

Submission for Leadership Seminar – Biennial Conference Alphacrucis

Title

Leadership in the Collapse and Restoration of Society (founded on Ezekiel and the Exilic Prophets)

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Abstract

Current contemporary church life emphasises leadership as the answer to a fulfilled godly society. Yet, scripturally corrupt leadership has frequently influenced the collapse of an entire society. The attitude of a leader can either, build people in order to build God's Kingdom, or tear others down to increase themselves. Ezekiel vividly illustrates the impact of corrupt leadership as a major cause of the collapse of Jerusalem and exile into Babylon. This paper will examine the writings of Ezekiel (and his contemporaries, Isaiah and Jeremiah) for the purpose of understanding the role of leadership in building a godly nation who belongs to God.

Introduction

One day a tourist guide in Israel was explaining that an Israelite shepherd personally cared for his sheep, and they would follow him because they knew his voice, and sought his protection. Whilst telling this story he saw a herd of sheep coming. At first he thought this would give illustration to his story, but instead of the sheep gently following the voice of the shepherd, the shepherd was harshly and aggressively

driving the sheep to where he wanted them, with angry barking dogs, harsh shouting, and roaring aggressive jeeps.

Why was the shepherd treating his sheep like this? The leader of the sheep explained, “I am not the shepherd. I am the butcher and I am taking the sheep to slaughter to them.” The sheep were not his friends, they were possessions he had purchased to provide life for himself.

From the Exodus out of Egypt, leadership that uses their power and position for self-gain, who takes away the people’s voice, and who enslaves others in order to make self-great and rich, is continually condemned throughout scripture. Ezekiel is no exception. The book of Ezekiel contains extensive passages challenging self-exalted leaders about their abuse and neglect of people as ungodly and opposed to the ways of God’s leadership.

The greatest issue with “bad shepherding (butchering)” is that God’s name is profaned. God is misrepresented as a harsh cruel tyrant who demands his own way at the cost of his people. Ezekiel proposes that God’s answer to this dilemma of leadership is through one man, who is God himself. Only God can stand in the breach in the wall to remove the injustice and domination of this world striving under the oppressive and insatiable. This Messianic leadership stands in strong contrast to the impersonal and self-exalting ways of butchering driving domination.

This paper will look specifically at the role of leadership in bringing in cultural change that removes the unchallenged and dysfunctional aspects of leading, in order to restore godly leadership that empowers people and restores glory to God’s name.

Definition of Leadership as Cultural Changers

According to Northouse (2001) there are at least 65 different definitions of leadership¹, which he has divided into 4 groups:

1. Leadership is a process
2. Leadership involves influence²
3. Leadership occurs within a group context
4. Leadership involves goal attainment

My Hanh Derung proposes that leadership needs followers and subordinates that must be organised and managed to achieve determined goals³. A question Christian leaders need to consider is, do leaders need subordinates to influence in order to perform tasks so that leadership determined goals can be met, or is this the OT leadership style of the way of Egypt?

The OT used Egypt as the example of enslaving, disempowering leadership, which used created beings and land to build a kingdom at their cost, to make self-great. YHWH exhorted his people, Israel, to never return to the ways of Egypt, so we need to understand the difference between worldly leadership, and God-ordained leadership. Without going into the technical definitions, there is empowering leadership which builds and empowers others, and dysfunctional leadership which enslaves and disempowers others in order to build their own kingdom.

¹ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, *Transcultural Leadership for Transformation Leadership and Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan 2010 p43

² (satan influenced the whole of humanity to follow him)

³ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, *Transcultural Leadership for Transformation* p43 Leaders are not the only ones who drive towards organisational success. It requires both formal and informal leaders to pull together to achieve the organisational goal. (43)

This paper will focus on the role of a leader in changing culture. Although culture enables a group of people to function together and find meaning in their existence⁴, the assumptions, or hidden worldviews, of a culture are often dysfunctional, therefore disempowering and take away the freedom and voice of their followers. The leader must therefore recognize the most effective culture for their group and whether it requires radical or limited change⁵.

