

## **“So, You’re Looking for a King”**

*Deut. 17:14-20*

Over the summer we’ll be studying the lives of the good kings in Chronicles. When we read about the lives of Israel’s kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles their life is always summarized by,

*“He did evil in the eyes of the Lord”*

*“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord”*

So this tells us two things: 1) there’s no in-between with God; we are either considered right with the Lord or doing evil. God defines evil as that which is contrary to his Word and right as obeying His Word.

The second thing we note by those summaries is that the kings of Israel were required to live by God’s standards. So as we study the lives of these Kings we’ll apply what they did right to our own lives because that is how God assesses all of us. And, all of us are leaders in some way. Whether in ministry, or at work or at home we all have leadership roles that require wisdom and godliness in order to manage and direct people towards a godly life.

But before we look at specific kings we need to go back to Deut. 17 where God tells Israel through Moses what He requires from those who would be king. What should you look for in a king? What qualities does God require for leading people – at work, at home or in ministry? Because if God assesses every king by whether they did evil or right, we need to start where God says this is what I mean by what is right and what is evil, so we begin in Deut. 17:14-20.

The book of Deuteronomy was written by Moses to the generation of Israelites who would enter the land of Canaan under Joshua’s leadership. So many times we read in Deuteronomy, as we do here in 17:14,

*<sup>14</sup> When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it . . .*

Moses was the leader Israel needed to get them out of Egypt and get them ready for Canaan. Joshua was the leader Israel needed to take the land, to defeat their enemies and settle there. But once Israel is settled in the land they’ll need new leaders. Spiritual leaders who will keep them God-focused but also leaders who will run the government, organize this spread out country so that justice rules and to prepare an army to defend themselves. When you have a large group of people they need governing, organizing and managing. So god prepares them for that day when they ask for a king. God says if they ask here’s what you look for. But not any person but one that will have God’s interests and perspective for Israel. Israel was not a democracy at the time, they were a theocracy; a God-ruled nation. Yet, even though they were God’s people they still rebelled against God. So God says through Moses,

*<sup>14</sup> When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, “Let us set a king over us like all the nations around us, <sup>15</sup> be sure to appoint over you a king” . . .*

And then Moses describes what God wants in a king. But as we go through the qualities and standards for a king of God's people we'll understand that the principles for spiritual kingship will apply to any area of leadership we find ourselves in, at work, in ministry, in the community and even at home.

So what kind of leader did God say to look for?

<sup>15</sup> *be sure to appoint over you a king the LORD your God chooses.*

So here's what to look for to lead God's people of all ages; Look for someone who clearly . . .

### **God's Hand on Their Life** **(17:14-15a)**

The people will want someone to rule them *'like all the nations around us'*. What did Moses mean by that? These words become prophetic when in 1 Samuel 8 the nation of Israel is not willing to listen to the prophet Samuel (partly because his own sons were disobedient priests) and they say to him,

*"We want a king over us. <sup>20</sup> Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."*

So they wanted a soldier, a commander-in-chief who will bring them peace over their enemies. Samuel warned them that this will cost you your sons as soldiers, who some will die in battle. He'll take your daughters because he needs them to cook for and make weapons for the army. He'll take your land and your produce because he needs to feed his army. And he'll tax you because he needs to pay his army. But they said, that's what we want. And the people chose Saul and he gave them a couple of early victories but he refused to do what the Lord said through Samuel. So God sent Samuel on a mission to anoint a new king, one whose heart beat after God. And God chose the 8<sup>th</sup> son of Jesse, David, a teenage shepherd. David knew how to protect his sheep. David knew how to handle himself. David wrote songs about God while he watched the sheep. God's hand was on David's life.

David wasn't perfect – no one is – and the power that comes with kingship ebbed its way into his life too, but when confronted with his sins David repented and sought to make things right with God. Saul never repented of any sins. He was sorry because it made him look bad; and he was more interested in what people thought of him rather than God.

How has God's hand shown up in your life? How have you grown in your walk with God? This is what God says first as a qualification to lead. Our kids need to see how God's hand has shown in our life. How He saved us. How He gifted us to use His gifts and talents for other people? And involved in this is the second part of v.15,

*He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite.*

While we might think 'Of course an Israelite should govern Israel' but it's not ethnicity God's looking for. Israel was not like the other nations. Only Israel worshipped God, the true God. Only Israel had laws that united them to worship God alone. Only Israel had a God who went before them and fought their battles and sent rain for their crops and blessed their cattle to produce offspring. The king God chooses should be one who will submit himself to God's rules as well. So the leader God desires is . . .

