bathsheba, the queen, to approach David and inform him of Adonijah's plot. Afterward, Nathan approached David and supported Bathsheba's claim. David ensured Solomon was proclaimed the next ruler (1 Kings 1).

The events mentioned above underscore that David relied on the counsel of the high priest and the prophets Samuel, Gad, and Nathan to make crucial decisions. Moreover, David was receptive to criticism, an essential trait for a leader.

KING SOLOMON

One of King Solomon's first major decisions was deposing Abiathar as high priest for supporting Adonijah and banishing him to Anathoth (1 Kings 2:26). Tzadok, who anointed Solomon as king and was always loyal to him (1 Kings 1:34), becomes the high priest (1 Kings 2:35). It is reasonable to assume that Tzadok was afraid he would be removed as high priest, so he became reluctant to criticize David.

God appeared to Solomon in a dream when he was young and offered him anything he wanted (1 Kings 3). Solomon prayed to God for "an understanding heart to judge people and the ability to discern between good and evil; for who can judge this formidable people of Yours?" (1 Kings 3:9). Solomon understood that a leader must possess intelligence, a strong sense of fairness, and empathy for others. For him, this held greater significance than riches or power. God recognized that Solomon understood what leadership was really about and promised to bestow on him tremendous wisdom in addition to riches and fame (1 Kings 3:10–13).

King Solomon constructed the First Temple, which was an extraordinarily elaborate structure that took seven years to complete. It was not a simple task. A corvée of 30,000 men was required to construct it (1 Kings 5:27). These men were dispatched to Lebanon monthly, in shifts of 10,000. In addition, Solomon required 3,300 supervisors to oversee the labor, 70,000 men to act as transporters, and 80,000 stonecutters to hew the mountains (1 Kings 5:29). This was a noteworthy accomplishment essential to the monotheistic faith. Private altars that might easily be set up for pagan deities would no longer be permitted; all sacrifices to God had to be done in the Temple.

The prophet's name is not mentioned, but it is assumed to be Ahijah the Shilonite (Nathan is another possibility), who spoke to Solomon during the construction of the Temple.

Then the word of the Lord came to Solomon, saying, "Concerning this temple which you are building, if you follow My decrees, execute My judgments, and observe all My commandments, to follow them, then I will uphold My word with

you, which I spoke to your father, David. And I will dwell among the Israelites and will not abandon My people Israel (1 Kings 6:11–12).

Solomon made his first mistake when he lost sight of the fundamentals of moral leadership. A leader should not be preoccupied with personal gain and comfort. Solomon ought to have built himself a modest palace after embarking on such a massive project as constructing the Temple. An individual given so much wisdom by God should have had the insight to realize that it was wrong to spend so much money and time on an extravagant palace. He forgot that leadership was not about achieving status, wealth, or power, but about spiritually and physically elevating people. Indeed, it took 13 years to complete this project, whereas the Temple took only seven. It is no accident that he spent more time building his palace than the Temple. Scripture alludes to his error, ultimately resulting in grave issues for his son and heir, Rehoboam. His preference for his own house over the Temple was evident when he devoted more time to the former. Admittedly, one might argue that he rushed the building of the Temple because of its greater importance.

Solomon did not find a magnificent palace sufficient. He also crafted "an immense ivory throne and overlaid it with glittering gold." Twelve golden lions, one on each side of the six steps that led up to it, graced the stunning throne (1 Kings 10:18–20). One might wonder why a person of such wisdom would prioritize chasing after material comforts.

His desire to accumulate wealth became almost compulsive. According to the *Babylonian Talmud* (Sanhedrin 70b), his mother, Bathsheba, rebuked him for indulging in worldly pleasures, including extravagant feasts, rather than behaving as a righteous king. Proverbs 31:1–5 records how Solomon (called Lemuel) was chastised by his mother. The job of a king is to "judge righteously and defend the rights of the poor and needy" (v. 9).

Annually, Solomon received 666 talents of gold and became so prosperous that gold and silver became nearly valueless to him (1 Kings 10:21). Solomon had at his disposal 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen (1 Kings 10:26). He harbored a passion for amassing horses, leading him to import the finest steeds from Egypt (1 Kings 10:28). Moreover, he married numerous women, totaling 300 concubines and 700 wives of royal birth (1 Kings 11:3).