Leaders are regarded as failing their leadership task, if they are unable to lead their group to adapt to the changing environment⁶. In order to bring change the leader must be able to identify the dysfunctional aspects of the core of the culture, by recognizing the basic assumptions or core unstated values of the group (worldview of the group) and lead the group through the organisational changes required to adapt the group to a new culture⁷. Unlearning or unfreezing the old culture requires courage, confidence, self-awareness, as well as a lot of effort⁸. Leaders also need to be able to sustain continual improvement and transformation, to continue to survive as a leader⁹.

Anxieties that always occur with change are reduced by providing safety through a positive vision, positive learning environment and processes, and positive environment through not only positive management skills, but leadership. This leadership needs to develop a change orientated culture, as well as the ability to both learn, and unlearn processes¹⁰.

⁴ Hanh Derung, p41 Culture can most simply be defined as the way we view and do things. It is a system of orientation that defines identity. Culture supports internal integration and external adaptation. It allows people to make this world rational and ordered in order to take away chaos and the darkness.

⁵ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation p42

⁶ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation p42

⁷ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation p42 The leader needs to understand the culture or group of people with a common sense of identity and orientation,⁷ to be able to initiate and induce change. They must also be able to lead their followers through incremental process of change

⁸ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation p42

⁹ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation; p42

¹⁰ Isabelle My Hanh Derung, Transcultural Leadership for Transformation; p42

Ezekiel's Cultural Change

The book of Ezekiel was written at a time of the complete collapse of a nation. Not only was the country of Judah overtaken, and people either killed or taken into exile into a pagan nation, the entire symbols of their belief system, the temple and the holy city of Jerusalem, was destroyed. This time of radical change would challenge any leader.

Is it possible for a culture to survive such devastation, the dysfunction removed, and for this ancient tradition to be rebuilt in goodness? If so, what type of leadership is needed to bring people through such drastic and extreme change?

Radical Cleansing

Ezekiel's task was to dismantle the dysfunctional "ways of Egypt", of a dominating enslaving culture that favours the rich and leaders over the weak and poor, through a new linguistic¹¹ in order to give birth to a new way of living still established on Israel's founding traditions¹² (Torah given through Moses)¹³.

ANE Oral-Written Literature

In order to understand the writings of Ezekiel they need to be read as ANE oral-written communication. This reading can only occur in the context of the entire message of Ezekiel, within his relevant culture, or tradition of ANE Israel. Repetition, with variation, and metonym, are particularly strong features of Ezekiel¹⁴. The poetic

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann. *Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd edition, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001, 21

¹² Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 2

¹³ Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination*, 21-22

¹⁴ Greenberg, Moshe. *The Anchor Bible Ezekiel 1-20, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1983. 24-26, Greenberg, Moshe. *The Anchor Bible Ezekiel 21-37, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1997. Block, Daniel. *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24 New International*

features of Hebrew literature, included even in narratives, use a high amount of metaphor and repetition¹⁵, therefore examine these crucial feature are essential elements of understanding the meaning of the text¹⁶.

According to Susan Niditch, repetition is a technique of oral presentation that has to do with meaning and stylistic preference¹⁷. She establishes repetition of a single word within a presentation deepens and unifies the meaning of the message in ways far more subtle than variation of language¹⁸. Repetition is not a simple-minded tool that offers the listeners easy memorization, nor is it a lazy method of communication for the composer¹⁹. Repetition is a strategic feature of the text. It metonymically emphasizes key communications and atmospheres in the literary work, in a similar way to musical arrangements²⁰. In fact, repetition itself is the metonymic process of becoming²¹. ANE concepts of the ancient Israelite aesthetic²², including the concepts of repetition, memorization, and metonym, need to read as valid and essential tools of

Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, 45

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¹⁵ Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written World*, Ancient Israelite Literature. (Douglas A. Knight, ed Library of Ancient Israel) Knox: Kentucky, 1996, 11, Carr, David, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible, A New Reconstruction*, 2011

¹⁶ Allen also challenges that repetition within texts are more likely to be an authentic stylistic device, a literary tool, rather than evidence of secondary accretion Allen, Leslie C. *Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 28, *Ezekiel 1-19*. Nashville: Nelson, 1994.

