

## The Books of Samuel & Kings *“Biblical Lessons on Leadership”*

### Introduction:

Throughout history there have been many different views that people have held about who should have authority in a given society, and how that authority should be exercised. The views that people have held represent a broad spectrum of opinions. On one extreme of that spectrum is the idea that leaders should have absolute authority, and on the other extreme is the idea that no one should have authority over anyone else in any way. Some, like the German philosopher Nietzsche, glorify leaders as superhuman, superior to the rest of humanity and thus argue that it is fitting for them to rule everyone else. Others prefer the chaos of anarchy. Between these extremes are a multitude of mediating views that seek to establish the legitimacy of leaders while putting some limits on their authority. And of course, every individual has his or her own ideas about the proper role and limits of authority, and all these views exist within the ever-present tension between how far someone is willing to follow a leader, and when one feels one must resist a leader.

But what does the Bible teach about authority and leadership? The reality is that it teaches quite a bit. This is particularly true in the Books of I & II Samuel and the Books of I & II Kings. These books narrate the history of Israel's monarchy, from the establishment of the monarchy, through the division of Israel into two monarchial nations, and finally it narrates how the monarchies of the divided kingdoms came to an end. In these four books God reveals many important principles about how the people of God should view authority, the role of leader, and the role of follower.

### I. The Reality of Leaders:

The first principle to learn about authority and leaders is one that both Scripture and history make very clear. At all times and in all situations, there will always be leaders. Human history records that in every age, in every culture, among every race, and in every grouping of human beings there are always leaders. Often those leaders have officially recognized roles, however, there are also many times when there are leaders who have no official roles, but influence others to follow them even so. Though the exercise of authority takes many forms, and though the degree of authority given to leaders varies significantly from culture to culture, leaders always emerge.

In Scripture we don't see any indication that this is purely a human invention. God reveals that He is the ultimate source of authority. God further reveals that His own authority is absolute, and that everyone else who exercises authority does so because God providentially delegated that authority to them (either directly or permissively). In God's dealings with His people, He always works through leaders. First, it was through the patriarchs as the head of the relatively small family, and later it was done through Moses, Joshua, and the various Judges. There is no

recorded situation where the people of God are exhorted to act independent of all authority figures.

## **II. The Importance of Good Leaders:**

The second principle that the Scriptures reveal about authority and leadership is that it is essential that those who exercise authority have excellent character. The Books of Samuel & Kings chronicle that when the nations of Israel or Judah were ruled by wicked kings, the nation as a whole followed their lead, and descended into evil. When this happened it inevitably resulted in ruin for the nation. However, when the nations of Israel and Judah were ruled by righteous kings, and the nation as a whole followed their lead and acted righteously, it resulted in the nation being blessed by God. This unfailing pattern demonstrates that the people of God must insist (to whatever degree they are able) on placing only godly and righteous individuals in positions of power and influence.

## **III. Characteristics of Good Leaders:**

The third principle that the Scriptures reveal about authority and leadership is what to look for in a leader. In the Books of Samuel and Kings there are three particularly important examples set forth that teach God's people what to look for in a leader.

The first example is David. In the Book of I Samuel we read the following:

*“But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be commander over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.”*

I Samuel 13:14

In the passage above, the prophet Samuel was confronting king Saul for his disobedience to the instructions given to him by God. In the confrontation Samuel told Saul that his dynasty would end with him, and that he would be replaced by “*a man after His own heart*”. Based on the contextual emphasis on Saul's disobedience, the expression refers to an individual who was committed to obeying God's commandments. Though Samuel did not know it at the time, God was speaking of David, indicating that a proper leader must be someone who is like-minded with God, one who reveres and obeys Him. Next, we read:

*“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”*

I Samuel 16:7

Yahweh, speaking to Samuel, said that what was important in a leader is what is in his heart, not how much he may look the part, or seem outwardly to fit the role. In Hebraic thought, the “*heart*” represented what the person truly was inside. Therefore, what is important in a leader is that he be a person who has godly character, one who is genuinely devoted to God.

In one of David's psalms, we read the following:

*"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward."*

Psalm 19:7-11

This portion of the psalm is basically a song praising God's word and expressing David's love for it. It was this passion for God's Word that made David a man fully committed to God, and thus an important part of what qualified him to be God's choice as Israel's king.