As detailed in Deut. 17:16–17, the Torah outlines several commandments intended to prevent a king from accumulating excessive wealth, marrying multiple wives, or acquiring a large number of horses. These restrictions ensured that the king remained humble, focused on serving the people, steadfast in his adherence to the Torah, and uncorrupted by power and luxury. A king was always expected to have a copy of the Torah readily available and to study it regularly. By doing so, he would extend his reign and that of his descendants in Israel, as stated in Deut. 17:20.

The absence of ethical and moral advice obtained by consulting a prophet or priest is clearly evident. Despite his enormous personal fortune, Solomon did not use it to benefit the populace. Instead, his extravagant spending put a heavy tax load on the people and ultimately created severe problems for his son and successor, Rehoboam. King Solomon's enormous expenditures could explain the following:

At the end of twenty years, during which Solomon built these two buildings—the temple of the Lord and the royal palace—King Solomon gave twenty towns in Galilee to Hiram, king of Tyre, because Hiram had supplied him with all the cedar, juniper, and gold he wanted (1 Kings 9:10–11).

Several commentators have found it challenging to reconcile the biblical account of King Solomon giving away 20 towns, which could be seen as diminishing the size of the Holy Land. One interpretation offered by the Radak (Rabbi David Kimchi; 1160–1235) suggests an alternative explanation. Citing 2 Chronicles 8:2, where it states that Hiram also provided Solomon with cities in his kingdom, he avers that King Hiram and King Solomon traded towns to cement their agreement; thus, the size of Israel remained constant. Many disagree with this explanation.

As previously mentioned, Solomon had 1000 wives and concubines. It is reasonable to suggest that some of these marriages were politically motivated. Given that no other monarch had as many, it seems unlikely that Solomon's multitude of wives was for any reason other than self-aggrandizement. Moreover, this action violated the Torah's directive in Deut. 17:17, which warns kings against accumulating numerous wives to prevent their hearts from turning away. According to the biblical account, this exact consequence came to pass.

King Solomon loved many foreign women, including the daughter of Pharaoh. They included Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites. They were from nations where the Lord warned the Israelites, "Do not intermarry with them, for they will surely sway your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon clung to them in love. He had 700 wives who were noblewomen and 300 concubines, and his wives swayed his heart. Unlike his father, David, who maintained a steadfast faith, Solomon wavered in his devotion to the Lord in his later years because he permitted his many wives to worship foreign deities. He went after Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites. Scripture states explicitly that he did not wholeheartedly follow the Lord, as his father David did, because of his wives (1 Kings 11:1–5).

The repeated use of the term "loved" indicates that Solomon's marriages were not solely for political alliances. These women practiced idolatry, yet they were the object of Solomon's affection. Marrying an idol worshipper was prohibited, especially for a monarch whose duty included abolishing idolatry and promoting monotheism globally. Solomon's act of constructing shrines for foreign gods in Jerusalem, the same city where he built the Temple, was a grave violation of Jewish law. This action suggested the validity of all gods, not just the God of Israel, which was contrary to his religious obligations. Solomon's punishment was the division of the mighty kingdom he had built.

God told him, through a prophet (unnamed but thought to be Ahijah), about the consequences of his behavior:

So God was angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although He had commanded him about this matter not to follow the gods of others, he did not obey what the Lord had commanded. Therefore, the Lord told Solomon, "Because you are guilty of this and have not kept My covenant and My statutes

that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant. Nevertheless, for the sake of your father, David, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son (1 Kings 11:9-12).

According to the *Babylonian Talmud* (Shabbos 56b), Solomon was not deemed an idolater. Instead, because he allowed his wives to engage in pagan practices, Scripture views it as though he also worshipped these pagan deities. The marriage to all these foreign idol-worshipping women had the opposite effect of what God wanted. Instead of propagating ethical monotheism, Solomon was responsible for helping spread paganism.

As a divine punishment, Solomon had two adversaries in the last few years of his life: Hadad the Edomite and Rezon. They joined forces and ruled over Aram (1 Kings 11:14–25). They made trouble for Solomon until his death. Because Solomon focused on his own needs and sinned before God, he was punished when Hadad and Rezon were able to break the long peace: "Rezon was Israel's adversary as long as Solomon lived, adding to the trouble caused by Hadad. So Rezon ruled in Aram and was hostile toward Israel" (1 Kings 11:25).