Allen, Leslie C. *Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 29, *Ezekiel 20-48*. Nashville: Nelson, 1990, xix:

¹⁷ Since repetition is such a prominent feature of the Hebrew text this will be a crucial feature examined during exegesis.

¹⁸ Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 13

¹⁹ Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 13

²⁰ Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 13

²¹ Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word*, 13

²² Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written World*, 13

oral-written interplay, rather than repetition being identified as a blemish in the text that highlights editing by multiple redactors²³.

The Argument: Where is YHWH in Exile?

Ezekiel 11 reveals the heart of the message of Ezekiel. This passage tells the message as an argument between Ezekiel, a priest and prophet taken in exile into a pagan land, and the Judean Leaders who remained in the temple in Jerusalem prior to the complete devastation of Jerusalem, and overtaking of the Promised Land by Babylon.

The essence of the argument is over two sayings (Ezekiel 11:2-3), which are founded on Jeremiah's prophecies. Jeremiah²⁴ prophecies that Jerusalem is a blown pot, which is about to explode, and is facing away from the north²⁵. It is well documented that the leaders of Judah were strongly, and publically opposed to the prophecies of Jeremiah²⁶. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the elders are once again countering the claim that Jerusalem will be overcome and defeated. The image of a blown pot lying on its side, is one of a pot being cleansed over fire. But this pot has been heated up so much that it is about to be destroyed by the intensity of the heat. Also, it is facing away from the north, which in ANE literature indicates the direction of the people's deity. This also means it is looking south, which is the direction of Egypt. The Israelites have been told never to return to Egypt, but this vision indicates that they are relying on, and looking to the ways of Egypt for provision and strength, rather than looking towards YHWH.

The elders who remained in the temple in Jerusalem claimed that God was with them. The exiles had been taken away as punishment for their rejection of YHWH as their only god, and for their sins. But Ezekiel strongly countered these claims. In context, it is clear that the Lord, through Ezekiel, opposes the leadings of these men.

²³ Niditch, *Oral and Written World*, 1-3

²⁴ Jeremiah 1:13

²⁵ The reasoning behind this is the theme of my thesis and is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁶ Jeremiah 36 and 37

It's Not Time to Build Houses

The other argument is over Jeremiah's prophesy to build houses. Both these statements are a great example of metonym, short phrases that refer to well-known longer statements and traditions. The longer version of "it is not time to build houses" is found in Jeremiah 29. This entire passage reveals important concepts in leading people through radical cultural change. Jeremiah frequently advises the exiles to have children and build houses in order to prepare Jerusalem and Judah for a future beyond exile (29:5-7, 1:10, 12:24-27, 18:5-10, 24:6, 31:28, 40, 42:10, 45:4).²⁷ The essence of Jeremiah's entire message is one of hope, there is life beyond devastation and exile. God's plan and purpose is not for destruction, but to give a future and a hope, with YHWH as their only God.

Not only are the exiled Judeans exhorted to be "fruitful and multiply" in a pagan unclean land, they are told to seek the welfare of their captures, their enemy.

Counter Culture Message

The elders' statement in 11:3 opposes Jeremiah's exhortation "to build houses", and all that is contained in this metonym,²⁸ because it is counter-culture to their current belief structure and tradition. Holiness meant separation from the contamination of the unclean. God's presence was only accessible to those who were whole and clean in the temple in the holy city, therefore God could not possibly be with, or bless the exiles in a pagan unclean land. God would not want them to bless their enemies. He was there to protect them from the enemy and be the more powerful God and defeat them. The exiles were being punished by being sent away from the presence of God, as they were the disobedient ones.

²⁷ Sweeny, (1469 – kindle)

²⁸ Sweeny, (1469 – kindle)

God' Glory in Exile with the Exiles

Ezekiel counters this claim with the statement, “*Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.*’ Ezekiel is claiming the God’s presence is with the exiles.”. Rather than a complete separation from YHWH as their protector and provider, the exile appears to be a dismantling of ineffective external forms that caused leaders to be “white-washed tombs full of dead-man’s bones,” in order to recreate people’s hearts into renewed flesh so they belong to YHWH alone.

