Shebna and Eliakim: Isaianic Leadership Oracle

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Abstract

This article examines the various types of ecclesiastical and biblical models of leadership and explores the roles and impact of these various models upon the leadership practices of the Church today. The article traces the different models of leadership common among various biblical communities through time and focuses on the critiques of leadership especially as depicted in the book of Isaiah. The article aims at creating awareness of both the variety of leadership patterns and the potential risk of failure even among God's chosen servants.

Introducing Leadership Models

The primary intent of this article is to explore models of leadership alluded to in the book of Isaiah, particularly in chapter 22. However, we need to trace our steps back through time in order to situate Isaiah's thought in its proper context. To do that, we first examine contemporary forms of leadership and then move backwards to biblical times. The purpose of this study is not merely to explain the various types of leaders and their roles but to consider the implications of the critique of leadership embedded in Isa 22. The article also delimits considerations to leadership among Christian community and does not examine leadership in the wider political and managerial contexts.

Contemporary Christianity

Christian organisations are characterised by a wide variety of leadership theories and models. Every church, from the mega-churches to the small country church, subscribes to some form of leadership. The picture is complicated by the sheer diversity of Christian churches and groups. There is no standard version of church leadership, historically or otherwise, but we propose that there is a basic pattern that emerges from this landscape. To fully understand the leadership models, it is helpful to understand the core ideas of Christian leadership as this is foundational to our discussion.

Types of Organisation

Church organisation plays a significant role in the healthy development of the Church and in 'the accomplishment of its task of carrying the gospel of salvation to the entire world.' Christ gave the disciples a simple but effective organisation (*SDA Church Manual*, 2010, p. 27). With this task of carrying the gospel of salvation into the world, three major types of organisational structures may be observed in the Church today.

The first of these is the Episcopalian system. This system upholds Christ as the head of the Church and entrusts the government of the Church directly and exclusively to an order of prelates or bishops as successors of the apostles. In this system it is maintained that Christ has constituted these bishops a separate, independent and self-perpetuating order (Berkhof, 1996). Episcopalians hold that Christ has passed on his full authority to the successor which is viewed as a priesthood (this refers to bishops, archbishops, rectors or vicars).

Berkhof also suggests Congregational, or independent system, as another type of Church organisation (1996). This system holds that the final governing authority resides within the congregation itself. However, the issue of just who in the local congregation exercises final authority differs from congregation to congregation

(Reymond, 1998). The guidance of a local congregation is based upon leaders such as elders and deacons or a leadership group often referred to as the church board.

Raoul Dederen identifies another major type which is utilised by Seventh-day Adventist Churches around the world. This is the Presbyterial System (Dederen, 2000). He explains that this type of government consists of leadership by elders as representatives of the church whose authority is exercised through this office and more particularly via a series of representative bodies (Ibid). This refers to authority that Christ bestows on individual believers who delegate it to elders who in turn represent them and exercise authority on their behalf, both locally and in a series of governing assemblies that include clergy and laity (2000).

Through careful examination of the three major types of Church organisation, it may be noted there are primarily two types which exist in today's Church: (1) Congregational Type are churches that base their authority upon their own local congregation where decision is fully based on local church sentiments; and (2) Hierarchical Type churches who function with an organisational structure in which the authority is based upon a higher organisation. This includes Roman Catholic Church and Adventist Church. It may be argued that the Adventist church is closer to the delegating system in theory. However, in practical terms it is a more Hierarchical Type in which the principal decision maker is the General Conference Session.

Types of Leaders

In every major church structure today, there are certain leaders we encounter regardless of tradition. Whether we study Orthodox, Catholic or Protestant streams of Christianity, we find two main types of leaders: those who operate at the denominational structure level and those who function at the parish level. Even strictly Congregationalist setups exhibit both types of leaders in their ranks. Our background is the Adventist Church with its hierarchical organisational structure and we write with this as the backdrop.

Church Administrator

In every church, especially non-congregationalist types, church administrators are the acknowledged leaders of the church. Titles vary considerably from Patriarch to Bishop to Minister to President. Generally, these are the executive officers of a church organisation and are tasked with two principal duties: (1) to oversee the running of the Church within their designated jurisdiction, and (2) to maintain the 'faith' among their constituencies. To accomplish these roles, their diverse duties may range from training to discipline. Depending on the organisation, such leaders are either elected to or selected for office. The office itself may be purely spiritual or political/spiritual. The process of appointing leaders may be an open or closed affair, but it has the same desired result. These are the persons accepted by the members as their spiritual overseers.

Church Pastor

The local church pastor has more or less the same role and functions as the church administrators, but his jurisdiction is much more limited. In some cases the pastor has responsibility for a single church, while in others he may be responsible for a district of churches. Like the denominational administrators, church pastors also fulfil the same basic tasks. They teach, preach, manage, counsel and discipline. Unlike the administrators, church pastors have to relate to members on a more local level and personal relationship is integral to the job.

