

OT LESSON #27
THE INFLUENCE OF RIGHTEOUS AND WICKED
LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION: Prophets are not required to do things that make sense to anyone but God. Their prophetic utterances are often received with ridicule and derision. Their actions are frequently misunderstood. But what Ahijah did to Jeroboam must have seemed strange beyond all comprehension:

And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way; and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two [were] alone in the field: And Ahijah caught the new garment that [was] on him, and rent it [in] twelve pieces . . . (1 Kings 11:29,30).

There was of course a divine and significant purpose in the act—it was intended to teach Jeroboam a lesson about the will of God.

And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten pieces: for thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee . . . I will take the kingdom out of his son's hand, and will give it unto thee, [even] ten tribes (1 Kings 11:31, 35).

With the call came a great promise:

And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that is right in my sight, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built for David, and will give Israel unto thee (1 Kings 11:38).

With the calling and the promise of God safely in his heart, we might expect that Israel—at least the 10 tribes—would have a truly and continually

righteous king. But we have seen with Saul and David that righteous kings have been in short supply among the descendants of Israel so far.

As we review the division of Israel and subsequent events, we will examine some profound principles of leadership taught in the scriptures.

#1: Rehoboam became king of all 12 tribes when Solomon died, and “all the congregation of Israel come, and spake unto Rehoboam . . .” What they wanted was a little relief. Solomon had taxed them and worked them to exhaustion.

Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee (1 Kings 12:4).

This request of the people brings us to our first principle of leadership. Notice where Rehoboam went for advice on the matter of this request.

And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men, that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people? (1 Kings 12:6).

This is Leadership Principle #1 (LP#1). **WHEN THINGS REALLY MATTER AND YOU NEED GOOD ADVICE, TALK TO THE GUYS WHO HAVE EXPERIENCE.**

Joseph Smith said it this way:

The way to get along in any important matter is to gather unto yourselves wise men, experienced and aged men, to assist in council in all times of trouble. Handsome men are not apt to be wise and strong-minded men; but the strength of a strong-minded man will generally create course features, like the rough, strong bough of the oak. You will always discover in the first glance of a man, in the outlines of his features something of his mind (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, Section Six 1843–44, p.299).

Paul, in the book of Hebrews, said,

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, [even] those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

So Rehoboam brought in the bearded brigade and asked for advice. That was good! And their advice was good, too.

If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever (1 Kings 12:7).

“Give them what they have asked for,” the old men suggested. *“Serve them.”*

LP#2 comes from 1 Kings 12:7. **BE A SERVANT TO THOSE YOU LEAD,**

You will remember what the Lord said about this:

. . . whosoever shall be great among you, let him be your servant (Matt. 20:32).

But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant (Matt, 23:11).

I got a call early in the morning the day after a putrid evaluation of my abilities by my seminary students. I was devastated by my scores, and my supervisor, who had administered the evaluation, was surprised as well. I could not sleep that night and about 3:00 AM went back to the Seminary to pray and ponder over the matter. At 5:00 AM my supervisor called. “I could not sleep,” he said. “I’ve been sitting in my office trying to understand what is wrong, and I think I have figured it out . . .” And he had! What he told me changed the way I taught and changed my life. He was more than a supervisor. He was a servant. I will be forever grateful for him and to him.

LP#3: IF YOU GO TO KIDS FOR COUNSEL, YOU MAY NOT GET MUCH VALUABLE HELP.

1 Kings 12:8 begins with a word that links it to the counsel given by the elders in the previous verse: “*But* he forsook the counsel of the old men . . .”

What did Rehoboam do after he abandoned the counsel of the old men? He “consulted with the young men” (1 Kings 12:8). Their advice to the king? “Thou shalt speak unto the people . . . my little finger shall be thicker than my father’s loins” (1 Kings 12:10) In other words, *tell them you are going to increase their burdens.*

My brother-in-law was a bishop when he accompanied his explorers on a river trip in Idaho. One day they stopped in a gorge where a towering rope swing offered the thrill of swinging off a the top of a cliff and dropping 40 feet into a deep pool of water below. The boys coaxed their bishop to give it a try. The other youth leaders— scoutmasters and assistants—told him he was an idiot for even considering it. But he did consider it and did take the advice of the 16- and 17- year-old youths and he did come home with ugliest and largest bruise I had ever seen. It covered his back in blue and yellow and purple from his neck down. He was so worried about being entangled in the rope when he let go that he forgot to plan his fall and hit the water flat on his back.