Given his many wives and concubines, one would assume Solomon would have a large family. We only know of three: Rehoboam and two daughters, Taphath and Basemath, who married two of Solomon's regional commissioners (1 Kings 4:11–15). It is quite likely that Solomon had many more children from his wives, but they are not mentioned because they did not identify as Jews.

It is curious that, despite his wisdom, Solomon did not understand the importance of consulting the prophets. God spoke to him twice through a nameless prophet, but it had no impact, unlike the effect of Nathan's rebuke of David. One would expect Solomon to repent upon hearing that the empire would be divided because of his wrongdoing. There is no evidence that Solomon divorced his wives or destroyed their pagan shrines. It could be that he, the wisest of all rulers, erroneously thought he was beyond the need for prophetic guidance. Additionally, he did not seek insights from the *Urim V'Tumim* through the high priest. The Bible's message is unmistakable: even the most sensible leaders require something akin to a chief ethics officer, not necessarily a prophet, but an unbiased advisor capable of discerning the wisdom and morality of decisions.

The prophet Ahijah the Shilonite encountered Jeroboam as he was leaving Jerusalem and informed him that the kingdom would be divided, with Jeroboam ruling over 10 tribes (1 Kings 12:29–39). Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was from the tribe of Ephraim and worked as a tax collector for Solomon. Solomon never consulted with this great prophet, who could have provided him with counsel so that the great empire built by David and Solomon would have remained intact. The division made Israel vulnerable, and, according to tradition, the Assyrians ended the Northern Kingdom in 556 BCE. The Babylonians terminated Solomon's Temple and the Southern Kingdom in 423 BCE (Kantor, 1989).

REHOBAM, SOLOMON'S SUCCESSOR

Following Solomon's death, the populace petitioned Rehoboam to reduce the heavy taxes imposed to support Solomon's excesses (1 Kings 12:4). Rehoboam consulted two groups of advisors. The senior advisors, who were elderly, recommended a lenient and kind approach to win the people's lasting allegiance (1 Kings 12:7), recognizing that a ruler's role is to serve, not to burden, the people. In contrast, Rehoboam's younger advisors urged him to adopt a stern, authoritarian stance. Ignoring the advice of the elders, Rehoboam told the people (1 Kings 12:14): "My father made your yoke heavy, and I shall add to your yoke! My father chastised you with sticks; I shall chastise you with scorpions!" This led the people to rebel against him and join Jeroboam, a member of the tribe of Ephraim.

Following in his father's footsteps, Rehoboam did not consult with the high priest or any prophet.

After that, Israel was split into two kingdoms: the Southern Kingdom of Judah, comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (David, Solomon, and Rehoboam were from the tribe of Judah), and the Northern Kingdom, comprising the other 10 tribes. Jeroboam became the king of the Northern Kingdom and established idol worship so his people would not go to Jerusalem to make sacrifices in the Temple (1 Kings 12).

By the fourth year of Rehoboam's reign, the people of Judah also "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" and worshipped pagan deities (1 Kings 14:21–29; 2 Chronicles 12:1). In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, King Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem and looted the treasures of the Temple and the king's palace (1 Kings 14:25). The great wealth accumulated by Solomon ended up in Egypt. Eventually, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom and dispersed the 10 tribes of Israel. The 10 tribes disappeared and were probably assimilated into other nations. All this would not have happened had Solomon not deviated from his original mission of being concerned with righteousness and justice and living a simpler life rather than a sybaritic and extravagant one.

DISCUSSION

Many prophets, including Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Huldah, Ezekiel, Amos, Jonah, and Micah, prophesied. Prophets delivered their messages to various audiences, speaking to the rulers of the Northern Kingdom, the monarchs of the Southern Kingdom, the Jewish exiles in Babylon, as well as to Edom and Nineveh. Additionally, some prophecies were directed to Governor Zerubbabel. Many fought for social justice and warned monarchs and kings that disobedience to God's law would lead to disaster.

