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## **An examination of how YHWH assesses good and bad leadership:**

### **Kings of Judah and Ezekiel 22 as focal points**

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#### **Abstract**

An analysis of how YHWH assesses the success or failure of the Kings of Judah is prepared with special attention to YHWH's summary of their failures as found in Ezekiel 22. The constraints on kingship outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 are explained and the structure of leadership for the nation, consisting of kings and their executive and judicial counterparts, along with priests and prophets are explored showing their ideal role in the society. A list of activities associated with leaders who failed YHWH is provided and generalized into a master list and then translated into a list of opposite activities that would be labeled positive or successful. The Kings Asa and Josiah are examined in terms of their successful leadership and a list of their activities provided. A synthesis lists of the converted failures and successes provides a template or guidebook for how leaders can lead in a manner to please YHWH.

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**Keywords:** leadership, worldview, spirituality, kings, prophets, priests, failure, success, southern kingdom, kings of Judah, Ezekiel 22, Asa, Josiah

## I. INTRODUCTION

God has revealed himself to humankind in various ways and has at times referred to himself by highlighting the roles he plays. For example, He has declared himself to be a warrior (Ex. 15:4-10; Isa. 52:7,10), shepherd (Psalm 23), king (Psalms 47, 65, and 93-99) and judge (Psalm 7:11, 50:6, Eccl. 12:14, Heb. 12:23, Acts 10:42), to name only a few. He is rightly viewed in terms of perfection and humility (Bratcher, 2003; Decker, 2003; Hardgrove, 2008; Loke, 2010).

Because God exhibits all aspects of character in perfection, and consequently all manifestations of his roles in perfection, scholars have examined God's action as a model leader. They have looked at his role as king and his use of power (Muthunayagom, 2009; Westphal, 1970), how the trinity embodies aspects of perfect leadership and community (Cincala, 2017; Horsthuis, 2011; Schwarz, 2017), how God embodies shared power and leadership (Cincala, 2017; Jones-Carmack, 2016), how God embodies servant leadership (Gray, 2008; Hagezi, 2015; Kye, 2016), how God's care for the marginalized informs leadership (Iselin & Meteyard, 2010; Kraybill, 1978; Mott & Sider, 1999; Perkins, 1976; Sider, 1997), and how God as leader pursues the establishment of his reign (Kraybill, 1978; Snyder, 1985; Swartz, 1990). These analyses recognize that God is the ultimate model and judge of what could be called proper leadership. God's role as the final judge of leadership and leaders is amply revealed in the Old Testament.

The examination of leadership in the Old Testament has been quite extensive. It covers the study of individual kings of the divided kingdoms of Israel, both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (Ash, 1998; Bakon, 2008; Breuggemann, 2008; Dillard, 1980; Jang, 2017; Janzen, 2013; Ohm, 2010; Pajunen, 2017), and the kings of a united Israel such as Saul, David, and Solomon (Green, 2014; Roberts, 2002; Sellars, 2011). In addition, individuals such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as key figures in Israel's history, such as various prophets, have been examined to various degrees.

Rather than focusing upon particular leaders, this paper examines the criteria God uses to assess the successes or failures of the ruling classes of Israel. At first glance, when looking at assessments of kings in both 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles, it appears that, for the most part, God condemns the promotion or toleration of idolatry by the people. However, when revisiting the covenantal constraints on kingship outlined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and when reviewing key passages from the perspective of a prophet who sought to call the kings, ruling classes and people back to a wholehearted following of God, we find a more complete picture of how God judges the successes or failures of leaders.

This paper will begin with an examination of the concept of kingship within Israel. Next it will examine the structure of leadership within Israel in which a balance of power seems promoted with the official offices of king and Levitical priests, and the unofficial, seemingly grassroots role of prophets within the kingdoms. The paper will then examine various texts both within the Kings and Chronicles Scriptures as well as Ezekiel 22,

which outline what could be called auditing criteria for assessing the success or failure of leadership.

## II. METHOD

There are many different ways a person can approach an exegetical study of the Scripture. The approach this author has taken arose from some basic presuppositions. First, the Scriptures are the inspired word of God and are inerrant in their autographs. Second, the primary goal of the reader is to discover the author's intended meaning as conveyed by the Holy Spirit, and what the Spirit sought to convey to the hearers of the time. Third, the Bible should be taken literally according to the normal rules of communication.

With this in mind, the author has taken what could be called a historical critical method utilizing rhetorical, narrative and semiotic analysis. The historical critical approach focuses on questions such as: (a) who is the author of the work, (b) when, where and under what circumstances was the work written, and (c) who were the recipients (Commission, 1993; Stuart, 1993).