According to Brueggemann, the threats of disorder are not primarily understood to be moral, rather it is about holiness. The power of disorder is palpable, material, physical, and can be managed only by careful and powerful attention.²⁹ In such an arena of disorder, which may indeed be large and deep and ominous, it is not surprising that one should look to YHWH, the Creator of heaven and earth, to counter the chaos with a powerful ordering and continual reordering of creation.³⁰ Order is needed to bring this extreme disorder back under YHWH’s reign, and to restore creation to the finished work of holiness, Sabbath Rest.

In fact, the book of Ezekiel commences with an astonishing vision of YHWH, which is very similar to the vision Isaiah had. The major difference between these two visions is that Isaiah had this vision in the temple of YHWH, in the holy city of Jerusalem, in the Promised Land. This was regarded as a holy place. The whole Mosaic Law differentiates between the clean (holy) and the unclean (unholy). Nothing unclean or unholy could enter into the holy place. The whole premise of the law was separating the holy from the unclean, so that purity of holiness could not be contaminated by the unclean.

²⁹ Brueggemann, W. (1997). *Theology of the Old Testament : Testimony, dispute, advocacy* (191). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

³⁰ Brueggemann, W. (1997). *Theology of the Old Testament : Testimony, dispute, advocacy* (191).

So Ezekiel's vision is both astonishing and counter-culture. The holy presence of YHWH appeared in the pagan unclean land of Babylon, the very year which Ezekiel would have commenced his priesthood in the holy land, and temple of Jerusalem. Ezekiel did not have to enter into the holy of holies to encounter the holy presence of God. Instead the presence of YHWH came to the dark place where Ezekiel dwelt in a pagan land.

YHWH dramatically challenged the holiness culture of Israel and the Law of Moses. Rather than isolating themselves in protection from the uncleanness of the idol worshiping, pagan immoral and unclean nations, YHWH entered in their land to be with his people in his full glory.

Ezekiel's Leadership

An essential message of the entire OT is the work of humanity in their own strength, compared with living in the Sabbath rest God's finished work. There is a constant call for humanity to come to back living in God's holiness – Sabbath Rest³¹. Humanities' attempts to gain knowledge³² without God are not only fruitless and unable to attain life, they are total deceptive and unhealthy, therefore they strive and jealousy compete over the limited resources they see in this world.³³ Jeremiah describes humanities' heart as desperately sick, "therefore no-one can understand by it."³⁴ The Judeans continue to attempt to live "by the sweat of their own brow" (reliance on man-made idols and the strength of their own flesh), and therefore remain in Adam/Cain's cursed place of hard work with little or no fruitfulness, and rejection, the opposite of God's plan and purpose for his people.

³¹ Hebrews 4:1, 11, Ephesians 2:8-10, Matthew 11:28-30,

³² Genesis 2:1-4, and 3

³³

³⁴ Jeremiah 17:9

Jeremiah 6:13-1 (ESV) *“For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain; and from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.”*

Leadership in the strength of the flesh uses others for self-gain, striving for position and acceptance and is the core of wrong leadership.³⁵

Leadership – Good Shepherds Bad Shepherds

So what type of leadership does Ezekiel propose for this drastic dismantling and reconstruction of the culture of Israel, in order to remove the hidden and destructive dysfunction which relies on the strength of flesh rather than the life-gifting Spirit of God, and therefore disempowers God’s people?

Ezekiel 34, which strongly resembles Jeremiah 23, compares the self-aggrandizing, abusive, and disempowering leadership of multiple bad shepherds (34:1-10, 17-19), with the rescuing and healing leadership of the one good shepherd (34:11-16, 20-31). This chapter introduces a whole new section, which builds on previous concept of the writings of Ezekiel, concludes at the end of chapter 37 with two hope-filled visions. Life and hope are to be restored into all that seems dead and lost, by the unifying leadership one shepherd king, like David (37:24-29). God’s people are restored under this leadership by the removal of stone-dead hearts (reliance on self-made idols) back