So Rehoboam delivered his answer to the people:

And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; And spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to your yoke: my father also chastised

you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions (1 Kings 12:13,14).

The people were not at all pleased.

So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only (1 Kings 12:19,20;

The Septuagint says Judah *and* Benjamin followed Rehoboam).

God refused to give the Southern Kingdom of Judah permission to war against the rebellious tribes following Jeroboam (see 1 Kings 12:22-24) and so the division of Israel's descendants was complete.

LP#4: NEVER MAKE IMPORTANT DECISIONS BASED ON FEAR

Jeroboam set up his kingdom in the north, but he soon perceived that he had a problem. The temple, that incredible building erected at such sacrifice and expense by his people and the people of Judah, was in Jerusalem, in what was now a foreign nation.

And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah (1 K. 12:26,27).

Jeroboam was frightened. What if he lost his kingdom? What if his people, in their love for the temple, turned against him and abandoned him? You remember, don't you, the promise Ahijah made to Jeroboam when he ripped his clothes? Be righteous and the Lord will "build you a sure house."

In his fear, Jeroboam

the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi (1 K. 12:28-31).

King Jeroboam, in his fear, led the people into idolatry .

Elder Holland wrote an article in the March 2000 Ensign and said something about LP#4.

Once there has been illumination, beware the temptation to retreat from a good thing. If it was right when you prayed about it and trusted it and lived for it, it is right now. Don't give up when the pressure mounts. Certainly don't give in to that being who is bent on the destruction of your happiness. Face your doubts. Master your fears. "Cast not away therefore your confidence." (Heb. 10:35) Stay the course and see the beauty of life unfold for you (*Ensign*, March 2000, p. 9).

LP#S: TRUST THE PROPHET ALWAYS; NOT JUST IN A CRISIS

We find a remarkable, almost entertaining inconsistency in Jeroboam. In I K. 14:1, his son gets sick.

And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray thee, and disguise thyself, that thou be not known to be the wife of Jeroboam; and get thee to Shiloh: behold, there is Ahijah the prophet, which told me that I should be king over this people. And take with thee ten loaves, and cracknels, and a cruse of honey, and go to him: *he shall tell thee what shall become of the child* (1 K: 14:2,3; *emphasis added*).

Jeroboam the king had chosen not to trust the prophet's promise about a "sure house," but when he was faced with the loss of his son, he turned to him at once. He sent his disguised wife to try and fool a blind man (14:4). But Ahijah knew who was coming and what she wanted, and had his message ready. He prophesied the destruction of the house of Jeroboam

(14:7-11) and concluded with this solemn note: "when thy feet enter into the city, the child shall die" (14:12).

LP#6: REMEMBER HOW MUCH INFLUENCE ONE WICKED MAN IN A POSITION OF POWER CAN HAVE

And it came to pass, when Rehoboam had established the kingdom, and had strengthened himself, he forsook the law of the LORD, *and all Israel with him* (2 Chron. 12:1; *emphasis added*).

1 K.14:16 tells us that Jeroboam "did sin, and. ..made Israel to sin." What an indictment! It is impossible not to think of Amalikhiah:

Yea, and we also see the great wickedness one very wicked man can cause to take place among the children of men. (Alma 46:9)

How carefully a leader must guard his conduct. As Alma said to Corianton, "When they saw your conduct they would not believe in my words." (Alma 39:11)

LP#7: TEACH PEOPLE FROM THE SCRIPTURES

The next lesson comes from 2 Chronicles 17, and from a great king of Judah, three generations removed from Rehoboam, named Jehoshaphat. "The Lord was with Jehoshaphat ...he sought to the Lord God. ..and walked in his commandments. . . and his heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. . ." (2 Chron. 17:3,4,6).

In the third year of his reign, "he sent to his princes . . . to teach in the cities of Judah And with them he sent Levites . . . and with them. . . priests." (2 Chron 17:7,8).

And they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people (2 Chron 17:9).