Rhetorical, narrative and semiotic analysis seeks to unpack among other things, (a) the message the author is trying to convey, (b) who are the characters and what roles they play, (c) what is the author's point of view, and (e) what is the overall narrative or story that is being conveyed (Commission, 1993).

This author progressed through multiple readings of the books of Kings, Chronicles and the major and minor prophets associated with the southern kingdom of Israel up to the time of the Captivity. The author then identified two kings from the text where sufficient material was included to make an analysis of their respective success or failure as leaders. Due to the vastness of the textual pericope, a key passage in Ezekiel was selected that accurately summarized issues associated with failures of various leaders of Judah as reflected in the books of Kings and Chronicles.

## III. UNDERSTANDING KINGSHIP IN ISRAEL

The issue of kingship in Israel arises not from divine but human will. Samuel is aging and his sons are seen by the populace to be totally unsuitable to take their father's place in leadership (1 Samuel 8). The people demand to have a king like all the other nations. Samuel prays to the Lord and the Lord explains that their rejection of Samuel is really a rejection of the Lord. Samuel then communicates to the people what Leuchter (2005) refers to as The Rule of the King, in verses 11-18. In it, Samuel delineates actions outlining the extent of royal authority and its impact on the lives of followers. At the prompting of God, Samuel selects and anoints Saul as the first King of Israel. Samuel wrote down the rights and duties of a king on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord. It is probable that Samuel wrote down Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

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," be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your fellow Israelites. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not an Israelite. 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."

He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.

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. 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 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. (New International Version)

Levinson (2001) argues that this portion of Scripture exists as a utopian manifesto that flew in the face of Near Eastern understanding regarding the role, authority, prestige, and power of a king. This portion of Scripture severely constrains the power of the king in at least five key areas (Cafferky, 2010; Knoppers, 2001). First, kings are to be selected by God from native Israelites. Second, the king is forbidden to obtain many horses and to return to Egypt to acquire them. This is understood to relate to having a standing army (Dutcher-Walls, 2002). Third, the king is not to take many wives in order to build alliances since the wives may, through their attachment to idolatry, lead the heart of the king astray. Fourth, the king is constrained in relation to obtaining much wealth, and setting himself above fellow Israelites. Fifth, the king is to write for himself his personal copy of the Torah and read it daily in order to learn to fear the Lord and follow His decrees. This text in Deuteronomy becomes a yardstick to judge the king's conduct and activities (Knoppers, 2001).

Deuteronomy 17:14-20 acts as a constitution for the nation, placing the role of the king within the covenantal character of Israel and reminds the king that his loyalty is not only to the community but to YHWH (Dutcher-Walls, 2002). The king is to not only advance the nation's status and serve the people in a manner that enriches their lives, the king must also advance YHWH's agenda and ensure fidelity to Him by modeling what fidelity to YHWH entails. For instance, the limitation on obtaining horses, understood as related to a standing army, emphasizes that the king must depend upon YHWH for protection in time of war (Dutcher-Walls, 2002; Knoppers, 1996). The limitation on wives and wealth limits foreign entanglements through political alliances and commerce, protecting the king and the people from the introduction of foreign gods. The limitation on wealth ensures the king does not accumulate too much status or power above his kinsmen, losing sight of the challenges kinsmen face daily. The requirement to have a personal copy of the Torah and to daily read it emphasizes not only that the king is to have a relationship with God but also that the king is to ensure that God's decrees are not only followed by him, but by the people. A key aspect of the king's work is to ensure not only justice, but spiritual and moral allegiance to YHWH

(Levinson, 2001). The king is essentially put on notice that he is subject to the rule of law (Cafferky, 2010; Knoppers, 2001).

It is important to note that the initiation of the office of a king in Israel changed the structure of leadership and presented some key contrasts. The addition of the role of king introduced a threat of centralization of power.

#### IV. THE STRUCTURE OF LEADERSHIP IN ISRAEL

Prior to the office of king, the office of the priesthood existed with a hierarchy of priests that culminated with the High Priest. The priesthood was divinely created and involved descendants of Levi. It was passed on through kinship. Although the office of king was to be the result of divine appointment, after the Davidic Covenant, in which God promises that a descendant of David would be ruler over Israel in perpetuity, all kings were appointed based on kinship (2 Samuel 7:1-17).