³⁵ Ezekiel and Jeremiah continue the theme of the impact of people’s refusal to live in God’s Sabbath Rest. Thus says the LORD: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ Jeremiah 6:16 (Jeremiah 17:27)

“...no flesh has peace. They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns; they have tired themselves out but profit nothing. They shall be ashamed of their harvests because of the fierce anger of the LORD³⁵.” Jeremiah 12:13

Jeremiah 17 *“Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”*

into recreated flesh that can once again be filled with God's Spirit of life³⁶ (11:16-20, 18:30-32, 36:24-30), and therefore they are enabled to be able to follow the ultimate shepherd-king, YHWH³⁷, under the princely leadership of David. . The chapter, and entire section, concludes with the establishment of YHWH's covenant of peace, which restores productiveness to the earth and provides life-empowering godly sanctuary from deathly invasion (34:25-32)³⁸.

ANE literature often portrayed civil authorities as shepherds, therefore Ezekiel may have applied this common idea.³⁹ Ancient Near Eastern ideology of kingship also stressed the nurturing and sustaining role of kings. They were to rule with justice, provide for their people, thereby ensuring abundance and prosperity. Other aspects of royal ideology indicate that kings performed these functions as servants of the gods, to whom they gave an accounting of the lands and peoples over which they exercised stewardship⁴⁰.

One Shepherd King

Therefore it can be asserted that the reference to shepherds, is a metaphor for leaders. Allen⁴¹ and Block's arguments indicate that the leaders are the local Judeans who have failed to be YHWH's representatives and caretakers, and are oppressing YHWH's people, and therefore they have become scattered⁴², whereas Odell leans towards the invading Babylonians as the false shepherds who plunder YHWH's

³⁶ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*, 360-361: Block argues that the role of the Spirit is identical in the New and Old Testament, saying that the role of the Spirit in both is to authorize and empower humanity for God's work. Ecclesiological continuity exists as both Testaments proclaim the restoration of righteousness is through infusion by the Spirit and not self-works of righteousness. Psalm 51 expresses fear of loss of salvation and sentence of death if the Holy Spirit is taken away. Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, "The Spirit of God is called the Holy Spirit because it makes our life here something living, not because it is alien and estranged from life".

³⁷ Margaret Odell, *Ezekiel*. (Smyth and Helways Commentary, Georgia: Smyth and Helways, 2005), 423

³⁸ Odell, 423

³⁹ Block, D. I. (1997-). *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-48* (p. 275). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

⁴⁰ Odell, 426

⁴¹ Allen, 161

⁴² Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*, 275

people and land⁴³. Either way, there is no doubt that the shepherds are leaders who are relying on the strength of their own flesh to gain life, prosperity and position.

Ezekiel's answer to the competitive slaughter of many false shepherds is to instate one shepherd over his people, a prince (royal leader) like David.

The primary concern, however, is the reestablishment of YHWH as king and God over his people because the Israelites rejection of YHWH as their only God and life-source has caused great profaning of YHWH's name, or reputation (18:22-31, 36:16-21). Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah all prophesy that Judah's leaders and prophets were misrepresenting God's truth with lies, proclaiming there was peace, where there was no peace. (Ezekiel 13, Jeremiah 23, Isaiah 5-6) The Judean's leadership falsely believed that their natural inheritance, as sons of Abraham, meant that they were automatically YHWH's people. But they were working in the strength of their own flesh to build their own kingdom, therefore the way they lived, and the destruction of YHWH's temple, the decimation of the Promised Land, and exile, misrepresented and defiled God's holy name. In fact, Ezekiel disputes that the primary purpose for the restoration of God's people is not for their sake, but in order to restore holiness and glory to God's name, or reputation (36:22-23).