## **Committed to God's Covenant (17:15b)**

If you're wondering whether you're doing a good job of leading your children, guiding your ministry group, overseeing people at work, then focus on follow God first. If we make God our priority and study His Word we'll discover what God says in how to lead others. When we read His Word we'll know how God wants us to treat people so we'll lead in that manner. God wants those who lead others to recognize they are all 'brothers' all subject to the same rules God gives to all. This is will show up again.

As a fellow Israelite even the king was one who was willing to be . . .

## **Accountable to Other Wise Leaders (16:18-22; 18:1-22)**

This section about Israel's king is sandwiched in-between God's standards for Judges & officials (in 16:18-22) and Levites, priests and prophets in ch. 18. But kings aren't mentioned first nor last if he wanted to save the best for last. The king was counselled and held accountable to the prophets and was also held to be accountable to the priests and Levites who held up the standard of the covenant stipulations. Unlike the kings of other nations, the king of Israel was not the lone ruler on top of a hierarchy of leaders, he was one of a plurality of leaders, all who had roles to play to help the king govern the people according to God's standards.

Many times you see prophets counselling or confronting kings, seeking advice from or even being rebuked by the priests. God was the true king of Israel and the kings and prophets, judges and priests all had roles to play to make sure each one was following God's ways according to His Word.

God's design for ruling and governing involves a multiple of leaders who each have roles to help the others lead according to God's Word. Even the family unit has two leaders with different roles designed to assist the other in making sure both of them are walking with God and managing as God would have you lead. Each one holds the other accountable. If you find yourself in a position where you are the sole leader and don't want to fall into the temptations of the abuse of your position, set up godly accountability partners who you trust to keep you walking God's path.

When the kings of Israel took the throne there was always the danger of being like the other nations, trusting in your resources. But here God commands any future Israelite King

*<sup>16</sup>The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the LORD has told you, "You are not to go back that way again."*

A king wanted horses for his army. God specifically commanded His kings must,

## **Trust God More than Resources (17:16)**

Ps. 20:7 says,

*Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

The king was to trust God to fight their battles. Many times we read about God's miraculous intervention in Israel's battles and defeated those with greater weaponry. The connection with Egypt

and horses was twofold. It was the Egyptians on their chariots and horses that God drowned in the Red Sea. God showed Israel He can look after them. Don't trust in weapons and the latest technology more than God. Secondly, didn't Israel have horses they had to go somewhere to buy them. Guess who raised horses and sold them? Egypt. And how did that usually work? It was very customary for one nation to exchange troops for horses. So if Israel wanted horses from Egypt, Egypt would demand slaves in return and quite often an insurance policy. Egypt would send a small garrison of troops to Israel so they could keep act as peacekeepers. It was an alliance of peace. If you buy weapons from me I don't want you to use them against me so we make a peace treaty to guarantee that. The issue is more than just military might. It also means don't trust the other nations to protect you. This would become one of Israel's major problems. Various kings would make alliances with Egypt so they would protect them from Assyria or Babylon. It never worked.

Of course this was part of Solomon's downfall. He accumulated vast numbers of horses. Look at 2 Chron. 9

*<sup>25</sup> Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horses, which he kept in the chariot cities and also with him in Jerusalem. <sup>26</sup> He ruled over all the kings from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. <sup>27</sup> The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and cedar as plentiful as sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. <sup>28</sup> Solomon's horses were imported from Egypt and from all other countries.*

This was part of Solomon's downfall; he made treaties with all these other nations by buying their horses and marrying women from these countries. That's one reason why he married all the women that he did, to make treaties with other nations so neither would attack the other. But Deut. 17:16 says something about that too:

*<sup>17</sup> He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.*

Listen to what happened to Solomon in 1 Kings 11,

*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. <sup>2</sup> They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. <sup>3</sup> He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. <sup>4</sup> As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. <sup>5</sup> He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites <sup>6</sup> So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done.*

Solomon fell into the power trap and didn't listen to God or those who counselled him in His Word. God says be

### **Dedicated to Family Stability more than Personal Pleasure (17:17a)**

These were more than political alliances. We read he "loved" them. But these women didn't know God. They worshipped other gods. Solomon wanted to make them happy so he began to worship their gods. It very rarely works the other way. Once in a while it does but most of the time when you marry someone who doesn't follow Jesus, they lead the Jesus follower away from God.