Church Elder/Church Deacon

At the local level, pastors are frequently assisted by church elders or deacons (depending on denominational set up). Their function is not dissimilar to the pastor or administrator. They may also engage in the training and management of the church. However, they are also members of the congregation, whereas pastors and administrators are paid employees of the church. Some denominations pay their pastoral employees from a central fund, while congregational churches pay the pastor directly and also pay a membership fee to the denominational office. In some congregational settings there are no elders or deacons but even such churches still have some local leadership.

Contemporary Leadership

God never intended for his Church to be institutionalised rather to exist as an organic body (Richards & Hoeldtke, 1988). However, in both organic and institutional forms, leadership is needed. The discussion above has highlighted two dominant administrative systems: Hierarchical-Episcopalian (inclusive of Presbyterial System) and Congregational. In these organisations there are three types of leaders: administrators, local church pastors and lay leaders (elders and deacons). All these leaders have two major responsibilities: (1) to oversee the running of the church, and (2) to maintain faith among their congregations. A healthy exercise of leadership depends upon the leaders' relationship with the head of the Church, Jesus Christ. To understand this concept we need to trace our steps backwards through ecclesiastical and biblical history.

Leadership in Biblical Times

NT Church

The NT presents four main models of leadership. The first of these, the office of apostle, was a time-bound model that is no longer operational. The other three are still very much evidenced in the Christian world.

Apostolos

The first leadership model we meet in the NT is that of *apostolos* (Apostle). The Greek term simply means 'one who is sent.' Throughout Christian history, this designation has been applied mainly to the twelve disciples of Jesus and a few others (such as Barnabas, Paul, Timothy, etc). When we examine the training of the twelve provided by Jesus, we notice that their work was largely confined to the preaching of the gospel. In fact, the disciples had such a profound conviction about their role that they refused to adjudicate the first crisis of the church (see Acts 6) and instead proposed that others be tasked to do that. Peter's words during this episode are quite revealing: 'It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables' (Acts 6:2). Subsequent history demonstrates the singular commitment of the apostles to this singular task. Nevertheless, the apostles were involved with some management-type duties as may be observed in the Jerusalem Council episode (Acts 15).

Episkopos (Elder or Overseer)

A prominent leadership office of the NT Church is described by Paul in 1 Tim 3 as *episkopos*. The basic meaning of this Greek word is 'overseer' but not in the CEO model of today's world. Paul is very specific about what this leader should do. The *episkopos* had two primary duties, teach the word of God and model the gospel in his personal and family life. Another word, *presbuteros*, also appears in NT literature to describe more or less the same office (cf. Acts 20:17-28; Titus 1:5-7). This is the office that most closely resembles the pastoral office of today and became the model for the office of bishop (the English word 'bishop' is derived from *episkopos*).

Diakonos (Deacon)

A second type of leader mentioned by Paul in 1 Tim 3 is that of *diakonos* (deacon). In contemporary Christianity, the office of deacon has different connotations from that of respected spiritual leader to manual labourer (depending which church uses the term). Paul's description of the *diakonos'* work is almost identical to that of *episkopos*. The similarity of these two descriptions points to the fact that no ranking existed between the two offices and that the roles of these leaders may be more nebulous that many imagine. Exactly what Paul envisioned by these two descriptions is difficult to ascertain (cf. Capes, Reeves & Richards, 2007; see also Lea & Griffin, 1992).

Managers

The crisis of Acts 6 introduced another type of leader into the mix. No specific designation is given to these leaders and many today think they are the original 'deacons'. However, close reading of Acts reveals that their task is entirely different from that of *diakonos* in 1 Tim 3. To use Peter's words, these men were chosen to

'wait on tables'. The precise meaning of Peter's counsel is difficult to grasp but the situation enables us to surmise. An argument had ensued over the disbursement of funds for the widows in the church. Apparently the Hellenistic widows did not get the same amount of help from the common coffer as the Hebraic widows (Acts 6:1). These men were selected for office to manage and distribute the funds of the church. Brown (1980) suggests that they are the top-level administrators for the Hellenist Christians because of the fact that they also preached and taught as seen in Acts 7 and 8 (cf. Bruce, 1960).

1st Century Judaism

When we think of 1st century Judaism, we should be aware that their world was highly developed on every level. This was certainly true liturgically and theologically, but more so organisationally. In exploring leadership models from the 1st century, we encounter three main types: the Temple, the Council and the Synagogue models. Each offers its own unique perspectives on leadership.

Temple Model

While many trappings of the OT era still manifested themselves at the Temple, there were also significant differences. The Temple reminds us of the quintessential underpinnings of spiritual leadership. This is the most basic conceptualisation of clerical leadership. The Temple was governed by three main groups of leaders.