Ezekiel nurtures the Judean's reason for trusting in their God in the face of devastation, by reminding them of their cultic heritage by communicating the answer to their predicament in well-known language of their covenantal tradition.⁴⁴ Creation language, such as restoration to Eden (Genesis 2:8-15, Ezekiel 28:13, 36:35), and God's own Spirit dwelling within "created flesh" in intimate harmonious relationship (Genesis 1:26-31, 2:7-8) re-establish trust in the creation/recreation ability of YHWH. Ezekiel also employs the process of Jewish cultic purification (36:24) to speak of the washing of their hearts to cleanse them of all death (dead idols). These stone dead hearts can no longer hear God's voice, or know his ways, but once they are recreated

⁴³ Odell, 423

⁴⁴ Ezekiel 36:25, compare with Leviticus 14:5-7, Numbers 8:7, Numbers 19:13-20, Psalm 51:7, Isaiah 52:15, Language which is reemployed in the NT for the washing cleansing of the Holy Spirit John 3:5, Titus 3:5-6, Hebrews 9:13-14, 19, 10:22, 1 John 5:6

back to flesh breathed to life with God's creative Spirit, they will once again be able to hear and know God, and live in his live empowering ways of justice and life for all.

However, Ezekiel strongly reinforces that this coming renewal, that will restore holy creative order out of this devastating chaos (Genesis 1), is not because the actions of the people, particularly the leaders (not for the people's sake).⁴⁵ YHWH, alone, will act in order to restore his own reputation, or glory to his name (Ezekiel 36:20-24).

The subjunctive participle in this passage "indicates purpose or intent," therefore the implied meaning is possibly that the purpose of YHWH's actions are not to accomplish humanities' self-imagined purposes, but to establish His own will and holy reign on earth. The introduction to this message is that lack of YHWH's holiness within His people has led to failure and exile due to their incapacity to be fruitful and multiply (because of their reliance on false idols). In context of the entire book, this polemic is explicitly directed against Judean leaders and priests who were performing detestable acts in the most holy place, deceiving YHWH's people with false "self-imagined" hope and slaughtering YHWH's prophets.⁴⁶ The focus of this tradition of holiness, which we may find rooted in the first three commands of the Decalogue, is that those zones of life that are inhabited by YHWH in an intense way must be kept pure and uncontaminated.⁸² Thus this material is instructional and has a status not unlike canon law to protect such zones of holiness and, in a more general way, to prevent the disordering power of impurity from disrupting the life of Israel.⁸³ The great threat to holiness that can jeopardize the presence of YHWH in the community

⁴⁵ Brueggemann, W. (1997). *Theology of the Old Testament : Testimony, dispute, advocacy* (190). Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

⁴⁶ A New Heart of Flesh and the New Spirit, Sue Earl, 34

⁸² The notion of holiness in the Priestly traditions is regarded as almost physical in its force and in its threat. See Philip P. Janzen, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* (JSOTSup 106; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); and John G. Gammie, *Holiness in Israel* (OBT; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989) 9–70.

⁸³ This general approach to holiness in the cultic traditions of Israel is especially rooted in the anthropological studies of Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41–57; and *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSup 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

of Israel is to create a disorder by mixing things in ways that confuse and distort.⁸³ The antidote to such confusion is to sort out and make distinctions, so that nothing is wrongly mixed that will disturb the order that belongs to the holiness of the Creator. In other words, God's created order, which cumulates in holiness on the seventh day, Sabbath Rest, has been turned upside down. Humanity is meant to live in the holiness of life as a gift of God's creation, but instead they are seeking to be gods for themselves by making life for themselves out of created things. This cause great disorder, conflict and destruction, as humanity attempt to live in the deception of lack (sin), under the oppressive reign of death, where there is no life, and many leaders fight against each other to achieve life through status, riches, and unjust gain. Only restoration to holy created order by the creator himself can remedy this mess.

God's intervention alone will bring salvation to his people⁴⁷. The human leaders are given responsibility as caretakers of God's flock. The people do not belong to them, they belong to their creator, YHWH.

Justice

A reflected concern in the restoration of YHWH's reputation is that his people dwell in justice⁴⁸.