The priests provided spiritual leadership. They acted as mediators and worked to ensure healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. They sought to instruct the people in the Torah and promoted law and order. Priests clarified the requirements for not only worship of YHWH, but how they were to conduct themselves with one another in daily affairs to assure holiness and justice. Priests ensured the worship of YHWH adhered to the specific demands of the Torah, even to where worship took place (Deuteronomy 12:13,14). Failure to demand this discipline in the keeping of not only ceremonial law but civil laws cheapened the sacrifices and trivialized the work of God leading to the abandonment of justice (Covrig, Ongo, & Ledesma, 2012).

Alongside this dual structure of official leadership, another structure arose that was outside official positional leadership roles. Prophets functioned as critics or auditors, holding the king, the priests, and the people to specific standards outlined in the Torah as well as being sensitive to the degradation of relationships within the community or between the community and God. The prophets emphasized moral ideals and vision from God. They were driven by a personal revelation from God and sought to call all people back to fidelity to God. Prophets were at war with the status quo (Covrig et al., 2012). While role of the prophets increased, by the time of Josiah's death, the Levites were hardly mentioned after the initial appearance of Jeremiah in 2 Chronicles 35:25 (Leuchter, 2009).

The existence of these three leadership structures—kings, priests, and prophets—when operating properly, created a check and balance on the concentration and use of power. At the same time, it enhanced the spiritual, moral, social, and legal health of the community. When any one of those structures is populated by leaders who abandon their God-given role or pollute their leadership with self-serving activity or are seduced by competing ideologies or worldviews, there is degradation.

According to Knoppers (1996) there was no provision for leaders in one office to usurp authority over another office. Power was distributed in local courts (Deut. 16:18), a central court (17:8-13), the king (17:14-20), the Levitical priesthood (18:1-8), and the prophets (18:15-22).

All three of these leadership structures were subject to corruption, degradation and decay. All three were under continual scrutiny by YHWH and assessed as either

successes or failures in their role of promoting a healthy community in harmony with the law of YHWH and enjoying relationship with him.

## V. ASSESSMENT OF SUCCESS OR FAILURE OF LEADERS

When reading through 1&2 Kings and 1&2 Chronicles, one quickly encounters instance after instance where kings, priests, and prophets are declared satisfactory or unsatisfactory in fulfilling their leadership roles. When read in a chronological manner, in which the writings of the prophets are placed within their proper appearance in various dynasties, one soon begins to gain a more complete picture of how YHWH assesses the success or failure of leaders (see appendix 1).

Prior to the total destruction and captivity of Israel, YHWH lays out His justification for the punishment of Israel. He has sought to intervene throughout their history through various prophets, calling the people back to the covenant and demanding repentance. Finally, God speaks through the prophet Ezekiel to address the failure of each office of leadership within Israel, painting a picture of the total collapse and corruption of a civil society, which demanded the judgment of God. The prophet provides a stark contrast: the city of peace, Jerusalem, has become a city of blood and turmoil.

### *The city of blood and turmoil and its failed leaders*

Throughout chapter 22 in Ezekiel, YHWH systematically enumerates the failures of each office of leadership. Through the use of metaphor, such as refining corrupt metal, and analogy, leaders as roaring lions, ravaging wolves, and mauling jackals, YHWH reveals how their lofty self-perception and self-assessment of each office of leaders truly appears to him.

### *Failure of the kings and princes.*

Kings held themselves in high esteem and gloried in their military conquests, accumulation of wealth, status among other nations, and personal status among the people. However, what YHWH does is present to them their true nature and accomplishments.

In Ezekiel 22:6-13, you find the major leaders, the princes or kings, being singled out for a long list of wrong-doing that includes: (a) using their power to shed innocent blood (most probably the blood of prophets) (Lange, 2019); (b) mistreating parents and diminishing the role of parents; (c) exploiting foreigners; (d) oppressing widows and the fatherless; (e) despising holy things, calling good evil and evil good; (f) profaning the Sabbath; (g) various sexual sins involving immediate and extended family members; (h) adultery; (i) usury; (j) extortion; (k) worshiping false gods; (l) worshiping at mountain shrines instead of at Jerusalem; (m) slanderous behavior; (n) various indecent acts; and (o) taking bribes.

Ezekiel paints a picture of leaders ruling by might and not by right. They modeled this as acceptable behavior for the rest of the lower level officials. This led Ezekiel to address those lower level officials as ravaging wolves (Ezekiel 22:27) who shed

innocent blood and destroy lives for dishonest gain. This same labeling of officials occurs in Zephaniah 3:3.