The highest form of leadership in biblical times was the office of priest. This was a lifelong vocation and was passed down from generation to generation. The *kohanim* (priests) of Israel traced their lineage all the way back to Aaron, the very first high priest (cf. Exod 28:1-2; Lev 8-9; Num 17:1-18:7). During the 1st century, the priestly office was very complex. The High Priest was the main priest and the head of the Temple and also the Sanhedrin. There were also other high-ranking priests with the title Chief Priests. It is somewhat unclear as to who these men were. Two main proposals exist: either that they were retired high priests or they were priests with some special influence (Ferguson, 1987; Moulder, 1979). Below these two groups were the ordinary priests who carried out most of the liturgical and cultic duties at the Temple. There were 24 orders of priests who functioned on rotating shifts as the case in the OT period (1 Chronicles 24; cf. Luke 1:5, 9; also Ferguson, 1987; Moulder, 1979).

The next group of leaders was the Levites. They also consisted of 24 orders but were divided into 3 main clans, according to function. One clan was responsible for the music at the Temple and two supervisors or music directors were appointed over the clan. The other two clans performed guard duty and carried out all the manual work related to the temple. There were two supervisors to oversee the work of these clans (Ferguson, 1987; Moulder, 1979; see also Abba, 1962).

Unlike the OT period, the Temple at the time of Jesus was governed by a Temple Council consisting of seven persons. The members of the Council included the anointed high priest, an invested high priest, the temple captain (probably the supervisors of the Levite guards), a temple overseer (probably the supervisor of the working Levites), and three treasurers (Ferguson, 1987; Moulder, 1979). This 'council' is a distant cousin of the modern church board and may have been copied by the Church in later periods.

Councils

First century Judaism was also governed by a Council, seen as the highest religious and judicial authority. In the NT period, this council was called the Sanhedrin (Strauss, 2007; cf. Moulder, 1979; Ferguson, 1987). Essentially a council of leaders, the Sanhedrin was made up of chief priests, elders of the people, and scribes (theologians). The seventy-member council was presided over by the High Priest and had autonomous authority under Roman rule with the exception of executing people.

When Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, the Sanhedrin was replaced by a different council called *Beth Din* (literally meaning 'house of understanding'). Unlike the Sanhedrin, *Beth Din* was a council of scholars, mostly rabbis, and demonstrated a shift to theological leadership that has remained more or less intact to the present. *Beth Din* was presided over by a *nasi* (equivalent to president today) with an *'ab beth din* (equivalent to vice-president today) as his associate. It is more than likely that Paul's *episkopos* and *diakonos* model in 1 Timothy is a replica of the *Beth Din* paradigm (Ferguson, 1987; cf. *Jewish Encyclopedia*, 'Sanhedrin').

Synagogue Model

The Synagogue provided another model for leadership. Rabbinic rulings required that a Synagogue be established wherever ten adult Jewish males and their families lived (Jeffers, 1999). The origins of the Synagogue may be traced back to the period of the Babylonian exile. The destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar and the loss of a central place for worship compelled the Jews to develop alternatives for worship. The Synagogue was born during this period and had become a fully-established institution by the 1st century.

There were two main leaders at the Synagogue. The *Rosh hakeneset* (literally 'head of the assembly') was the principal leader (cf. Lasor and Eskenazi, 1979). In Greek he was called *archisunagogos* ('ruler of the Synagogue'). His role was largely a liturgical one with primary responsibility for the services of the synagogue. It was also his task to maintain the traditions of Judaism (Ferguson, 1987). *Rosh hakeneset* is the most likely model for the office of bishop in the church.

The associate to *Rosh hakeneset* was the *Hazzan* (in Greek *huperretes*). His role was somewhat more colourful. His principal duties include looking after the scrolls, caring for the furniture and building, serving as school teacher and community officer (cf. Lasor & Eskenazi, 1979). This is probably the model for the office of deacon in the church (Ferguson, 1987).

Exile to New Testament

As we move farther back in time, we come to the period between the Exile and the NT. This was a period of flux in the lives of the Jews and presented certain challenges to the leaders. The absence of central leadership so important to OT times was no longer available during this period. Other leadership modes appeared during this long period.

The first of these was the office of governor, a largely political appointment by the particular senior official of whatever government authority was in place. This office was an outgrowth of the Persian period. When the Jews were permitted to return to the land of Israel, the Persians appointed leaders over Judea (cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21-23; Tomasino, 2003). These leaders may be termed governors. The three best known governors were Zerubbabel (mentioned in Zechariah and Haggai), Ezra and Nehemiah. While theirs was a political appointment, we also learn they were engaged in religious duties such as driving reforms (cf. Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah 1-12; Tomasino, 2003).

During the Maccabean uprising of the Hellenistic period, a new breed of leader came on the scene (Tomasino, 2003; Strauss, 2007). These were the Priest-King Hasmoneans (or Maccabees), Judas, Jonathan, John Hyrcanus (mid-second century BC). The desecration of the rebuilt Jerusalem by the Syrian Hellenistic rulers, particularly Antiochus Epiphanes IV, led to a major revolt by the Jews. In the ensuing conflict, leadership was assumed by the priests of the house of Maccabee. They exercised both political and religious authority (Ferguson, 1987).