"I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat (robust, forceful) and the strong (mighty) I will destroy. I will feed (tend in a good pasture) my people in justice (judgement)."
(34:16)

34:17 to 22 judges between the victims of the oppressively strong, and the dominating leaders who abuse the weak with their power, and destroy even the left-overs, so that

⁸³ This general approach to holiness in the cultic traditions of Israel is especially rooted in the anthropological studies of Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 41–57; and *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (JSOTSup 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

⁴⁷ Allen, 159

⁴⁸ Odell, 423

cannot be fed. This is an imagery of striving against others in individualism, of competition that destroys, and of people trying to lead others by the strength of their own flesh, so that people become their fodder. But YHWH declares they are his people (sheep), and he is their true shepherd, and he will set on over them as a shepherd king, like David (37:24). The entire aim of restoration is to establish YHWH's covenant⁴⁹ in justice, that gifts life to all.

According to Odell, in this subunit, "David is called "my servant," "one shepherd," and "prince." All of these titles contrast his just rule to that of the other shepherds. Unlike the shepherds of vv. 1-10, who fail to honor their roles as stewards of the sheep, David will act as YHWH's servant. The emphasis on his singularity ("one shepherd") may be intended as a solution to the conflicting claims over the flock in vv.17-22"⁵⁰.

One purpose of the one shepherd is to stop the destructive divisiveness and jealous warring of the many shepherds over the flock that actually already belong to God alone. Leaders do not own the people. The people do not belong to them, they belong to God. The feeding aspect of the shepherd is again emphasised in 34:23, to establish the royal responsibility of the prince shepherd like David to care for God's sheep⁵¹. Once again the re-emphasis that the sheep belong to YHWH as their ultimate and only leader is given in 34:24. "David will be their prince, but YHWH will be their God⁵²." God is the establisher of the covenant (of unifying peace) with his people, and also the fulfiller of this promise.

Leadership – One Man to Stand in the Gap

This concept builds on Ezekiel 22 where Ezekiel proclaims that no human can stand in the gap of injustice, death, and uncleanness. Ezekiel states that God looked for a man who would build the breach in the wall, and stand in the gap so the land would

⁴⁹ Odell, 423

⁵⁰ Odell, 429

⁵¹ Odell 429

⁵² Odell, 429

not be destroyed, but he found none. (Ezekiel 22:5) God was looking for a leader to lead his people out of idolatry and the oppressive ways of pagan nations, a leader who could repair broken boundaries and restore his people. (Ezekiel 13:1-16) Instead, the princes (leaders) of Judah's self-styled prominence meant that they were like wolves tearing their prey, shedding blood, and destroying to get dishonest gain. They unjustly used their position to obtain goods, status, and power for themselves. They oppressed the poor and needy, and extorted from the sojourner without justice. (Ezekiel 11, 22:23-31, 34) Not only did they destroy life violently, they smeared whitewash over flimsy walls of cover-up, saw false visions and divined lies for them, saying, "Thus says the Lord GOD," and proclaimed words that the LORD had not spoken.

Rebuilders of Ancient Ruins, Repairers of Breached Walls

Ezekiel's builds on Isaiah and Jeremiah's writings, which emphasised the need for rebuilding the ancient ruins, repairing the breach in the wall, and healing sick humanities' sick heart (Isaiah 58:12, 61:4, Jeremiah 17:9). His rhetoric portrays leadership as the means to establish God's justice to restore individuals and rebuild community. But the Judean leaders had become comfortable in their status and wealth believing they had made it to the pinnacle. They separated themselves from the people, using them to reinforce their own status and refused to lower themselves by walking with the poor and lost. Consequently, injustice and violence reigned. They failed to rebuild and restore!

Ezekiel says that there was no man who could stand in the gap, therefore God himself stood in the breach and rebuilt the wall. Only God can stand in the gap of oppressive injustice, and self-seeking exaltation to bring justice, and life that overcomes the uncleanness of death, therefore only the one Shepherd-King can restore true justice, unity, and ordered, created life.

If there is only one shepherd-king over God's people, the one anointed one, the messiah who belief is the Christ, the question remains, "What is the role of human leaders?" The NT makes a number of suggestions, including discipleship, so that people will learn to follow Christ as their leader, and the community concept of the

five-fold ministry, evangelism, pastoring, prophecy, leading, and teaching. Paul's illustration of ministry in 1 Corinthians 12 gives the imagery of a body, with one head. Although a detailed exposition is beyond the scope of this paper, the image of a body has one head. This is the unity of the one shepherd-king, which counters the striving and oppression of the competing of many shepherds with their individualistic flocks.