### *Failure of the prophets*

Ezekiel also addresses the prophets, calling them roaring lions who tear their prey. They are actually referred to as a conspiracy of prophets, giving the impression that prophets had formed a coalition or corporation in which they put forth a unified message and stance on issues, usually supporting the king (Lange, 2019; Matthew Henry, 2019; Pulpit, 2019). They were careful not to contradict one another's lies. They too had a list of shocking wrong-doing that included: (a) stealing treasure and precious things, (b) treating people in such a manner that some died, (c) creating widows through their desire to gain wealth, (d) promoting false visions, (e) speaking for God when God hasn't spoken, (f) lying divinations, (g) female prophets promoting magic, and (h) justifying the sins of officials ... whitewashing crimes.

In Ezekiel 13:1-6 prophets are referred to as jackals among ruins, scavengers gobbling up what is discarded by the more powerful. Rather than speak for God and critique the society and its leaders, the prophets have become a professional class of defenders of the status quo who are interested in personal gain in either wealth or status or both. Their role as a type of religious, political, and social auditor is abandoned and consequently the society has no voice that speaks solely for God, calling it back to its foundational principles or values (Lange, 2019; Matthew Henry, 2019; Pulpit, 2019).

### *Failure of the priests*

This failure of the prophets removes accountability of not only the kings in their activity, but of priests who were supposed to promote strict adherence to the law. Ezekiel addresses the priests and catalogues their failures as: (a) profaning holy things, (b) failing to distinguish between what is holy and what is common, (c) failing to distinguish between what is clean and what is unclean, (d) disregarding the Sabbath, (e) doing violence to the law ... calling good evil and evil good, and (f) shedding blood and destroying lives for dishonest gain.

Ezekiel makes it clear that the priests have forsaken their central role of ensuring ceremonial integrity and ritual purity. They have perverted the very nature of their job of ensuring sacrifices are pure and appropriately offered. They have abandoned their charge to ensure adherence to the law by the people and have gone so far as to redefine what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. They have even forsaken the most basic of their functions, that of ensuring the Sabbath is observed in a proper manner.

### *Grouping failures into broad categories*

In looking at the lists above, one finds natural grouping of activities. These include: (a) failure to care for the vulnerable or marginalized; (b) failing to develop followers to higher levels of moral thought and action; (c) spurning, denigrating or abandoning a biblical moral code or law; (d) general lawlessness; (e) corrupt actions

politically, socially, spiritually, and economically; (f) lack of compassion; (g) oppression of people; (h) destruction or corruption of major social systems of family, community, religion, and politics; (i) a flight from and corruption of justice; (j) deceitful and lying practices at every level of life; (k) raw use of power to dominate and manipulate; (l) sexual impurity of every type; (m) greed and avarice as foundational values; and (n) abandonment of fidelity to God .

There is some overlap when looking at the detailed charges against each office. The generalization of those charges leads to the more manageable categories above. However, these only categorize failures. What constitutes successful leadership?

### *Two kings provide an example of successful leaders*

It's not enough to merely look at the negative activities of kings, priests, and prophets who have failed, one must also look at examples of leaders who have been declared successful to gain insight into what leaders should do to please God. Two kings of Judah provide a positive example of how God assesses leaders and declares a king to be good. Asa and Josiah, from the texts in the books of Kings and Chronicles, will be examined and their accomplishments listed and then grouped according to category.

#### *King Asa*

Asa (1 Kings 15:9; 2 Chronicles 14:1) comes on the scene following two bad kings in Judah, Rehoboam, whose pride led to the splitting of the kingdoms, and Abijah. Asa is declared to be a good king for the following reasons (a) he removed foreign altars and male prostitutes, (b) removed high places throughout the land, (c) commanded all Judah to seek the Lord, (d) smashed sacred stones and Asherah poles, (e) built up and fortified cities with walls, (f) defeated the Cushites and built an army of 300,000, (g) removed idols from the whole land, (h) Repaired the altar of the Lord in the Temple, (i) renewed Temple sacrifices, (j) drew the people into renewing their covenant with God, (k) put to death all who would not seek to follow the Lord, and (l) deposed his grandmother as queen and broke up and destroyed an Asherah image she had.