The prophets delivered their messages from God, unapologetically and courageously, and frequently at significant personal risk, to guide the powerful rulers they confronted towards a path of moral integrity. Indeed, the prophet Zechariah was stoned to death in the courtyard of the Temple (2 Chronicles 24:21). Jeremiah was beaten and placed in the stocks (Jer. 20:2). Amaziah, the false priest, sent word to Jeroboam II that Amos was conspiring against him and telling the people that

"Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel will be exiled from the land" (Amos 7:10–11).

Some of the memorable rebukes from the great prophets include the following:

Elijah confronted King Ahab with the Lord's message in 1 Kings 21:19, accusing the monarch of murdering Naboth and seizing his vineyard. He said, "Have you murdered and also taken possession?" Isaiah warned the people of Judah about the consequences of their actions, particularly their social injustices and meaningless religious rituals (Isa.1).

Woe to those who make unjust laws and who issue oppressive documents to deprive the destitute of their rights and to rob of their rights the needy of My people, making widows their prey and orphans their booty. What will you do on the day of reckoning when the calamity comes from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Where will you leave your wealth? [There will be nothing to do] except cringe among the captives or fall among the slain (Isa. 10:1–4).

Jeremiah also warned the leaders what would happen if they abandoned the Torah.

Woe to him who builds his house without righteousness and his upper rooms without justice; who uses his neighbor's services without payment and does not give him his wages (Jer. 22:13) . . . If one does justice to the poor and needy, then it is good; Is that not what it means to know Me? declares the Lord (Jer. 22:16).

Amos, known as the prophet of social justice, prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II in the Northern Kingdom and Uzziah in the Southern Kingdom:

Listen to this, you who devour the needy, annihilating the poor of the land, saying, When will the month pass so that we can sell grain; the Sabbatical year, so that we can open the stores of grain; using an *ephah* that is too small and a shekel that is too large, and distorting dishonest scales so that we may purchase the poor for silver and the needy for shoes and sell the refuse of grain as grain. The Lord swears that He will never forget their deeds (Amos 8:5–7).

Micah believed that the essential virtues of leaders were justice, kindness, and humility—leaders lacking these qualities were undeserving of their positions:

Listen to my message, you leaders of the House of Jacob, you chiefs of the House of Israel, who abhor justice and who twist all that is straight, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with iniquity. Her leaders judge for bribes, her priests give rulings for a fee, and her prophets divine for pay . . . Therefore, because of you, Zion shall be plowed over as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of rubble, and the Temple Mount will become like a stone heap in the forest (Mic. 3:9–12).

De Jong (2023, pp. 148–166) highlighted the dangers of leadership that prioritizes strict adherence to rules over fulfilling core objectives. In today's world, simply claiming to "follow protocol" is no longer an adequate justification. This disconnect between regulations and ethical behavior has created a moral vacuum. De Jong, along with other forward-thinking individuals, envisions a new leadership paradigm emerging.

These emerging leaders will play a crucial role in addressing global challenges, including climate change, poverty, economic disparities, and racial discrimination. Driven by increasing pressure from consumers, employees, the general public, and governmental bodies, the traditional profit-focused executive model is becoming obsolete. CEOs do not have prophets or high priests to guide them, but it is "crystal clear that companies need a chief ethics officer" (p. 162).

A Model for the Chief Ethics Officer

The biblical and organizational evidence presented above can be consolidated into a model comprising six elements, each with a scriptural warrant and a corporate application:

- **Independence:** Nathan's authority derived from a source outside the royal household, which is why his rebuke of David succeeded. The chief ethics officer should likewise stand outside the executive structures being overseen, reporting to the board rather than to management.
- **Access:** David consulted Abiathar and the ephod before pursuing the Amalekites, not after. The ethics officer requires direct, unmediated access to the chief executive and the board while decisions are still open.
- **Authority:** The prophets held an explicit mandate to challenge the king. The ethics officer must be empowered to pause a decision pending ethical review, not merely to comment upon it.
- **Protection:** Zechariah was stoned and Jeremiah beaten for delivering unwelcome truths. Protection from retaliation must therefore be codified in corporate bylaws rather than left to executive goodwill.
- **Transparency:** The prophetic rebukes were public and preserved in Scripture for all generations. Ethics recommendations and management responses should similarly be disclosed to the audit committee and documented.
- **Integration:** David's consultations were routine, occurring before battles, appointments, and successions, rather than exceptional. Ethical consultation must be embedded in the ordinary rhythm of strategic decision-making rather than treated as after-the-fact compliance. Recent evidence indicates that ethics and compliance programs are most effective when embedded in organizational culture and supported by leadership, data-driven evaluation, and employee-centered training (Divers, 2024).