The second example is Solomon. In the Book of Kings, we read the following:

*"And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places. Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask! What shall I give you?' And Solomon said: 'You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?' The speech pleased the LORD, that Solomon had asked this thing. Then God said to him: 'Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days.'"*

I Kings 3:3-14

In this passage Solomon revealed himself to be a humble individual (at least at this point in his life), someone who recognized the enormity of the responsibility for having authority over God's people. This teaches us that such humility and

dependence upon God is an essential component to a godly leader. We are then told that Yahweh was pleased by Solomon's request for wisdom, so that he could discern between good and evil. This demonstrates that Biblically informed and Spirit guided wisdom are also essential components of what makes a person capable of being a godly leader.

The third example is Josiah. In II Kings, we read the following:

*“Now Josiah also took away all the shrines of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD to anger; and he did to them according to all the deeds he had done in Bethel. He executed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned men's bones on them; and he returned to Jerusalem. Then the king commanded all the people, saying, ‘Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant’. Such a Passover surely had never been held since the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was held before the LORD in Jerusalem. Moreover, Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiyah the priest found in the house of the LORD. Now before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses; nor after him did any arise like him.”*

II Kings 23:19-25

Josiah proved to be an individual who was fiercely loyal to Yahweh, and who was committed to not only obeying Yahweh himself but requiring everyone under his authority to be obedient to Yahweh as well. Therefore, an essential aspect of godly leadership is that the individual himself is fully submitted to the authority of God.

Finally, Jesus Himself gave us another important quality that should characterize anyone who is in authority over God's people:

*“Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask’. And He said to them, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ They said to Him, ‘Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory’. But Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?’ They said to Him, ‘We are able’. So, Jesus said to them, ‘You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared’. And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great*

*ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even 'the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'*

Mark 10:35-45

Jesus taught the twelve, and by extension all believers, that though the world seeks after positions of authority in order to have power over others, God's people are to use positions of power as opportunities to serve the best interests of those they have authority over. Therefore, authority is given by God not for the benefit of the one who has the authority, but rather it is given so that one can be a benefit to others.

#### **IV. The Necessity of Accountability for Those in Leadership:**

As Jesus noted, in the world, people seek to have power so they can dominate others. Scripture and history demonstrate repeatedly that having power and influence over others brings with it powerful temptations. Even in the secular world, many have spoken about this reality. Abraham Lincoln once wrote, "*If you want to test a person's character, give them power*". Lord Acton said, "*Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely*". Edward Abbey wrote, "*Power attracts the worst & corrupts the best*". And Plato wrote that power should never be given to anyone who desires it. The Books of Samuel and Kings record that the three finest examples of what a godly leader should be, all succumbed to temptations that brought disaster upon themselves and their people because of the power they possessed. In II Samuel we read:

*"It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof of the king's house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold. So David sent and inquired about the woman. And someone said, 'Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?' Then David sent messengers, and took her; and she came to him, and he lay with her, for she was cleansed from her impurity; and she returned to her house. And the woman conceived; so she sent and told David, and said, 'I am with child.'"*

II Samuel 11:1-5

*"Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him: 'There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared*

*it for the man who had come to him.’ So David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, ‘As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.’ Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave you your master's house and your master's wives into your keeping, and gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if that had been too little, I also would have given you much more! Why have you despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in His sight? You have killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; you have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the people of Ammon.”*

II Samuel 12:1-9

These passages reveal that David, who was such a righteous man before he was in a position of power, a man who dearly loved his God, ended up committing terrible sins after he found himself with absolute power. His power gave him the opportunity to pursue unrestrained sexual lust, and it even led him to commit murder to hide his sins from others, decisions that would have tragic and lasting consequences for both David and the nation.

In regard to Solomon, we read the following in the Book of I Kings:

*“But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites — from the nations of whom the LORD had said to the children of Israel, ‘You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods’. Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the LORD his God, as was the heart of his father David. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.”*

I Kings 11:1-8

Solomon, once he got comfortable in his role as king, allowed his various lusts to guide him. Those lusts overwhelmed him so that he no longer relied on the wisdom that God had given him. As a result, we read here that he collected multiple wives and concubines who turned his heart to paganism. Later in the Books of I Kings we read that Solomon's lust led him to pursue many other things in extravagant and expensive ways. The king with the grandest beginning to his reign, would see his reign conclude in the most tragic way.