#### *King Josiah*

Josiah (2 Kings 22:1; 2 Chronicles 34:1) came onto the scene following two bad kings, one of whom, Manasseh, was considered the worst king of Judah and was responsible for YHWH declaring that Judah would be doomed to captivity (2 Kings 21:12-15). Josiah is declared to be a good king for the following reasons: (a) followed completely the ways of his father David turning neither to the right or the left; (b) repaired the Temple; (c) repented, seeking forgiveness after hearing the Book of the Law read; (d) had Book of the Law read to the people; (e) renewed the covenant to follow the Lord and keep his commands; (f) urged all people to renew the covenant, which they did; (g) ordered priests to remove all articles made for Baal, Asherah and the starry hosts; (h) he destroyed these idols in the Kidron Valley; (i) he did away with idolatrous priests who burned incense on high places (alternative worship areas); (j) removed the Asherah pole from the Temple of the Lord and destroyed it; (k) tore down



the quarters of male shrine prostitutes; (l) tore down the quarters of women who did weaving for Asherah; (m) brought to Jerusalem all the priests from towns of Judah who offered incense on high places and desecrated the high places, removing their influence in the countryside; (n) he desecrated Topheth so no one could use it to sacrifice children to Molek; (o) removed from the Temple the statues of horses that were dedicated to the sun; (p) he burned the chariots dedicated to the sun; (q) tore down the altars Manasseh had built in the courts of the Temple, (r) destroyed the high places Solomon had built for the goddess Ashtoreth; (s) destroyed the altar built by Jeroboam in Nebat; (t) removed all the shrines and high places kings had built in cities of Israel; (u) renewed the celebration of the Passover in such a manner that the text states no one had observed it so fully since the days of Samuel; (v) got rid of mediums, spiritists, household gods, and other detestable things seen in Jerusalem and Judah; and (w) no one before or after him sought the Lord with all his heart and soul and strength as he did in accordance with all the Law of Moses.

When looking at the list of Josiah's and Asa's actions that brought God's assessment that they were good kings, are there common groupings of activities?

#### *Grouping successes into broad categories*

The accomplishments of these two kings are very similar and consists of: (a) the removal and destruction of all idols; (b) removal of perverse priests and purveyors of false religions; (c) removal of sexual expressions of worship or religion; (d) restoration of Jerusalem as the focal point of worship; (e) leading people in a renewal of the covenant to follow the Law of Moses; (f) restoring the observance of temple sacrifice, ritual, and worship; (g) repairing the Temple; (h) refocusing the people on the Torah and the observance of the law; (i) destroying all worship areas in competition with the Temple or representing other gods; (j) punishing those who refused to follow God; and (k) removal of perverse priests and purveyors of false religions.

Despite the success of Josiah and the repentance of the people, it was not enough to forestall judgment and suffering. Consequences of sin can remain in spite of repentance.

Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to arouse his anger. So the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also from my presence as I removed Israel, and I will reject Jerusalem, the city I chose, and this temple, about which I said, 'My Name shall be there'." (2 Kings 23:26-28)

#### *Synthesizing failures and successes into directions for successful leadership*

When kept in their respective categories, each compilation of generalizations provides a limited picture of what is used to assess successful leadership. However, it is possible to synthesize the lists by taking the failures, which provide a prophylactic tone of "don't do this", and translating them into positive proscriptive pronouncements and then blending them with the successes. You then end up with a useful guide to leaders

in how they should function in the world, according to YHWH, and where they should place their focus.

As seen in Table 1, much of what YHWH praised as doing what was right before the Lord involved restoring commitment to YHWH as evidenced in a refocusing on proper worship at the Temple in Jerusalem, recommitting to the covenant of the Law, removing anything that would contribute to idol worship, false worship, or superstition. Much of what YHWH points out through the prophet Ezekiel touches on religious activity, but goes much deeper into the society to pinpoint specific sin.

## VI. GENERAL DISCUSSION

### *The focus of Kings and Chronicles*

The authors of Kings and Chronicles present summary versions of the success or failure of kings with only the most egregious or superlative kings being singled out for elaboration. The focal point in all accounts relates to how well the kings upheld their covenantal relationship with YHWH and protected the purity and extent of worship of YHWH. Particular attention is given to whether or not kings supported or sought to eradicate idolatry and the various types of perverse expressions related to it.

What is interesting is that when one considers the constraints listed in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 in relation to what is singled out in both Kings' and Chronicles' assessments of the success for failure of kings, little is said that relates directly back to the five constraints outlined by the Deuteronomist. These constraints are: (a) appointing only native Israelites as king; (b) not obtaining many horses and certainly not from Egypt (this relating most certainly to creating a standing army with chariots); (c) not having many wives who would lead him astray with their foreign gods; (d) not amassing great wealth; and (e) having his own personal copy of the law that he read daily and followed.

All the kings selected were Israelites so the first constraint is followed. Constraint number two seems to be ignored or dropped since David, Solomon, and the kings that followed all had standing armies and obtained many horses. And this violation is never directly addressed. In fact, Asa seems to be praised regarding his army of 300,000.