The Sanhedrin also came into existence during this volatile period (Horn, 1979). It comprised mainly of two groups of people, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who represented the two leading religious parties. These two often bickering parties represented two different leadership models. The Sadducees, who represented the priests, exercised leadership through political and liturgical means. The Pharisees, often seen as the common people's party, exercised leadership through scholarship and legal means. They developed the rabbinic system with its highly honed laws and rulings and eventually assumed full control of Judaism in the post-AD 70 period.

Old Testament: Exodus to Exile

The pre-exilic OT period offers a complex of leadership models that would not be repeated in history. We discover leadership ranging from purely liturgical to fully military leadership. There were prophetic leaders and judicial leaders. The special needs of this extended period may partially account for this variety. Perhaps Israel's status as nation also fostered leaders on many levels.

Prophets

The leadership type that most readily comes to mind is that of prophet. We recall great names like Moses,

Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. The Hebrew Bible arranges books into three categories: Torah, *Nebi'im* (prophets) and *Kethubim* (writings). The *Nebi'im* were divided into two groups, early and latter prophets. The Christian OT organises books into Pentateuch (Torah), History, Poetry and Prophecy. The OT contains 16 prophetic works classified as major (Isaiah to Daniel) and minor (Hosea to Malachi) prophets. In the OT the early prophets like Elijah and Elisha are located in the historical books. Whatever the classification, prophets had one principal task: to be the voice of God (Wood, 1979). Invariably, their messages were introduced with *koh 'amar Yahweh*, 'this is what Yahweh says,' or *n'um Yahweh,* 'declaration of Yahweh' (cf. Von Rad, 1965). Because of this task, the prophets functioned at every level of Israel's life—from the royal court to the village farm. Prophets themselves came from all walks of life. Isaiah and Daniel were aristocrats; Jeremiah and Ezekiel were priests; Amos was a businessman; others had no specified background.

Priests and Levites

While the office of prophet occurred at irregular intervals, the office of priest was a constant throughout the OT period. Names like Aaron (Torah period), Eli (pre-monarchy period) and Joshua (post exilic period) easily come to mind. According to 1 Chron 24, there were 24 orders of priests who functioned on a two order per month rotation. The organisational pattern was simpler with the High Priest serving primarily during the great feast (such as Pesach and Yom Kippur), while the ordinary priests took care of the *tamid* (daily rituals).

The next group of leaders were the Levites. Among the best known Levites were Korah (who led a revolt against Moses) and Asaph (who composed several psalms). There were three main clans of Levites responsible for music, guard duty and manual work (2 Chron 24-26). During the monarchy period, some Levites also functioned as officers and judges (2 Chron 27:29). The degree of Levitical specialisation during the monarchy period was not in evidence in the Torah period. According to Num 4, all Levites were involved with Sanctuary manual work, especially when the Tent was being moved.

Warriors, Kings and Judges

A unique class of leaders is made up of a band of warriors chosen by God to deliver Israel in times of foreign oppression. The outstanding examples of this type of leader were Joshua, Gideon, Samson and Jephthah. To most Christian readers, these men have been mistakenly labelled as judges, partly due to the name ascribed to the book which records their exploits. The Hebrew name for the book is *shoptim* which literally mean 'judges'. The name is derived from the Hebrew root sh-p-t from which are derived such ideas as 'justice' and 'judge'. However, a closer examination of their work clues us to a simple fact, they were *shoptim* in the sense that they ushered in periodic moments of peace and justice in the land. The way they did this was through military means rather than judicial ones (Inrig, 1979). The word 'judge' evokes images of judicial tasks for most modern readers. This was not the case for these men. Consequently, once central government was established in Israel, the 'judges' disappeared and their office became redundant.

Monarchy was never the plan of God as attested by the covenant document God gave Israel (see Exod 19-24). Israel was designed to be a theocracy with God as its King. To ensure that the nation did not move in that direction, Moses warned of the danger of having a king (Deut 17:13-20). In spite of this warning, Israel eventually decided they would rather have kings to rule them (1 Sam 8). Perhaps after 300 years of anarchy during the period of the judges, they simply had had enough. So kings like David, Solomon, Uzziah, Hezekiah and Josiah would rule the kingdom of heaven on earth. When the kingdom split in the 10th century BC, two separate lines would experience the blessing and displeasure of God. Eventually, Israel (the northern kingdom) would disappear from history after its destruction in 721 BC. The history of Israel is littered with kings who were godless and openly defied God and the nation followed the destructive path of its leaders. Judah (the southern kingdom) outlasted Israel by almost 200 years but they too were carried off into Babylonian exile at the command of God (as depicted in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Unlike their northern neighbours, Judah did not disappear in history, but emerged as a people known since as the Jews. The kings of Judah were a mixture of godliness and godlessness and the nation also followed the path set by their leaders.

