



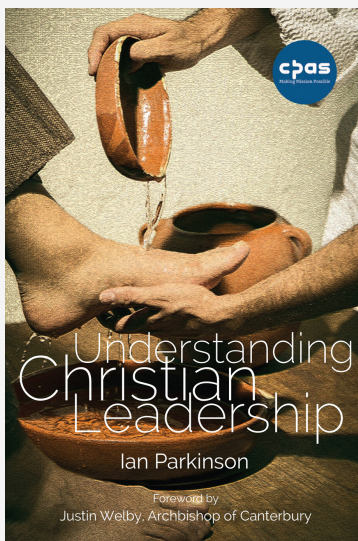
LEADERSHIP IN THE BIBLE

AN OVERVIEW OF THE IDEA OF LEADERSHIP IN
OLD TESTAMENT AND NEW TESTAMENT SCRIPTURES



**MATERIAL LARGELY
SUMMARIZED FROM**

*UNDERSTANDING
CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP
BY IAN PARKINSON*



OLD TESTAMENT

KEY IDEAS

It is God who leads His people – many of the titles ascribed to human leaders first of all describe God.

Yet He delegates His responsibility for the right ordering of world to leaders, reflecting His covenant-partnership with humanity.

Leadership in the Old Testament is less concerned with the ability of leaders to discern direction, and more with how they exercise obedience to God's will. Moses speaks only what God had revealed. Prophets fulfilled their roles by speaking as God's oracles.

Many of the themes of leadership are taken up by Jesus as the complete example of what we see through the failures and stumbles of Old Testament examples.

TYPES OF OT LEADERS AND THEIR PURPOSE

PARTICULAR INDIVIDUALS WHOM GOD CALLS.

Provision of leadership is seen both in the way that God directly calls, for example, Abraham, to initiate His purposes in specific ways, and in the general establishing of structures to oversee society e.g. Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18 to "select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens."

PRIESTS

Priests were set apart to be able to "come near" to God (Numbers 16: 5) - they represented God's holiness, communicated His Law to the people, and represented the people to God through the offering of worship and sacrifice.

JUDGES

The earliest formal leadership in Israel, exercising God's good rule through ensuring the right ordering of relationships in society - helping those suffering injustice and upholding cause of the needy.



KINGS

Anointed by God as a concession to His people who had proved unable to accept His direct appointment of leaders, kings are celebrated as bringing stability (By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down. Proverbs 29:4), caring for the people (And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skilful hands he led them. Psalm 78:72) and ensuring they thrive (When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan. Proverbs 29:2).

PROPHETS

As opposed to those who rule by appointment or birthright (kings and priests), prophets are raised directly by God to call His people back to His ways of righteousness and justice).



EXAMPLES OF OT LEADERS AND WHAT THEIR STORIES REVEAL

LEADERSHIP IS EXPLORED THROUGH STORY AND EXAMPLE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

Noah:

Leadership as obedience to God alone.

Abraham:

Leadership as responding to God's call and embracing the unknown.

GENESIS 12: "GO FORTH FROM YOUR COUNTRY, AND FROM YOUR RELATIVES AND FROM YOUR FATHER'S HOUSE, TO THE LAND WHICH I WILL SHOW YOU."

Joseph:

Leadership as having a vision to endure through hard circumstances and showing grace. Joseph forgave his brothers' mistreatment of him (Genesis 50). "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good..." (Genesis 50:20).

Moses:

Leadership as taking responsibility for people.

Moses and Joshua:

Leadership as ensuring succession. The succession of Joshua to Moses begins with Joshua taking orders from Moses (Exodus 7), being an aide (Exodus 24), exhibiting confidence in the face of challenges (Numbers 14), transitioning to partial leadership (Numbers 27), receiving a commission and blessing (Deuteronomy 34), and assuming full leadership (Joshua 1).

Joshua:

Leadership as exercised by example rather than command. Joshua 24: "But as for me and my house," he says, "we will serve the Lord." The people follow, inspired by his example.



David:

Leadership as defeating giants through trusting in God's power, and as knowing when to let wrongs go. "Leave him alone; let him curse..." (2 Samuel 16:11).

Solomon:

Leadership as exercising wisdom. He sought "a discerning heart to govern... and to distinguish right from wrong." (1 Kings 3:9).

Esther:

Leadership as knowing when to act with courage. "...you have come to your royal position for such a time as this" (Esther 4:14).

Isaiah:

Leadership as taking the initiative before others. "Here am I. Send me!"

Daniel:

Leadership as maintaining resolve.

Nehemiah:

Leadership as casting God's vision.



TWO KEY OLD TESTAMENT LEADERSHIP IMAGES

LEADER AS SHEPHERD.

A widely used image in the ancient world for leadership. This reflects God as the one as, “He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.” Jeremiah 31:10.

God promises his people in Ezekiel 37:24 a leader who will “be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd.”

At a time when shepherds would be personally liable for lost sheep and would know them individually, the image speaks of leadership which is self-sacrificial and concerned for the well-being and protection of the flock.

It is taken up by Jesus as the “Good Shepherd”, in the commissioning of Peter as one who will “feed my sheep” and as one of the five gifts of leadership given to the church in Ephesians 4.