The constraint regarding multiple wives seems to also have been overlooked other than a statement regarding how Solomon's wives led him into idolatry. Some wives or single alliances with women outside Israel are mentioned. However, it could be argued that the drift, or some would say the sprint, into idolatry could have been fueled by the failure of the kings to follow the constraint on foreign wives. Many of the kings faced challenges from outside countries or tribes and used marriage into the country or tribe as a means to form alliances.

The constraint on great wealth also seems overlooked in Kings and Chronicles. Various kings and their wealth are mentioned but in the sense of their wealth being a blessing. Kings were chastised for removing wealth from the Temple and using it as a bribe or tribute (2 Kings 20:12).

The single area emphasized the most is the fifth constraint regarding the law. The closest mention of a king having a copy of the law involves Josiah. Most of the passages in Kings and Chronicles chastise the people for drifting into idolatry and its perversions in worship, failing to worship only in Jerusalem, and failure to maintain the Sabbath and key holidays such as the Passover, and a general apostasy from YHWH

and his revealed Law. This points to a key factor in leadership. Good leaders must have a strong moral anchor point of objective morality (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Doty, 2009; Goodstein, 2000; Greider, 2003; Mazar, Amir, & Ariely, 2008; Richard Shweder, 1997; Webley & Werner, 2008; Wieland, 2010; Young, 2003). Without it they fall prey to utilitarian shortsighted solutions to immediate challenges that open a pandoras box of unintended consequences or they succumb to the mere lusts of their own heart. With the Scriptures as their anchor, the praiseworthy actions of leadership on not only the ceremonial or religions level, but on the social, economic and personal level are manifest in the leader and nation.

Josiah and Asa are praised primarily for seeking to bring the people back to God and ensuring temple ritual and sacrifice are performed properly and that the Sabbath and other holy days are observed. This focus draws the reader into what YHWH considers the heart of the matter, whether or not people are devoted to him and fulfil their commitment to the covenant God has with Israel. It is implied or understood that all else flows from this. The prophets provide the details to what it looks like when people abandon the covenant and Torah and rely on their own rationality to determine their moral trajectory.

### *The focus of Ezekiel*

When one moves to texts arising from the prophets who chastised and warned both northern and southern kingdoms, a broader focus is brought to light. By the time of Ezekiel, the rubicon had been crossed and there was no way that the nation could undo the judgement to come. God has weighed their activity and now confronts them with their failures. In looking at the summary of Ezekiel 22, the concerns of the failures of kings listed in Kings and Chronicles are reiterated. However, the prophets provide a much more wholistic picture of how a flight from the Law and fidelity to YHWH is expressed in the general culture as it pertains to political, economic, social, and family life.

The prophets draw attention to the decay spreading within every facet of the culture and its dehumanizing effect. The flight from YHWH is also a flight from civility and civilization itself goes into a degenerative spiral. The pursuit of power, pleasure, and wealth become ultimate values and lead to a frightening and depressing list of crimes that are committed by those filling the offices of kings and princes, priests and prophets. The people observe and follow the example of their leaders.

The prophets are a voice for God, calling the leaders and people back to their covenant. They also become a voice for the people, especially those most vulnerable in society, the widow, fatherless, and alien.

The focus of the prophets is traceable to very specific teachings within the Torah. While Kings and Chronicles looks at leaders from a 10,000 foot level, the prophets bring a view from the sidewalk, or kitchen table. Every religious, social, economic, moral, and political sin the prophets pinpoint can be traced directly back to a prohibition in the Torah. The prophets knew that if the people maintained fidelity to YHWH and followed the Torah, those failures would cease.

When looking at the constraints placed upon kings in Deuteronomy, four of the five constraints are directly addressed by the prophets. The constraint on a standing army is indirectly addressed when kings are chastised by prophets for creating alliances

with other countries or kings instead of relying on YHWH to deliver them. The constraint on the accumulation of wealth, especially in a lawless manner, is clearly addressed. The constraint on the king having a personal commitment to YHWH and the Law is directly addressed. The constraint on wives is partially addressed as the prophets single out women who led kings into idolatry.

### *How the synthesis helps*

If one takes the failures outlined in Kings, Chronicles, and Ezekiel, and determines their opposite, positive actions, and blends them with the successful actions of the good kings, we get a clear focus for those seeking to lead in a manner that YHWH would consider successful. This synthesized list involves (a) calling people to a strong commitment to God; (b) promoting and enforcing justice; (c) using power properly in a humane way; (d) commitment to generosity and avoidance of greed; (e) promotion of healthy community; (f) modeling values you would have people follow; (g) exercising sexual purity; (h) caring for the marginalized; (i) developing integrity, honesty and moral uprightness in the character of your followers; (j) emphasizing a commitment to the law; and (k) being compassionate. This provides a broad framework to guide leaders in a positive direction.