Solomon was the most powerful man on earth at the time and it went to his head. He probably rationalized it away by saying, 'yes, but we want to ensure peace. I don't want my people to have to go to war.' But that would have been an excuse. And the last part of v.17 applies to many kings, not just Solomon;

*He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.*

The King of Israel was God's man to lead Israel with justice and meet the needs of the poor. He was to . . .

### **Share Wealth More than Accumulate it (17:17b)**

These last 3 commands from God are a danger for all of us. We're all tempted at times to trust our resources more than God. To seek personal pleasure over relationships and to accumulate more than share. No matter what level of leading we may find ourselves in, these 3 are always a challenge for us. The greatest thing to remember with all 3 of these commands is what brings us greater joy in life? When we obey God's Word we get His joy. When we trust God with our problems rather than trust our resources we get greater satisfaction in watching God work. When we love our spouses and families the way God commands us the peace and joy that God gives us can't be matched by anything else. When we are generous to bless others with the resources that God gives us, we get great joy because we are acting like God who loves to provide for His children. Focus on these 3 commands and the temptations of the others will lose their appeal.

So these were all the things a leader of God should watch out for. Now in vv.18-20 God gives us the prescription that will significantly help the leader to avoid the previous warnings:

*<sup>18</sup> When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests.<sup>19</sup> It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees <sup>20</sup> and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.*

The greatest qualification for leadership for God is

### **A Desire to Grow Spiritually (17:18-20)**

Probably the scroll he's talking about is Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy means 2<sup>nd</sup> law. It's a recap of what God did for Israel and a reminder of the main commands God listed in Leviticus through Numbers. The whole point of writing it for himself was to tell him 'this is for you too!' We desire to grow spiritually

#### ***By applying the word to ourselves (vv.18-19)***

The king was to have his own copy of the Word so he can read it and study it for himself. It was supposed to be part of his daily discipline. In doing so he would learn to fear God by obeying His words. Fearing God means to obey because we are fully aware of the consequences of disobedience but also fully aware of the blessings of obedience.

The key to successful spiritual leadership at home, at work, in the community and in ministry is stay close to God by staying in his Word every day. Not accumulating knowledge but carefully obeying it. And in reading it daily he will grow spiritually . . .

## ***By serving the needs of others (v.20)***

If Jesus summarized the Law by saying love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself He was saying that when you're right with God you're looking how you can serve others. The king was no different than anyone else. He needed God's word too. He was not to set himself apart from the rest of the people. He was to be the champion of the people's rights and needs.

And that's a good question to ask ourselves for the positions of leadership we find ourselves in. Are we using that position to serve others or use others? Two different styles of leadership. Jesus illustrated this in Mark 10:40-45 when his disciples were arguing about which one of them would sit at Jesus' left and right. We read,

*<sup>42</sup> Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. <sup>43</sup> Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,<sup>44</sup> and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. <sup>45</sup> For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The world's way of leading is to use positions and power for personal gain. Jesus said, not so with you – His followers. Jesus' way is to serve, to use our positions and influence to lift up, build up and serve others. Ask yourself, whose example am I following in parenting, in oversight of staff at work, as a leader of a committee or ministry? Am I genuinely seeking to serve like Jesus? Perhaps let those words of Jesus "not so with you" ring in your ears and ask God to open your heart to His Word.

Another excellent exercise we can do to help us grow spiritually and help us lead by serving is to write out Scripture for ourselves. If you've never done it I'd like to challenge you this week to try it. Take something small- a psalm, a short epistle like Jude, Philemon, 2 or 3 John or a few proverbs – and take time each day this week writing out the verses for yourself. You'll be surprised how the Word sticks just by writing it out. It becomes more personal.

Something I've done at two different times is to write out Ps. 119. It's broken up into 22 8 verse stanzas. By writing out 8 verses a day you could write out all 176 verses in 3 weeks. Ps. 119 is a great to do because it's all on the Word of God itself.

So as we embark on a study of the good Kings in Chronicles, we now have a base on which to study them by. We know what God expected from all His kings and now we'll see why God said these ones did right in His eyes. And my prayer is that as we study the godly qualities of the leaders God commended, may we learn what God is looking for in leadership in general and have a better idea of how to lead at home, at work and in ministry contexts.