One Shepherd-King, One Head, One Body with Many Parts

If there is only one shepherd-king, one head, in the body of Christ, who gives the vision and empowers every branch of the vine, then the role of leadership functions like the unity of one body. For example, both the fingers and the shoulder now have the identical vision, but they have different functions within the body to outwork this vision. The muscles of the shoulder stabilise the arm so the elbow can bend in the right direction, and enable to hand to be in the correct position, so the fingers can perform the details of the task. Research work is needed to examine this theory, to establish if the role of leadership is to provide stability and positioning, so that others can perform the details of the task needed to outwork the Kingdom of God on this earth, now.

There is no room for competing heads, conflicting divisions, or abusive misuse of others, as the body cannot function without the direction of one head, and the unity of many parts working together to perform one task. One shepherd-king means that leadership is not headship that dominates and controls others, but leadership leads to the one head over the body, and provides support and stability to enable the body to be God's people on earth, to reflect his glory in unity, and to walk in community, so everyone is healed and empowered.

Where is God in the un-holiness of exile?

Ezekiel pronounces that God himself went into exile with the remnant of his people. In the NT, John continues Ezekiel's theme in the first chapter to show that when God sent Jesus into the darkness (to bring light, life) God still walks in exile with his

people, today. John also utilises Ezekiel's illustration of a bad shepherd (34) to illustrate godly leadership as a caring shepherd who personally looks for his lost sheep (John 10). YHWH's leadership walks with his people through the darkness, in order to lead them into purposeful holy living. God himself came down to lift his people up.

Jesus, as our greatest leader, and example, did not hide from the uncleanness of this world of death. Rather he reached out to the most rejected and unclean, such as the lepers (Matthew 8:1-4) and touched them. Unlike the fear of the Law, which says that touching the contamination of death will make us unclean, Jesus holiness overcame the uncleanness of death, and made the person whole.

Jesus is the shepherd-king leader. Yet his leadership did not rely on followers being subordinate to him. In fact, at the most critical moment of leadership, when Jesus was on the verge of saving all creation, not one person followed him, yet he kept leading to overcome death with life. If our leadership relies on followers we are not able to lead as God leads. But if our leadership relies on God's anointing, then we can lead where no-else leads, and we can touch the uncleanness of the contamination of death of this world, and bring life. This leadership does not rely on people's response to empower us. This leadership relies on God's acceptance and holy life-empowerment to bring holy-life to others, even our enemies and those who reject us. This leadership does not use others to make ourselves rich, by reducing others to our slaves. This type of leadership makes others our friends, and God's friend, so we all follow God as his family.

Conclusion

Founded on Ezekiel's proposal, godly leadership is not about controlling people, or disempowering others in order to empower self, or even influencing others to be different. Godly leadership reflects the heart of the shepherd, who lays down his life to seek one lost sheep, and who personally stands in the breached wall as an exile in a foreign land. Godly leadership is different to the models of this world. It is not self-

seeking to build its own kingdom. Godly leadership is not about being separated and above others, but it is humbling self to walk with the poor and oppressed in order to restore all people into God's community.

Rather than grasp at his lost priesthood, and lost identity, and lost culture, Ezekiel was able to embrace and adapt to a new culture, a culture which meant that humanities heart became the living temple of the living Spirit of God, in an unclean, unholy, pagan land. The text argues that YHWH's covenant is not being broken⁵³, rather it is being fulfilled by the removal of the "dead hearts of stone" of the people who are unable to hear God's voice, or see him and therefore know his ways. No longer was the culture living in a place and temple system that protected from the contamination of death in order to remain clean and acceptable to God. This new culture was able to overcome the stench and uncleanness of death, with the full glory and holiness of God dwelling within humanity itself. Leadership became following the Spirit as our holy life-source, so that we were no longer competing against others, enslaving others for our gain, or using created things as our life-source, but enables us to lead by speaking and living God's word, even if the whole world rejects God's leadership.

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⁵³ Ezekiel 11:19-20

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