What is interesting is that Wallace (2007) proposed what he called a praxis approach to a biblical worldview based upon God's original intention for how he expected people to live in the world. The elements identified were (a) respect for human dignity, (b) godly character, (c) personal responsibility, (d) community, (e) stewardship, (f) proper use of power, (g) commitment to justice, and (h) care for the marginalized. Many of these very categories are reflected in the synthesized list generated for successful leadership.

Comparing the list of synthesized successful leadership actions with the list associated with a biblical worldview, it is clear that many of these areas of focus would be attractive to the secular mind as well as the Christian thinker. Leaders who manifest a care for the marginalized, use power in a non-coercive or authoritarian manner, seek to strengthen the offices and fabric of healthy community are typically praised. Leaders who emphasize personal integrity as well as develop their followers to higher levels of personal, spiritual, and moral development, and also promote following the law are often sought after. Leaders who act with compassion would be lauded and have deep impact on their society. Though the secular mind would balk at the idea of promoting a particular religion, or religion at all, for the believer, religion would be a central focus, providing a foundation for all the values this paper has identified as traits of a successful leader in the eyes of YHWH.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Kings, prophets, and priests served as the leadership structure for the nation of Israel. The Torah outlines either specific roles, tasks or constraints for each. Central to each realm of leadership was fidelity to YHWH and his covenant with Israel.

The paper examined how each of these offices failed, by examining God's assessment of each office in Ezekiel 22. Their failures were so acute and had such a

profound negative impact on the culture that God refers to the city of Jerusalem, the city of peace, as the city of blood and ruin.

By examining the failures of the kings, priests, and prophets and translating their wrong actions into their opposite positive actions that would have avoided censure and led to success, we begin to get a sense of what it takes for leaders to gain YHWH's approval.

This paper also examined two kings of Judah, Asa and Josiah, who were singled out in the Scriptures for their exemplary leadership. The list of their actions, which were labeled successful, was synthesized with the list of the wrong actions that were translated to their opposite positive actions. This final synthesized list offers a guide to leaders who seek to lead in a manner that YHWH assesses as successful.

The central idea throughout the writing of Kings, Chronicles and Ezekiel, was commitment to the covenant YHWH initiated with the nation of Israel, and how its various leadership offices were bound to ensure that the nation fulfilled the covenant. The unique nature of the nation of Israel, being founded on a promise to Abraham and further ratified with Isaac and Jacob, identified it as a redemptive community that was to demonstrate to the world the intentions YHWH had for all humankind.

What can modern, mostly secular western societies, learn from this? Central is the idea that founding principles that serve as a foundation for the development of the society must be taught and defended. Most Western societies are permeated with a Judeo-Christian ethic. When these societies abandon these principles they open the door for all types of expressions of oppression, lawlessness, perversion, and corruption since the only foundation for morality becomes subjective. What is moral becomes defined as what is beneficial for me or my group/tribe. The guiding principle becomes power. Those in power define what is good or evil. Given human nature, an entropic moral spiral becomes almost inevitable.

When the positive list of principles YHWH uses to assess leadership are followed, the entropic spiral is not only stopped but reversed. Rather than decay and decline, the internal resources and structures of the society are renewed and refreshed.

When the righteous prosper, the city rejoices; when the wicked perish, there are shouts of joy (Proverbs 11:10).

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### About the Author

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## Appendix 1 The Kings of Judah and their assessment with Prophets listed

Southern Kingdom consisted of tribes of Benjamin and Judah. It lasted from 922-586 BCE