The office of judge proper, in the judicial sense of arbitrating cases, was first introduced during the wilderness years (Exod 18:13-26). The most celebrated judge of the Judges period was Deborah (Inrig, 1979) and descriptions of her work clearly highlight this judicial aspect of leadership (Judg 4:4-5). The parting memoirs of Moses clearly envisaged that such judicial leadership would always be needed among the Israelites (Deut 1:15-18; 19:16-21).

Israel also had a council of elders from its earliest days which served in a variety of leadership roles. The first mention of such a council occurs in Exod 24:9-11. This early council may have served as the model for the Sanhedrin and *Beth Din* that appeared much later in history. The same idea may have been used by the kings in their council of advisers.

Hybrid Models

What is truly unique to the OT period is the presence of hybrid models. One of these is the Prophet-Priest model, where the two offices were combined in the life and work of a single leader. The two examples of such a model are Moses and Samuel. Both of them had prophetic powers equipped with direct communication with God. Both of them also performed liturgical functions, offering sacrifices, normally done by the priests.

The second hybrid is that of Warrior-King as evidenced in the lives of Jephthah and David. Both men were essentially warriors who ended up becoming kings of Israel. While David was officially anointed as king by the prophet Samuel (1 Sam 16), Jephthah coerced the people to accept him as supreme leader (a king of sorts) as price for his involvement (Judg 10:9-11).

A third but lesser model is that of Prophet-Judge. This may be seen in the ministry of Deborah who was designated as both prophet and judge (Judg 4:4-9; cf. Inrig, 1979). Since this hybrid model does not seem to have appeared again, caution should be exercised in drawing conclusions from it.

Brief Excursus: Contemporary Implication

With this wealth of information about various types of leaders in biblical times, it is needful to pause briefly to ascertain the contemporary relevance of what is observed in the Bible. The reflection here is not comprehensive but provides a microcosm of thought and contemplation. First, most leaders in biblical were appointed via an anointing process of through a direct call of God. This was true of prophets, kings, judges and warriors. There was no election process involved because a person became a leader by God's choice (cf. Inrig, 1979), even when the choice was executed through human agencies. For instance, a prophet anoints a new king (Samuel and David) or commissioned a new prophet (Elijah and Elisha).

Second, the prophetic office was the most multifaceted form of leadership in the Bible. Prophets had to correct and encourage other leaders and the community as a whole. They were the balance against the sins of the laity or the excesses of the clergy and executive leaders. It was their task to point our sin, predict punishment, foretell restoration or call people to change life and morals. Today's pastoral office resembles the prophetic office most closely because pastors are intended to serve as the balance against members' sins and leaders' excesses. Pastors are also called upon, by virtue of their office, to point our sin, warn of God's displeasure, and challenge people to walk the high road. Prophets had to have the purity of the priests, the integrity of the call and the courage to stand up to leaders' excesses. Similarly, pastors are bound by their call to live clean lives, exercise their ministry with integrity, and serve as the voice of God in the face of leadership excesses.

Third, throughout the Bible God allowed poor and bad leaders (whether kings, priests or warriors) to rule but always sent prophets to correct them. Some of the prophets themselves were not above censure. Not every leader in position of authority or influence was automatically God's man (or woman); some were simply company players. The same is true today. God still allows leaders into positions of authority who are not his choice and who do not follow his voice. God's purposes in doing this are inscrutable but real. However, God's people, especially their pastoral leaders must possess the wisdom and courage to know and point out the existence of such leaders.

The brief survey of leadership patterns through the passage of time from the present back to biblical times and the brief excursus of its contemporary implications have given rise to a couple of baffling questions: On the one hand, could it be that certain leadership positions and structures are more susceptible to producing excesses of leaders? And, on the other hand, does ecclesiastical sanction or prophetic endorsement put leaders and leadership in a position of immunity against failures and God's judgement?

Apparently, as this study asserts, everyone is susceptible to the potential failure of leadership excesses and none are spared from God's judgement even among God's chosen servants. What, then, is required to avoid this failure? Perhaps to be made aware of certain risks of leadership position is a key to avoid the potential excesses of leadership. The book of Isaiah is compelling reading, for that matter, because it points to God's

thoughts when leaders, chosen or not, fail to live up to his expectations. It is to the idea of leadership in Isaiah that we now shift.