LEADER AS SERVANT.

Possibly the most significant symbol for leadership in the Bible and Christian religion.

It is one of the most widely used in OT, marking leaders who put others and God’s will above themselves.

It is not related to status - both the highest and lowest in society can be servant-leaders.

It’s a mark of true kingship – Rehoboam ignores the advice of the elders to “be a servant to these people and serve them and give them a favourable answer.” (1 Kings 12:7)

The Servant in Isaiah (40-55) is the one on whom Jesus bases the understanding of His ministry. Neil Cole writes,

”SERVANTHOOD IS NOT AN ADJECTIVE TO DESCRIBE A GOOD LEADER AS IF IT IS ONE OF THE MANY QUALITIES OF A GOOD LEADER. SERVANTHOOD IS WHAT WE NEED, EVEN MORE THAN LEADERSHIP. LEADERSHIP IS JUST A FUNCTION FOR THE SERVANT.”



JESUS AND LEADERSHIP

WHILE THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH WE CANNOT IMITATE JESUS FULLY, NEVERTHELESS HE IS OUR PATTERN.

Jesus intensified many of the themes of leadership in the Old Testament.

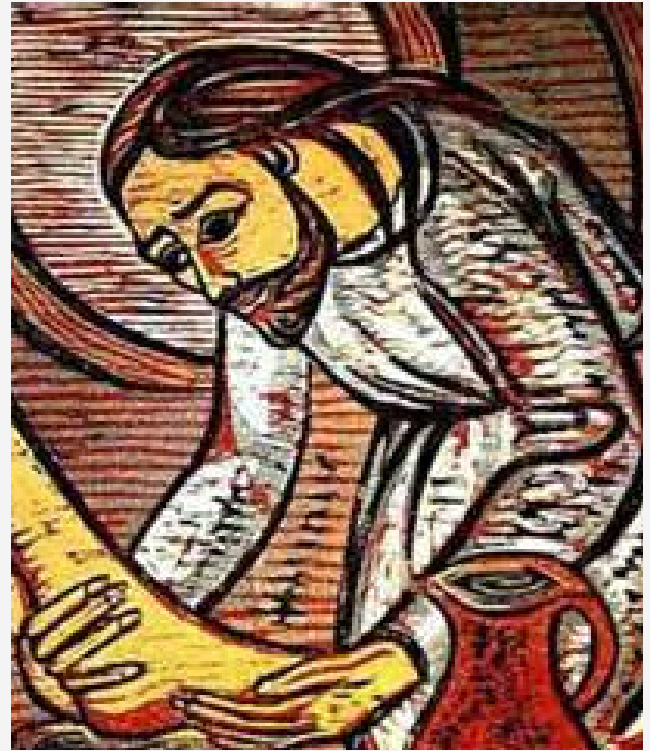
He was anointed and called by God. “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me...”

He did not act on His own authority, but through the work of the Spirit, to do His Father’s will.

He laid down His life for others.

His security was in His relationship with God, rather than His status as a leader.

He taught and demonstrated humility as the foundation of leadership. 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. Not so with you.



**INSTEAD, WHOEVER WANTS TO BECOME GREAT AMONG YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WANTS TO BE FIRST MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL. 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.”
(MARK 10:42-45)**

He offered His own life as an example for others. “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.” (John 13:13-17)

He called His followers to steward and take responsibility. “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (Matthew 24:45-47)

He called and released others into ministry and leadership – His key strategy.



LEADERSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

WHILE DIFFERENT STRUCTURES OF LEADERSHIP EVOLVE THROUGHOUT THE NT, THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP AND THE MANNER OF LEADERSHIP IS A CONSTANT FOCUS.

LEADERSHIP IS SEEN AS PART OF CREATION WHICH CAN LEAD TO FLOURISHING.

Nationally: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— 2 for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. (1 Timothy 2: 1-2)

Within the church: "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls." (Hebrews 13:7)

WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE LEADERSHIP:

THERE ARE A NUMBER OF DIFFERENT TERMS USED WHICH REVEAL LEADERSHIP AS OVERSIGHT, MODELLING CHRIST, AND EQUIPPING OTHERS.

OVERSIGHT WORDS:

Proistamenos

A generally used word in society which carried the meaning of *caring for those you have oversight of*, those who are "over you in the Lord", (1 Thessalonians 5:12) and found as a gift and calling in Romans 12:8 alongside teachers and those who show mercy.

Hegoumenos

Used in Acts and three times in Hebrews 13, with the sense of those *who act as guides, and are worth imitating*. Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7)



Kubernesis

Used once in a list of spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12:28) to carry the meaning of someone who *enables all the gifts in the body to work together*.

Episkopos

A characteristic of leadership, rather than a function in the NT. Paul asks the Ephesian elders to "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God." (Acts 20:28). The leader *will care for people, enabling them to grow in faith*. As such, s/he will have good pastoral skills and be an effective teacher. (1 Timothy 3:2-7; Titus 1:7-9)

Presbuteros

Leadership as being an elder (both in OT and wider society) - literally *someone who is older with responsibility*. They exercised responsibility in the Jerusalem church, and Paul and Barnabas appointed them to the churches in Asia Minor. They operated largely together in councils.