Jehoshaphat, in an effort to bless his people, caused them to be taught out of the "book of the law"-the scriptures. He knew that when a need arises to solve problems, nothing works better than that.

Bend your efforts and your activities to stimulating meaningful scripture study among the members of the Church. Often we spend great effort in trying to increase the activity levels in our stakes. We work diligently to raise the percentages of those attending sacrament meetings. We labor to get a higher percentage of our young men on missions. We strive to improve the numbers of those marrying in the temple. All of these are commendable efforts and important to the growth of the kingdom. But when individual members and families immerse themselves in the scriptures regularly and consistently, these other areas of activity will automatically come. Testimonies will increase. Commitment will be strengthened. Families will be fortified. Personal revelation will flow (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.44).

LP#8: WHEN YOU HAVE A PROBLEM YOU CAN'T SOLVE, GET DIVINE HELP

Later on, a confederation of three armies combined to come against Jehoshaphat in battle. When the King was warned of this impending attack, and when he knew that he could not prevail against so great a force, he was fearful. But notice what he did when confronted by a terrifying problem for which he knew he had no workable solution: his actions are so different from those of Jeroboam, who also feared.

Jehoshaphat feared, and set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah (2 Chron 20:3).

He set himself to seek the Lord. The foundation of Jehoshaphat's faith lies in his knowledge that if God is on your side, you are never out-numbered.

Jehoshaphat himself began to seek for divine help, and he called on all Judah to fast.

And Judah gathered themselves together" to ask help of the LORD: even out of all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD (2 Chron. 20:4).

Jehoshaphat offered a wonderful prayer, expressing his faith and reminding the Lord of his promises. He begged for the Lord's help and concluded with this declaration:

And now, behold, the children of Ammon and Moab and mount Seir, whom thou wouldest not let Israel invade, when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned from them, and destroyed them not; Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt thou not judge them? *for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee* (2 Chron. 20:10,11,12, *emphasis added*).

Then the Spirit of the Lord moved one of the congregation and he spoke to them all with this promise:

Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of .Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat, Thus saith the LORD unto you, Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the

battle is not yours, but God's. (2 Chron.20:15)

This man, a prophet to the people, counseled Jehoshaphat to take his people the next day and go down to the place where they would meet the invading army. But he said to them,

Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you" (2 Chron. 20: 17).

What happened the next day is one of the great stories in the Bible. The people of Judah "rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness. ." (2 Chron. 20:20). Jehoshaphat gave them this instruction as they departed.

Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper (2 Chron 20:20).

"Let us go up to the battle," he said, "with perfect faith, because we believe the word that came to us from the Lord through his prophet."

LP#9: BELIEVE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS-BELIEVE THEM ENOUGH TO ACT ON THEM

And so they went. Jehoshaphat did not appoint archers or pikemen or charioteers or a phalanx of swordsmen to lead the way. " And when he had consulted with his people, he appointed singers. . . as they went out before the army" (2 Chron. 20 :21).

Surely no more courageous or unusual congregation ever went into battle. They might have said to their enemies what David said to Goliath:

Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear~ and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. (1 Samuel 17:45)

And so they came, but without even a sling. They came with hymn books!

And when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten. For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of mount Seir, utterly to slay and destroy them: and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, every one helped to destroy another. And when Judah came toward the watch tower in the wilderness, they looked unto the multitude, and, behold, they were dead bodies fallen to the earth, and none escaped. (2 Chron. 20:22-24)

The attacking armies turned on each other, "and none escaped." It took three days for Judah to gather the spoil (2 Chron. 20:25). Which brings us to the final principal, one that we must not forget.

LP#10: FALL ON YOUR FACE AT HIS FEET, GIVING HIM THANKS

And on the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Berachah; for there *they blessed the LORD*: therefore the name of the same place was called, The valley of Berachah, unto this day. (2 Chron. 20:26, *emphasis added*)

Of course in this context the word *blessed* means *thanked*. They did not forget to give thanks, nor must we. When God raises his banners and marches in our defense; when he smites our enemies before us and opens doors that no mortal effort could open; when he loves us and forgives us and saves us, we must be like the tenth leper. We must fall "down on our

face at his feet, giving him thanks." (Luke 17:16)

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