Leadership in Isaiah

Leadership Types

The book of Isaiah contains glimpses of three types of leaders, kings, priests (Levites) and prophets. The book however, concentrates on the office of king and there are several episodes and prophecies relating to them. The two kings that Isaiah had to contend with the most were Ahaz and Hezekiah. The prophet's relationship with Ahaz was filled with fire and brimstone; it was ice mixed with fire (see Isa 7-8). His relationship with Hezekiah was full of promise but also with heart-breaking disappointment (see Isa 36-39). The Bible considers Ahaz an evil king, while Hezekiah is called god-fearing. Unnoticed in these confrontations between the prophet and the kings is a prophecy involving two high officials of Judah's court. It is to these two individuals that we turn our attention so as to discover Isaiah's view on leadership.

Isaiah 13-23: The Backdrop

For many Bible students, Shebna and Eliakim are unfamiliar names. The names appear in chapter 22 of the book of Isaiah in a series of judgement prophecies. The appearance of these names in such a dramatic segment of Isaiah is highly provocative. In the midst of pronouncing judgements against nations, God also announces the future of two men, Shebna and Eliakim. Why did God do this? What is intended by this inclusion? Who were these men? What are the applicable lessons of this particular prophecy?

Isaiah 13-23 comprises a litany of judgement messages, mostly directed at the nations of the world, though not exclusively so. There are fifteen separate judgement statements which are arranged in two groups (9 oracles + 6 oracles) separated by a narrative interlude pertaining to Isaiah being a sign from God (Isa 20:1-6). Ten of the fifteen judgements utilise the word *massa'* which is normally translated as 'oracle'. In these chapters the specific connotation is 'oracle of judgement'. Three of the oracles do not employ *massa'*, while two of them are introduced by *hoy*, a particle which expresses surprise or danger and therefore rendered as 'Woe!' or 'Ah!' The judgemental nature of Isa 13-23 is further underscored by the prevalence of the militaristic title for God, Yahweh Tseba'ot (the Lord of Armies/Hosts). The tile appears 24 times (13:4, 13, 22, 23; 14:24, 27; 17:3; 18:7 [twice]; 19:4, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25; 21:10; 22:5, 12, 14 [twice], 15, 25; and 23:9) in this collection of oracles. God is portrayed as the divine warrior out to judge the nations.

Isaiah 22:15-25: Shebna and Eliakim

Whereas most of the oracles in the collection target different nations or places, Isa 22:15-25 is the only prophecy whose targets are individual persons. The placement of such a prophecy in this collection is rather nebulous but the tenor of the message is not that dissimilar from the rest of the oracles.

The unit is made up of two halves: (1) verses 15-19 which forecast the demise of Shebna, and (2) verses 20-25 which raise the prospect that God will choose someone else to honour, a man named Eliakim. There is considerable debate about whether Isa 22:15-25 is a separate prophecy or simply a continuation of Isa 22:1-14. Some commentators maintain that chapter 22 is really one prophecy (for example, Oswalt, 1986, and Smith, 2007). Others contend that Isa 22:15-25 is a separate prophecy (see Ridderbos, 1985; Widyapranawa, 1990 and Childs, 2001). There is some continuity in the two halves of chapter 22. Verse 14 ends with 'says the Lord, Yahweh Tseba'ot' (Hebrew *'amar 'adonai Yahweh Tseba'ot*), while verse 15 begins with 'thus says the Lord, Yahweh Tseba'ot' (Hebrew *koh 'amar 'adonai Yahweh Tseba'ot*). The two readings are very similar and provide continuity for the chapter. Moreover, the word *massa'* is not repeated in v15 and this suggests that the same prophecy is continuing. Nevertheless, Isa 22:15-25 is enveloped by two messenger formulas—'thus says the Lord, Yahweh Tseba'ot' in v15 and 'for Yahweh has spoken' in v25. Furthermore, the subject matter between the two halves of chapter 22 is entirely different; one addresses a place, the other a person. However, because both prophecies concern the nation of Judah, their placement in the chapter is expected and explainable.

God commands Isaiah to 'go to this steward, to Shebna, who is over the household' with a message (v15). This is most likely the same Shebna spoken of in 2 Kgs 18:18, 26 and Isa 36:3. His job designation is *soken*. The word appears in feminine form for 'maidservant' or 'nurse' (1 Kgs 1:2, 4). Inscriptions in several languages

support the masculine reading and the term refers to someone who represents the king (Watts, 1985, 290). The title 'who is over the household' indicates a high-ranking government official. It was first used in the list of Solomon's officials (1 Kgs 4:6) and is also mentioned in 1 Kgs 16:9; 18:3; and 2 Kgs 15:5. By the time of Hezekiah, the person with this title appears to be in the same position that Joseph had in Egypt (Gen 40-44; 45:8). In 2 Kgs15:5, Jotham, while serving as co-regent with his father, was accorded this title. Later in Isa 36:3, Eliakim would bear this title (Watts, 1985). At this point in Isaiah, Shebna is the virtual second in command in the court of Judah.