The case of Solomon demonstrates that these elements are jointly necessary. Solomon enjoyed access to prophets, yet without integrating their counsel into his actual decisions, that access accomplished nothing.

The Limits of the Biblical Analogy

The analogy proposed here has limits that should be acknowledged. A chief ethics officer is not a prophet. The prophet's legitimacy rested on divine revelation, whereas the ethics officer's legitimacy rests on professional expertise, a corporate charter, and law. The prophet stood entirely outside the royal payroll. The ethics officer, by contrast, remains a salaried employee of the very organization whose conduct they are charged with reviewing. This is a structural tension that no reporting arrangement can fully dissolve (Adobor, 2006).

Furthermore, ancient Israel was a covenantal community with a shared religious framework, whereas the modern corporation operates in a pluralistic legal environment and serves stakeholders with divergent moral commitments. Moreover, the prophet could invoke ultimate divine sanction, while the ethics officer must persuade through argument, evidence, and procedure.

The analogy is therefore functional rather than theological. What the two roles share is their essential function: truth-telling before power, moral accountability for the person at the top of the hierarchy, and institutionalized resistance to unchecked executive authority. It is this function, not the prophet's metaphysical standing, that modern governance must replicate.

CONCLUSION

This study focused primarily on the reigns of Israel's initial four monarchs: Saul, David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. Traditionally, a king would seek counsel from the high priest for critical decisions. Prophets also played a role, admonishing the king, who was open to condemnation if he deviated from virtuous conduct. The biblical governance model reveals a sophisticated understanding of human psychology and organizational behavior that remains profoundly relevant to modern business leadership.

Three critical lessons emerge from these ancient narratives that directly address contemporary corporate governance failures:

First, let us consider the inevitability of ethical drift when institutional accountability is absent. The story of King Solomon offers a clear historical parallel: he began as a wisdom-seeking young leader but ultimately became an extravagant ruler whose excesses bankrupted the kingdom. This mirrors the lifecycle of numerous modern corporations. Initial success breeds hubris, which in turn erodes ethical guardrails, allowing destructive practices to metastasize in the absence of effective challenge mechanisms.

Modern examples abound: the 2008 mortgage crisis revealed a striking paradox. While major institutions like Lehman Brothers collapsed and Countrywide Financial was acquired at a fire-sale price due to its high-risk lending, executives at the center of the disaster prospered. Most notably, Angelo Mozilo, the CEO of Countrywide, amassed a massive personal fortune by aggressively pushing questionable mortgages that ultimately led to the firm's downfall and contributed to the subsequent financial meltdown. General Electric's accounting scandals, as well as the downfall of once-admired companies like Arthur Andersen. All followed a similar pattern. Just as

Solomon's gradual moral compromise was enabled by his failure to consult prophets or the high priest, modern executives operating without robust ethical oversight inevitably drift toward decisions that prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability and stakeholder welfare.

Second, we should affirm the structural necessity of independent ethical authority. The biblical prophets possessed several characteristics that made them effective: they operated independently of royal patronage, they had the explicit mandate to challenge authority, and they faced no retaliation for delivering unwelcome truths. Compare this to many modern chief ethics officers who report through the very executive structures they are meant to oversee, whose budgets can be cut by those they monitor, and who can be marginalized or dismissed for being too assertive. The prophet Nathan's ability to confront King David over his adultery and murder plot succeeded precisely because Nathan's authority derived from God, not David. Today's ethics officers require analogous structural protections, including board-level reporting relationships, guaranteed access to audit committees, protection from retaliation codified in corporate bylaws, and transparent disclosure of ethics recommendations and management responses.