<b>Kings of Judah</b>	<b>Good or Bad</b>	<b>Years of reign</b>	<b>Books of Kings</b>	<b>Books of Chronicles</b>	<b>Major Prophets</b>
Rehoboam	Bad-Lorded over 10 tribes and led to split. Installed male temple prostitutes, followed gods of nations.	17	1 Kings 12:1	2 Chronicles 10:1	Nathan, Ahijah,
Abijah	Bad-went to war with Jeroboam. Did not seek God. Followed path of Rehoboam.	3	1 Kings 15:1	2 Chronicles 13:1	
Asa	Good-removed foreign alters, fully committed to Lord, expelled male prostitutes, failed to remove high places (alternate places of worship to Jerusalem).	4	1 Kings 15:9	2 Chronicles 14:1	
Jehoshaphat	Good-devoted to God, removes most of high places, listens to Micaiah to avoid war.	25	1 Kings 22:41	2 Chronicles 17:1	Micaiah
Jehoram	Bad-married daughter of Ahab and was affected by her idolatry.	8	1 Kings 22:50	2 Chronicles 21:1	
Ahaziah	Bad-followed in the ways of his father.	1	2 Kings 8:24	2 Chronicles 22:1	
Athaliah	Mother of Ahaziah-destroyed royal family for Judah.		2 Kings 11:1	2 Chronicles 22:10	
Joash	Good-did what was right during the years of Jehoida the priest. Restored the temple. Later years left God for a time.	40	2 Kings 11:4	2 Chronicles 23:1	Joel
Amaziah	Good-Did right but not wholeheartedly, high places not removed, became evil in later years.	29	2 Kings 14:1	2 Chronicles 25:1	
Uzziah	Good-later years became unfaithful and burned incense in temple, stricken with leprosy.	52	2 Kings 15:1	2 Chronicles 26:1	Zechariah, Isaiah, Micah
Jotham	Good-followed the Lord but failed to turn people from corrupt practices.	16	2 Kings 15:32	2 Chronicles 27:1	Isaiah, Micah,
Ahaz	Bad-practiced Baal worship, sacrificed son.	16	2 Kings 15:38	2 Chronicles 28:1	Hulda
Hezekiah	Good-Did right as father David, purified temple, led people back to God, removed altars and celebrated Passover in way not seen since David and Solomon.	29	2 Kings 18:1	2 Chronicles 29:1	Isaiah, Micah
Manasseh	Bad-worshiped Baal, Asherah, sacrificed sons, allowed witchcraft, bowed down to starry host, built idol alters in Temple, consulted mediums and spirits. Brief period of repentance in later years. Judah sent into captivity because of his great sin.	55	2 Kings 21:1	2 Chronicles 29:1	Nahum, Habakkuk,

Amon	Bad-Followed the gods and practices of Manasseh.	2	2 Kings 21:9	2 Chronicles 33:21	Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah
Josiah	Good-followed God with whole heart, soul, mind and strength. Led massive reforms and removed the alters and practices of Manasseh. Restored celebration of Passover. Restored reading of Torah to people.	31	2 Kings 22:1	2 Chronicles 34:1	Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Ezekiel
Jehoahaz	Bad- Did evil in sight of Lord and was taken Captive by Pharaoh Neco and died in captivity.	3 months	2 Kings 23:31	2 Chronicles 36:1	Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah
Jehoiakim	Bad-Did evil in sight of Lord.	11	2 Kings 23:36	2 Chronicles 36:4	Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah
Jehoiakin	Bad-Taken prisoner to Babylon.	3 months	2 Kings 24:6	2 Chronicles 36:9	Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah
Zedekiah	Bad-last king of Judah, hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, priests and people became more unfaithful, taken captive to Babylon.	11	2 Kings 25:1	2 Chronicles 36:13	Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Zephaniah

**Table 1 Synthesis of failures and successes of kings**

<b>Failures converted to positive actions</b>	<b>Success list from Asa and Josiah</b>	<b>What a synthesis would look like.</b> (letters and numbers show relation to columns) not in priority order
A. Care for the marginalized	1. The removal and destruction of all idols.	Care for the marginalized a
B. Develop followers morally, spiritually	2. Restored the observance of temple sacrifice, ritual and worship	Develop character within followers of, honesty, integrity, moral uprightness,  c + 3 + j + k + b
C. Promote a biblical moral code	3. Refocuses the people on the Torah and the observance of the law	Emphasize an adherence to the law 3 + c
D. Be compassionate	4. Destroyed all worship areas in competition with the Temple or representing other gods	Be compassionate  d
E. Strengthen the foundational aspects of community, family, religion, and economic systems and promote biblical morality	5. Call people to a life of commitment to and fidelity with God	Promote healthy community  4 + e + b + 11
F. Act justly and promote justice	6. Train people in justice	Promote and enforce justice f + 6
G. Use power responsibly	7. Led people in a renewal of the covenant to follow the Law of Moses	Proper use of power  g + 1
H. Practice sexual purity	8. Removed sexual expressions of worship or religion	Sexual purity  h + 8
I. Be generous as opposed to greedy	9. Modeled for the people what following God entails	Model the values you would have the people follow  9 + j + k +
J. Act with honesty and integrity	10. Restoration of Jerusalem as the focal point of worship	Generosity, lack of greed or avarice i +

K. Promote godly character.	11. Removal of perverse priests and purveyors of false religions	Call people to a strong commitment to God  5 + 11 + c + 1 + 2
		Reestablish religious commitment of leaders and people 10 + e + 7