The reason for the judgement against Shebna is his pride and love of luxury (v16). This attitude is observed in the luxurious burial arrangements he made for himself. An elaborate tomb outside Jerusalem with the inscription 'Tomb of the Royal Steward' may be the tomb of Shebna, but this is far from certain (Smith, 2007). Because of this, God pronounces judgement upon Shebna (vv17-18). In rather graphic terms, Shebna is told that God will shake him violently, roll him into a ball and sling him into a 'wide land' (an obscure reading). The word plays in these verses are difficult to capture in English. A transliterated reading shows what God said:

mtaltelka taltelah (from *tul*, 'to hurl or overwhelm') . . .
w'otkah 'atoh (from *'atah*, 'to seize') . . .
tsanop yitsnapka tsnepah (from *tsanap*, 'to whirl')

The word plays and the severity of the punishment are best understood with this suggested reading (Smith's suggestion on the translation of these verbs is helpful [2007, p. 391]):

'he will overwhelm you with overwhelming . . .
he will seize you with seizing . . .
whirling, he will whirl you with whirling'

The imagery suggests the work of a slinger and depicts the act of slinging Shebna so as to bring about his demise. With the help of a simple chiasm, Shebna's fate is given a final twist (v19):

(a) 'I will thrust you'
    (b) 'from your office and'
    (b') 'from your station'
(a') 'he will cast you down'

God dismisses Shebna from office. By the time Sennacherib, the Assyrian king, invaded Judah (around 701 BC) Shebna had already been demoted to the position of secretary (see Isa 36:3; 2 Kgs 18:18; cf. Webb, 1996).

However, God does not merely dismiss Shebna, but chooses his replacement, Eliakim (v20). Two things are said about Eliakim (cf. Neh 12:41; 2 Kgs 23:34; Matt 1:13 for others with the same name): God refers to him as 'my servant' and he is Hilkiah's son (this is not Hilkiah, Jeremiah's father). The designation 'my servant' *('abdi)* is applied to Isaiah himself (Isa 20:3) and especially to the messiah in the Servant Poems (Isa 42-53). The title appears elsewhere in the OT as a designation of God's special leaders such as Moses (Num 12:7). The name implies that Eliakim was an effective and godly official (Wolf, 1985). The reference to his father normally indicates that he came from a highly placed family. Eliakim had an important background which may have prepared him for office.

Great honour will be bestowed on Eliakim. He would wear the robes that fit his station (v21). He would have the same authority that Shebna held (he become second ruler in Judah). He would be 'like a father' to the people. The idea of 'father' implies that he was respected by everyone and had a close relationship with the people. The same idea was also attributed to Joseph in Pharaoh's court (Gen 45:8). God would give Eliakim the key to David's house (he would have the final authority) and 'what he opens, no one can close; what he closes, no one can open' (v22). In Rev 3:7, the imagery of David's key is applied to Jesus, making this a messianic prophecy (Wolf, 1985). His place would be assured (using the same Hebrew word *ne'eman* that was central to the covenant with David [2 Sam 7:16]), his throne would be an honoured one (v23) and the burden of government would fall on his shoulders (cf. 9:6; Widyapranawa, 1990). All these descriptions are messianic in nature and point to someone who would be special to God but also serve as type of an even greater one to come.

Tragically, Eliakim's story ends on a sour note (v25). Eliakim, the peg that was in a secured place (v20) will be loosed, cut down and fall (v25). No reason is spelled out for his fall but three reasons are possible: the glory and burden of government became too heavy, someone destroyed him or success got to his head and exposed him to divine judgment. The last one is a likely suspect in this particular setting.

Two Leadership Models

The passage tells the story of two men who occupied positions of authority and power and in so doing provide us with significant leadership paradigms. Shebna abused his position for personal gains. His love of luxury and celebrity lifestyle became the reasons for his downfall. Shebna's 'this-worldly' approach to life depicts a self-serving desire to secure his 'place in history' through personal effort. Shebna measured himself by the chariots he had and the ornate tomb he prepared for himself. This type of leader is more concerned about his or her benefits than the need of his or her subordinates. Protecting his or her rights and authority is paramount to his or her view of life. Leaders like Shebna probably measure themselves in very materialistic ways: the cars they drive, the home they live in, the educational achievement of their children, the number of titles they are given and so on and so forth. We can almost visualise such leaders promoting their cause vociferously and going out of their way to win votes. We may also surmise that such leaders are prepared to use flattery and unethical conduct to achieve their goals. They lack genuine integrity and yet are accepted as leaders of God's people and may be admired by some.

In the book of Isaiah, king Ahaz fit this model quite well. He was not only a godless man, he was a truly 'this worldy' individual. He lived the ideal of 'I did it my way.' He took pride in his accomplishments and even refused the help of God (Isa 7) when he needed it. He was quick in seeking favourable alliances to promote his cause and it did not matter that some of these alliances (particularly the Assyrian alliance) were highly questionable. He surrounded himself with counsellors who would say anything to win his favour and to whom truth was subjugated to political convenience. He bred a nation filled with injustice and inequality. Corruption was rife in Judah and yet he arduously maintained that he was the rightful king of Judah. This is one way to lead.