Third, consider the catastrophic consequences of leadership isolation and self-deception. King Rehoboam's refusal to heed wise counsel and King Saul's descent into paranoia both demonstrate how leaders, deprived of honest feedback, make increasingly destructive decisions. Modern business is replete with parallel examples: the Sears bankruptcy under Eddie Lampert, who isolated himself from operational realities while pursuing a failed hedge-fund strategy; Elizabeth Holmes's Theranos fraud, enabled by a culture that suppressed dissenting voices; and the sexual harassment scandals at companies like Uber and Fox News, where powerful executives operated in environments where accountability mechanisms had been systematically dismantled. Just as the biblical kings needed prophets to pierce through sycophancy and self-justification, modern executives require ethics officers who can challenge prevailing assumptions and articulate uncomfortable truths.

In contemporary times, leaders must have a chief ethics officer to guide them toward ethical choices, but the position must be appropriately structured and empowered. Similar to Ezekiel's portrayal of prophets as watchmen alerting people to looming threats (Ezek. 33:1-9), corporate executives and their ethics officers serve as guardians, safeguarding an organization's moral integrity against ethical perils. The moral ramifications of CEO decisions are profound, with countless lives lost or affected by corporate prioritization of profit over safety (Friedman & Clarke, 2022). The Boeing 737 MAX crashes, which killed 346 people, stemmed from a corporate culture in which engineers' safety concerns were overruled by executives prioritizing competitive pressures and cost containment. This is precisely the kind of disaster that unfolds when ethical oversight mechanisms are sidelined or neglected.

Appointing a chief ethics officer is essential to seamlessly integrating ethical considerations into an organization's decision-making processes. Without this centralized role, ethical practices related to areas such as diversity, environmental responsibility, quality control, advertising, and pricing may become erratically dispersed across the company. This fragmentation can obscure the fact that these various practices all stem from a common ethical foundation (De Jong, 2023, p. 161).

Consider Johnson & Johnson's handling of the Tylenol crisis in 1982 versus its more recent talc powder litigation. In the former case, strong ethical leadership led to an immediate, costly recall that ultimately strengthened the brand; in the latter, the company fought transparency for years, resulting in far greater reputation and financial damage. The difference lay not in the ethical principles involved but in whether those principles were integrated into actual decision-making processes.

When cost-cutting measures compromise the integrity of infrastructure, such as buildings, bridges, or dams, the consequences can be catastrophic for innocent people. The 2021 Surfside condominium collapse in Florida, which killed 98 people, and the 2018 Genoa bridge collapse in Italy, which killed 43, both resulted from deferred maintenance and ignored engineering warnings. These organizational failures are rooted in the same ethical compromises that led King Solomon to prioritize his palace over his people's welfare. Lacking ethical oversight, executives may be inclined to prioritize financial gains, potentially neglecting the moral aspects of their decisions.

Indeed, it does not take a prophet to make a leader recognize that while profit maximization can yield short-term gains, it may have long-term consequences, such as a diminished reputation for quality and integrity. Yet history demonstrates that without institutional mechanisms to amplify ethical voices, even obvious long-term risks are routinely discounted. Wise decision-making strikes a balance between financial success, ethical standards, and long-term sustainability. Two quotes attributed to Warren Buffett say it all: "It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you'll do things differently." "Lose money for the firm, and I will be understanding. Lose a shred of reputation for the firm, and I will be ruthless" (Schwantes, 2021).

The biblical model offers modern organizations a proven framework: just as ancient Israel's governance required prophets to challenge kings and high priests to provide divine guidance, contemporary corporations need chief ethics officers with genuine authority, structural independence, and organizational cultures that reward rather than punish ethical courage. The failures of Saul, Solomon, and Rehoboam were not inevitable. They resulted from rejecting ethical counsel or failing to seek it, turning potential for enduring leadership into lasting cautionary tales.

Modern corporate disasters are not random misfortunes. They are the foreseeable outcomes of governance systems that neglect ethical oversight. Organizations that internalize the wisdom of ancient texts and establish strong ethical accountability before a crisis strikes will not only prevent catastrophic failures but also cultivate the trust, legitimacy, and enduring stability that marked the best of King David's reign. The question is no longer whether such mechanisms are necessary; the question is whether they are effective. That has been answered by centuries of human experience, from the courts of ancient Israel to the boardrooms of today. The real question is whether today's leaders will demonstrate foresight and act now or wait until the next avoidable tragedy forces their hand.

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