

## **Leaders chosen and appointed**

HN 19/12/04 pm

Reading: Nehemiah 2, Acts 6

Study: Deuteronomy 1:9-15

Psalms: 121, 119:97-104, 23, 111:7-10

The people of God were about to enter Canaan when Moses reminded them of the promises of God and of the law. He also reminded them of the importance of leadership within this community, within this holy nation, this people belonging to God. He recalled the time when he delegated leadership responsibility.

Moses was called by God to lead his people out of Egypt, out of bondage. This great leader delivered a band of slaves from the power of the mighty Pharaoh. He led them to Mt Sinai and it was here, just before giving the law, that Moses acknowledged that the burden of leading these people was more than he could manage alone.

### **Delegation**

Here in this brief recollection Moses does not explain how God brought him to this realisation. It was in a most unlikely way you may remember. God did not speak to him directly but through another man. It was his own father-in-law Jethro, who, having just come for a visit, saw the stress that Moses was under. He was in danger of exhaustion from over work, and the people were becoming frustrated at the delays in getting their cases judged.

‘Select men to help you’ Jethro told Moses. *Moses heeded the voice of his father in law and did all that he said* (Exodus 18:24). He chose able men and made them leaders over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. This great leader was willing to listen to the advice of Jethro who just came for a brief visit.

A leader can make or break a nation. History tells us of many leaders who have destroyed their nation. Hitler is perhaps the prime example of modern history. He led, or rather misled, the nation of Germany to war, and in fact plunged the whole world into disaster. At the present time we hear of how the president of Zimbabwe is leading his people into corruption and poverty.

A leader can make or break a church. Again history tells the stories and in our day we know of churches under threat because of poor leadership. The leaders are leading the people into spiritual poverty. Leaders that do not display the qualities detailed here by Moses will lead their church into poverty rather than fruitfulness in the Kingdom of God.

A leader can make or break a family. Too many families lack effective leaders – the role given by God to the husband and father of the household. Again we must consider the qualities of the effective leader. But also let the divinely ordained headship be taken

seriously and be established or re-established in homes where men have abrogated their responsibility in this regard.

Remember good leadership does not mean that I have to do everything. Tasks can be delegated as Moses learnt. He maintained his role as leader until passing the baton on to Joshua, but accepted his limitations and appointed others to exercise leadership at the local level. At this time there was little separation of general leadership responsibilities, that is, military and legal functions.

Poor leaders are afraid to delegate because they fear for their position. They feel threatened and live in the fear of men. They keep on doing everything themselves but are unable to perform all their duties. The people become frustrated and complain. The leader's fears increase and so he tries to take even tighter control over the people. This is what is happening in Zimbabwe and many other places. This is what sometimes happens in churches.

### **Choosing**

Moses had no such fear. He was appointed by God to lead the people. He had no fear in calling upon the people to choose their own leaders. Although in Exodus 15:25 we read that *Moses chose able men* there was a step before this in which he allowed the people to choose for themselves – after he gave them guidelines for making the choice. Moses took the men they chose and made/appointed them as leaders. He worked with the people in establishing good leaders.

We might compare the situation in the early church as we find it in Acts 6. Like Israel in the time of Moses, the people of God were growing rapidly in number and there was a need for more leaders. The apostles listened when complaints were brought to them about the daily distribution of food. They told the people to choose *from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business*.

What wonderful leaders they chose – the first Christian martyr being one of them. And most importantly a potential division in the church was avoided by appointing these leaders (deacons). How many divisions in churches today stem from poor leadership? It is a thing we should consider more seriously than we do and pray about more earnestly.

We can be thankful for procedures established in our own church that are based upon these Biblical principles. But we must not take these things for granted, for men in an effort to get their own way can easily subvert and destroy such procedures.

### **Able men**

In our text and in Acts 6 we find leaders being chosen by a democratic process. However this process is not inviolable. The process itself does not assure we get the right leader. We must consider the character of the persons being chosen as both Moses and the apostles pointed out.

The nation of Pakistan is currently ruled by a dictator after the democratically elected leader was ousted in a military coup. Such a process is an anathema to those who believe in democracy. But the people prefer their current leader because of his personal qualities. He is a better leader than the one chosen.

What did Moses tell the people to look for in the men they would choose as their leaders? He told them to *choose wise, understanding and knowledgeable men*.

### **Knowledge**

It is important that leaders be men of learning, whether it be formal education or informal. Leaders in the church must first and foremost be men who know the Scriptures, but knowledge of other disciplines is also important. They should be men with knowledge about the natural world, the world that God created. They should have knowledge of history, and of current affairs, if they are to be leaders of the people of God.

Look at Nehemiah for a moment, a man recognized as a great leader like Moses. He asked about the status of Jerusalem from men recently come from there. He wanted up to date information. The information caused him to weep and cry out to the Lord. But this was second hand information. What did he do when he got to Jerusalem? Nehemiah 2:13 – *he went out one night to view the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were burned with fire*. He wanted accurate information before he started to rebuild the walls.

Many a leader in the church has come to grief through lack of knowledge. Especially on the mission field we find Christians who rush in with the gospel only to find they are offending their hearers by their dress or some mannerism not to mention their inability to speak the language. We must remember the great gospel that we preach is not tied to any particular culture, nor to any particular time in history. It is for all the nations and for all time. Knowledge of the culture is important in communicating the gospel even in our own nation.

### **Wisdom**

Whilst knowledge is necessary we know that it is not all that a good leader needs to have. Wisdom is essential in applying that knowledge, in using knowledge for the benefit of the people.

The world places value on education and experience alone, but without wisdom great learning can lead to grief. I think of India where immense value is placed on education. There are many highly educated people in the nation but many lack wisdom in applying that knowledge. One man was a professor in animal nutrition but of what value was such knowledge when he worshipped the cow and offered it 'holy food'.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The wisdom that Moses spoke about was wisdom from above – wisdom that God gives to those who ask (James 1:5). This wisdom from God is very different to what the world calls wisdom. We see worldly

wisdom all around us – how to make money, how to beat the tax dept, how to cheat and not be caught. James condemns such self seeking, such envy and greed driven wisdom.

Wisdom from above comes by the Spirit of God; by humility and by asking God. The men chosen in Acts 6 were *full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom*. Wisdom from above is *peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy* (James 3:17). Nehemiah demonstrated such wisdom as he approached the king and in dealing with those who opposed them. He prayed that God would give him wisdom – wisdom in what to say and how to act.

Do we seek after such leaders in our church? Do we seek to be such leaders in the church, and in our home? Or are we too often self seeking, concerned about ourselves and not understanding others. A leader must be wise and understanding. He must seek to understand the people and their needs, both immediate and eternal. Then he can gently lead them to the great shepherd of the sheep who will lead them, together with himself, in rich pasture and by the still waters of life.

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