

## **Introduction**

Over the past few months with the instability in countries across the world and the negotiations surrounding our withdrawal from the European Union I have found myself reflecting on the nature of leadership. What makes a Good leader? Is leadership learned or inherent in someone? What impact does leadership have on those who are being led? I thought it might be interesting to share some of my thoughts with you and maybe provoke a discussion

What I am going to do is to talk about various examples of leadership from the Bible and make some observations about what I have learned from that and then ask some questions

In the Bible there are various examples of Kings and leaders who were considered bad kings in God's eyes and yet in worldly terms were very successful leaders. There were others who were good rulers in the eyes of the world and God but others who were just plain bad

## **Solomon**

Was the third King of Israel and came to power upon the death of his Father David. His accession to the throne wasn't smooth as various of his brothers made bids for power. But with the support of his mother Bathseba and the prophet Nathan he was crowned King.

Solomon was Israel's first dynastic king – ruling as a successor to his Father. Both Saul and David were chosen because God had given them a measure of power. Solomon took office by succession but was given power by God in a vision. At this point God offered him a choice of Gifts. Realising the enormity of his task, Solomon chose 'an understanding heart'. He has become renowned for his wisdom and this is seen in Biblical stories. His wisdom enabled him to rule well and no other period of the Jewish monarchy provided the international contact, wealth and relief from war experienced under Solomon's rule. He is known for his contribution to the wisdom literature of the time and for the building of the temple in Jerusalem. Like all human kings he was not without fault but is remembered as being the wisest and most successful of the kings of Israel and this is attributed to the fact that instead of seizing power for

himself or asking God to give him wealth and power he chose wisdom and the rest followed.

### **Omri – King of Israel 885 BC**

*God's view - 1 Kings 16:21-28*

*Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned twelve years, six of them in Tirzah. <sup>24</sup> He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents<sup>[a]</sup> of silver and built a city on the hill, calling it Samaria, after Shemer, the name of the former owner of the hill.*

*<sup>25</sup> But Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD and sinned more than all those before him. <sup>26</sup> He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols.*

#### *The View of the World*

Extra biblical sources, however, paint a picture of a dynamic and powerful figure, and he is thought by modern scholars to have been one of the most important rulers of the northern kingdom. He is known to have conquered Moab, formed an alliance with Tyre, and moved the capital of Israel from Tirzah to Samaria which he built and established as the Capital of Israel. As king, Omri brought stability following a period of riots and disorder. He also adopted a policy of toleration for the local Canaanite religion in hopes of reducing tensions between the Israelites and local Canaanite tribes, and that policy is believed to be the main reason why he is condemned in the Hebrew Bible as a propagator of foreign cults.

**Ahab** – Omri's Son whose marriage to Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal of Sidon renewed the alliance of Israel with the Phoenicians

He is known for the pagan worship he supported and also for the savagery of his rule under the influence of his wife Jezebel whose name has become synonymous with immorality and cruelty.

There is much that could be said about Ahab but for me one story stands out and this is to do with his dealings with a man called Naboth

*1 Kings 21*

*Naboth owned a vineyard which was in Jezreel, close to the Ahab's palace. Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth."*

*<sup>3</sup> But Naboth replied, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors."*

*<sup>4</sup> So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my ancestors." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.*

*<sup>5</sup> His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?"*

*<sup>6</sup> He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'"*

*<sup>7</sup> Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."*

Jezebel's response was to have false charges made against Naboth who was ultimately stoned to death

*<sup>15</sup> As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead."*

*<sup>16</sup> When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard.*

**Herod the Great**

Herod was not a Jew he was from Edom and was appointed governor of Judea in 47BC. He found favour with the Roman Leadership and in BC40 was proclaimed King of the Jews. The political climate of the time was very uncertain and Herod was very unpopular with the Jewish people. He did everything he could to guarantee his security as ruler by murdering all members of a rival dynasty who were descended from the Davidic Kings.

This included his wife, who he had married in order to give him some sort of standing with the people but later murdered as a threat to his rule.

Herod, was by worldly terms quite a good ruler, in that he made treaties and established peace within the region he governed. He built many fortresses, aqueducts, theatres, and other public buildings and generally raised the prosperity of his land but was the centre of political and family intrigues in his later years. Some of his paranoia and obsession comes through in our Gospel reading where the news of a new King makes him very uneasy and suspicious.

In worldly terms Herod could be described as a successful ruler but he was a ruthless, greedy, power grabbing and self-obsessed neurotic. He won power for himself by his actions and grabbed it where he could through battle and diplomacy.

His only priority was advancing himself and his interests and when anyone got in the way of that he was completely ruthless. This is the man to whom the Magi went asking, "Where is the one who has been born the King of the Jews?"

We are told King Herod was disturbed – of course he was! This new king posed a huge threat to him and his personal security. So he made pretense of interest and sought the answer to where the child might be found.

When the Magi deceived him and returned to their country by a different route we are told, *"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."*

So to sum up:

What strikes me about so many of these leaders is that they used their power and authority in their own interests not for the good of the people they ruled.

Many of them went to great lengths to seize power and to hang onto it when they had it.

I recently heard a comment about the current situation in America with the stand-off between Donald Trump and the democrats over the wall on the Mexico border which has resulted in the suspension of Government

"that Trump rules by tantrum" – well it would appear he is certainly not the first ruler to do that.

We are fortunate to live in a democracy and not a dictatorship. We see the results of dictatorships even today and the ruthlessness of people like Robert Mugabe who was received as a great leader for bringing freedom to his people but who turned into a violent tyrant prepared to do anything to hold onto power.

We see the use of power in Russia who indulge in what I would call state led terrorism and where the leadership apparently sanctions chemical warfare on the shores of the UK and cyber terrorism which has the power to paralyze and bring down economies and governments.

I think there are some interesting parallels between two of the great democracies: The United States and the United Kingdom. Both appear to have shown by the way they voted a disillusion with what currently was in their countries and a mistrust of the establishment.

Though very different situation what we see is party politics at work where our representatives in government don't seem so much interested in leading well as in achieving their own ends.

In the United States we see a partial shutdown of government, services withdrawn and public sector workers not paid because President Trump is determined that the government should pay the millions needed to construct a wall on the Mexico border and the democrats are determined to stop him. They don't so much seem interested in governing their country as in each achieving their own objectives.

There are very clear parallels with the situation we find ourselves in where the people have voted for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union and a Government, the majority of who don't agree with the mandate asked to bring this about.

The result has been appalling chaos, deadlock, bickering, petty behaviour and, most worrying of all to me, a quality of hatred and vitriol that I have never seen before.

During the turbulent debates in parliament this last week the Attorney general driven to exasperation by the chaos versus order dynamic that was operating in the house of Commons said this: *'If you were a litigant*

*in a court, if you were dependent upon having concluded a contract on the basis of EU law and you found yourself suddenly with the rug pulled from under you, not knowing what your legal obligations would be, you would say to this House... 'What are you playing at? What are you doing? You are not children in the playground, you are legislators' – we are playing with people's lives,"*

I have been astonished and deeply disappointed by the behaviour of our elected leaders who seem to be only interested in standing by their own point of view and achieving their own ends with no interest at all in what would be best for the country and what the way forward out of this impasse is.

So my questions are:

What makes a Good leader?

What options are open to citizens when their government isn't leading?

What happens when parliament takes over from government as it has done this week?