(A WORD NOT USED)

Arkhon

The most commonly used word of the NT era to describe a ruler is not used in the NT. The word's associations of rank and status do not sit well with a vision of leadership which is about pointing away from the self.

MODELLING AND EQUIPPING OTHERS WORDS:

EARLY DISCIPLES SAW THEMSELVES AS PASSING ON AND IMITATING THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF CHRIST AND URGED OTHERS TO IMITATE THEM IN TURN.

Diakonia

A widely used word to describe leadership in the NT. It has roots in the idea of *waiting on others as a servant but also of being a go-between messenger*. Paul calls himself a diakonos to emphasise his authority as a representative of Christ.

Apostolos

The early Church saw itself as apostolic in nature, *being sent out with the full authority of the sender, to share the good news of the kingdom*. Like diakonia the attention is not on the sent one, but on the one being represented.

THUS PAUL, WHO HAS A CLEAR SENSE OF BEING APOSTOLOS, DOES NOT ASSERT HIS OWN AUTHORITY, BUT BOASTS IN HIS WEAKNESSES TO POINT OTHERS TO CHRIST.

THIS LEADERSHIP EXISTS BECAUSE OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION, RATHER THAN EXTERNAL AUTHORITY.



EQUIPPING OTHERS:

Paul portrays leadership as being multifaceted and complementary in Ephesians 4, with God's grace being given to every member of the church.

IT'S A VISION IN WHICH NO ONE IS PASSIVE.

THROUGH DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP GIFTS INTERACTING THE WHOLE BODY CAN REPRESENT THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD.

(A WORD NOT USED)

Hiereus.

The word for priest is not designated to specific leaders in the NT, despite their existence in the Jewish faith community and in later centuries.

In Hebrews, the role of the OT priesthood is superseded by Christ, and the designation "priest" belongs to the whole people of God.

LEADERSHIP AND THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

IN UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IAN PARKINSON OUTLINES HOW THE BROAD THEMES OF SCRIPTURE WHICH REVEAL THE NATURE AND CHARACTER OF GOD AND SO HELP BUILD UP A PICTURE OF LEADERSHIP.

Creation

Leaders do not have ultimate authority to determine the trajectory of the world or any group of people.

Thus people can not be instruments of our purposes, and we are urged to be good stewards of grace and the church.

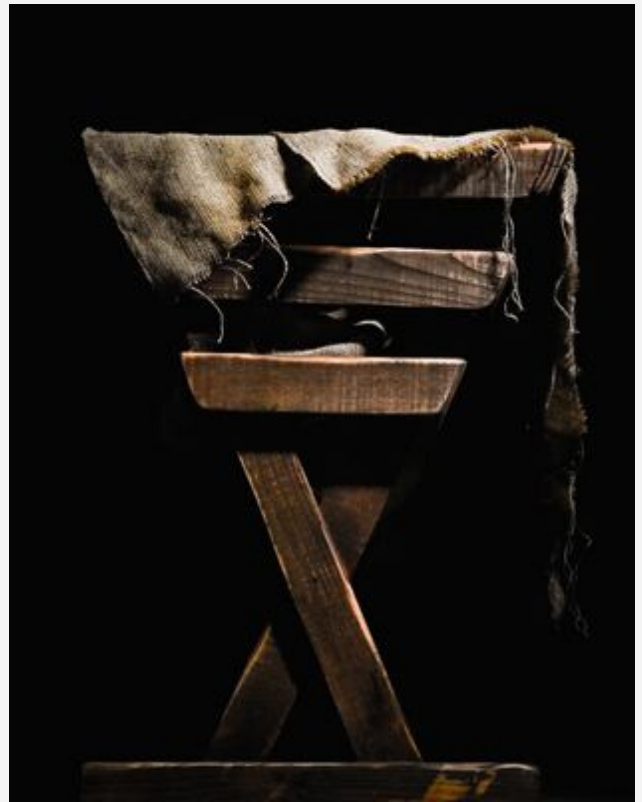
Incarnation

Jesus' total identification with the world is a paradigm for *leadership which is authentic* – deeply identifying with people, willing to go beyond the comfort zone to forgotten corners.

Jesus embodies the kingdom, *being the message* in character and practice as well as proclaiming it.

Trinity

Rather than leadership as the work of an individual, the nature of God is dynamic relationship, in which there is a *mutual raising up*.



Holy Spirit

Pentecost announces *an anointed community, rather than anointed individuals*, with good leadership therefore enabling the whole body to be led by the Spirit.

New Creation

As a people shaped as much by future vision as well as inherited story, mission is never static.

Therefore leaders will not be just custodians of the past, but catalysts for the future.

AMONG PILGRIM PEOPLE, LEADERSHIP WILL HELP FOSTER GODLY DISCONTENT WITH THE STATUS QUO, EMBRACING THE DISCOMFORT THIS MAY BRING,

IN THE AWARENESS OF ACCOUNTABILITY TO THE RETURNING MASTER.