By contrast, Eliakim was a 'Servant' of God, chosen and blessed. He did not vie for power or seek to get himself in position. This type of leader would probably stay out of the limelight and prefer to let God lead. His willingness to defer to God made him a fit servant. When we peruse through the sacred pages of the Bible, we discover that many of God's chosen leaders carried the same sense of deference and often felt unfit for the task. Moses, Jeremiah, Gideon, Barak, Timothy and many others were hesitant to step into the forefront despite assurances that God had chosen them. Such leaders are trustworthy and highly spiritual. They lead with truth, justice and equity. They treat everyone alike and show no favouritism towards those who flatter them. They measure themselves by an inner integrity and their walk with God.

Nevertheless, the Eliakim story contains a sour ending and reveals the danger that could cause the downfall of even the most righteous leader. Eliakim, because of his success, ran the risk of becoming the person others turn to instead of God. The double use of 'in that day' (a statement usually associated with eschatological judgement) with regards to Eliakim reveals that God's actions have a dual role, to build up and to tear down. Eliakim's ability to attract the trust and confidence of people unveils the hidden danger of reliance on a human person replacing reliance on God. The end is equally calamitous (Motyer, 1993).

In the book of Isaiah we meet another king, Hezekiah. He was as different from his father, Ahaz, as any son could be. Hezekiah was one of the truly godly kings of Judah. He did everything that was right in the sight of God. He avoided the worldly alliances of his father. He heeded the counsels of Isaiah, the prophet of God. He initiated a massive reformation programme in the land that culminated in a grand Passover celebration (2 Chron 29-30). He was loved by God. But, even the very best are prone to believing that they are special. Therefore, when God indicated that it was time for Hezekiah to die, he threw a tantrum and accused God of not repaying his faithfulness fairly (Isa 38). Yet, when God acceded to his pleas, cured him of his illness and restored his health, Hezekiah expressed his gratitude by taking credit for his success (Isa 39). Even a God-fearing leader is prone to 'the big-head syndrome'.

The book of Isaiah offers only two models of leadership. Ahaz and Hezekiah were the main kings the prophet had to contend with. Shebna and Eliakim are the only two individuals incorporated into a series of judgement oracles. There seems to be an intentionality on the part of the prophet to highlight these two particular models of leadership. One is a model of street-smart, self-serving leaders who operate outside of the will of God even though they may be leading God's people. Just because a leader is 'king of Judah' does

not automatically translate into godly leadership. The other is a model of God-fearing leaders who allow the elation of human praise to affect their integrity. Such leaders are chosen by God, but sadly, make themselves vulnerable to divine displeasure because they assume the mantle that belongs to God himself. Their inflated sense of indispensability undermines their relationship with God. In either case, God considers such leaders failures.

Shebna's self-serving life and Eliakim's magnetic personal presence both deny God his rightful honour and both are liable to divine judgement. Whether the leader does it his way or becomes inflated in his own sense of importance, it is God who is dishonoured. Those who are appointed to or chosen for positions of leadership must be cognizant of God's presence at all times so as to avoid the twin dangers of self-reliance and inflated sense of importance.

Reflection

There is a stern warning here especially for those who are appointed to high positions in the church. God allows persons into positions of power and authority so that through such leaders the blessings of God can flow to his people. When human leadership honours God, there is much to be gained. However, two things will undermine the leaders' ability to honour God. One way to accomplish this is by using position and authority for self-serving purposes; for personal benefits rather than to benefit the people. Leaders are not to build better homes or burial places for themselves but to figure out how to truly serve God's people (read Isa 1; Ezek 34; Matt 25).

Another way to undermine God is by being godly and yet succumbing to the pride which human praise fosters. There is a real possibility that even God's servants develop the 'big head syndrome' and confuse the praise of their people with the affirmation of God. When this happens, integrity is lost and, regardless what is achieved, such leaders lose the support of God and become square pegs in round holes. The story of Eliakim, in some ways, is a more provocative one because perhaps it especially afflicts those whom God has chosen. This happened to King Saul, Nadab and Abihu the priests, and even David (see 2 Sam 12). God's leaders today should tread warily lest they succumb to these same temptations. Even the truly godly leader may end up playing God because of human praise. Shebna and Eliakim's stories are warnings for God's chosen leaders today.

Perhaps there is also a subtle undercurrent of warning in the prophecy about Shebna and Eliakim. God does not expect us to blindly follow the example of the leaders. We are to resist the temptation of 'going along' with the leader simply because he or she is one. Perhaps, God even permits ungodly leaders to test those below as to their willingness to retain loyalty to God and God alone. Through Jeremiah God promises 'I will give you shepherds who are loyal to me' (3:15). In order for us to live this promise, we ought to be aware of and avoid the pitfalls of the Shebna and Eliakim failures.

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