Finally, in regard to Josiah, we read the following in the books of II Kings and II Chronicles:

*“Nevertheless the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath, with which His anger was aroused against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. And the LORD said, ‘I will also remove Judah from My sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, ‘My name shall be there.’ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all that he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went to the aid of the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him. And Pharaoh Necho killed him at Megiddo when he confronted him. Then his servants moved his body in a chariot from Megiddo, brought him to Jerusalem, and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, anointed him, and made him king in his father’s place.”*

II Kings 23:26-30

*“After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him. But he sent messengers to him, saying, ‘What have I to do with you, king of Judah? I have not come against you this day, but against the house with which I have war; for God commanded me to make haste. Refrain from meddling with God, who is with me, lest He destroy you.’ Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself so that he might fight with him, and did not heed the words of Necho from the mouth of God. So he came to fight in the Valley of Megiddo.”*

II Chronicles 35:20-22

In these parallel accounts we read about Josiah’s willful act to attack the Egyptians in an ill-conceived effort to support the Assyrians. The passages above make it clear that judgment was going to come upon Judah because of the sins of the previous kings (particularly those of Manasseh). But Josiah ignored what God had said and chose to fight in spite of God’s decree against Judah. As a result, this good king died in a pointless battle, and Judah ceased to be an independent nation.

These stories all highlight what happened to very godly men who were in positions of absolute power. However, the account of Nathan’s rebuke of David demonstrates why these men fell, and how it could have been prevented. They fell because as kings they weren’t really accountable to anyone. No person, no matter how godly they may become, is ever incapable of falling into serious sin. What everyone needs is to be accountable to others. Every person must have others with the authority and opportunity to confront them. Anyone who truly wants to succeed at living a godly life needs this. This is true for those without any power, and for those who have it all. The reality is that those with little power in life always have someone to whom they are accountable. The problem for those with power, is that they are often freed from those sorts of relationships. Thus, the principle from

these stories is that it is essential, both for leaders and for those they lead, that every leader be kept accountable to others in significant ways

#### **V. Insights from New Testament Titles for Leaders: (Acts 20:17-35)**

Additional insights into the nature of how believers should understand the idea of authority are found in the terminology that is employed to designate the role of leaders. Luke recorded a meeting between Paul and the leaders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17-35). Paul used that meeting to instruct these church leaders about the role that they had, using himself as an example of what one had to be and what one had to do. As he did this, he used three descriptive titles for leaders that enable us to better understand the basic nature of leadership as revealed by God.

The first designation was “*elders*”. This title indicates that the role of leader requires that one has life experience and wisdom. Though wisdom doesn’t always come with age, it rarely comes apart from it. Having life experience and wisdom tends to make one less reactive, and more contemplative when confronting problems. This is important since leadership often requires one to make sound decisions in situations where there are no rules or precedents to guide one. Therefore, those in leadership should understand that their role is to act in a mature way as they lead others.

The second designation was “*shepherds*”. Ironically, in the first century, shepherds were not highly respected. It is ironic, because God used their occupation as one of the paradigms of leadership. What made the role of shepherd ideal as a model for leadership was that it was one of the few roles where the one in charge of others was seen as being ultimately responsible to give account for those who were under their authority (the owner of the sheep). Thus, using the title “*shepherd*” reinforced Jesus’ teaching that being a leader is not about being empowered to have one’s own way, it is about being empowered to pursue the welfare of others. In addition, shepherding in the first century and earlier involved leading sheep, not driving them. Thus, it conveyed the idea that the leader seeks to gain the willing cooperation of those they lead, rather than compelling them to follow.

The third and final designation was “*overseer*”. This title pictured the leader as one who looks out for danger that threatens the people of God, and who seeks (as a shepherd does) to meet the needs of those under his authority.

None of these titles stress the idea of power over others, rather they stress the responsibility to use one’s authority to take care of others.

#### **Conclusion:**

These books about Israel’s monarchs (along with insights from the New Testament) teach us that it is necessary to invest people to have authority over us so that things can get done. But it teaches that those who follow should seek as much as they are able to only install people of good character in positions of leadership. Finally, once installed, we are warned to place leaders in accountable relationships with other godly individuals, to protect the leaders and the followers from the spiritual/moral weaknesses that plague everyone.