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AN INVESTIGATION INTO SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP
TRANSITIONS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT¹

A. Kay Fountain

1. Introduction

Now that the indigenous principle of church planting has operated in missions for about a century,² it seems timely to consider leadership transitions. As churches become indigenous, it is vital that there be smooth transition from missionary leadership to national leadership. It is also necessary for the future of the church that all leaders, both missionary and national, understand the process of leadership transition. There is a wealth of literature on leadership, styles of leadership, personalities in leadership, how to train leaders, developing the leadership potential of others and so forth, but in all this literature, there is virtually nothing on the subject of leadership transition. There appears to be an assumption that if you train and develop leaders properly, then the transition to the next generation of leaders will go smoothly. But little has been written on the process of transition itself.

The literature on Christian leadership also seems to be rather heavily weighted toward New Testament examples, for the obvious reason that we have godly leadership embodied in the person of Christ himself. While much is made of the delegation process instigated by Jethro with Moses and Israel at Mt Sinai, some scholars reject this as less than ideal

¹ An earlier version appears under the same title in *Reflections on Developing Asian Pentecostal Leaders: Essay in Honor of Harold Kohl*, ed. A. Kay Fountain (Baguio, Philippines: APTS Press, 2004), pp. 249-83.

² John F. Carter, "The Indigenous Principle Revisited: Towards a Coactive Model of Missionary Ministry," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1:1 (Jan. 1998), pp. 73-82 (73).

for Christian leadership.³ Although some do give good attention to Old Testament examples,⁴ others seem to completely ignore the Old Testament material as though it had no significance for Christian leaders.⁵ Some even suggest that it may lead in wrong directions.⁶

This paper is a small attempt to begin to fill these gaps in the literature and to rehabilitate the Old Testament as part of the Holy Spirit-inspired record.⁷ It is time to consider the process of transition, and to begin to understand how it should and could happen if it was planned. Too often a leadership transition takes place for the wrong reasons: a leader dies, or moves on to another ministry; others fail in a variety of

³ See, for example, Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist, 1977), pp. 84, 247.

⁴ Samuel Matthew, "Biblical Leadership: A Theology of Servanthood for the Church in India" (M.A. Theol. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1989), pp. 19-31. Mari Gonlag, "Relationships that Transform," in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, eds. Duane Elmer and Lois McKinney (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996), pp. 208-14 (210) says, "Old Testament models such as Moses and Joshua (Exod.17; Deut.31), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kings 19), and Eli and Samuel (1 Sam. 3) illustrate vividly the power of the role model in preparing others for tasks of leadership and ministry. Noteworthy in each of these cases is the fact that, while the ministries of the mentors were significant, the ministries of the protégés were broader and in some senses more distinguished than their mentors. One mark of a great mentor is to allow the protégé to develop beyond the mentor's own limitations."

⁵ Note, for example, David William Bennett, "Perspectives of Biblical Pastoral Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990). This thesis does not even have a section of the Old Testament, and yet it claims to be about biblical rather than New Testament leadership.

⁶ Ted W. Ward, "Servants, Leaders, and Tyrants," in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, pp. 27-42 (34-35) for example, says, "Models of leadership can be drawn from Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Nehemiah, Moses and other illustrious characters of the Old Testament. These are pre-Christian, some are even pre-scriptural, and they can send us off on the wrong foot."

⁷ In the introduction to his book, Rodney R. Hutton, *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), p. vi indicates the same oversight of the Old Testament in relation to the subject of empowerment as follows: "This study has two primary methodological concerns: first, to introduce the Old Testament into the discussion of a 'biblical' view of empowerment, a discussion from which it has unfortunately been excluded or dismissed as having no particular competency."

ways and have to be removed. Sometimes there is a power struggle between an older and a younger leader.⁸ When these things happen, there is often a scramble to replace the person who has gone. Although these are some of the most common kinds of leadership transitions, they are not the ideal way for change to take place. In the church, there should be a better way to handle things. It is my contention that there are examples of smooth transition processes in the Old Testament, which could help us to begin to develop guidelines for transitions from missionary to national leadership, or from one generation of national leadership to the next.

2. Four Old Testament Leadership Transitions

While there are, of course, many instances of leadership transition which fit the less desirable categories mentioned above, due to limitations of space, the following examples of leadership transition will be the focus of this paper.

The transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua (Num 27:12-23; Deut 1:38; 3:12-23; 31:3, 7, 14-15, 23) and from Elijah to Elisha (1 Kings 19; 2 Kings 2) could be considered successful leadership transitions. The inability of Eli to transfer leadership to his sons (1 Sam 2) could be considered an unsuccessful leadership transition, although in this instance we do have the successful transition from Eli to Samuel (1 Sam 2-4).

In order to compare the accounts of these events it will be helpful to consider several elements involved in the transition of leadership from one generation to the next. Source of authority, divine approval or disapproval, transfer of power, popular recognition or rejection, and the relationship between the older and the younger leader are some of the key items which need to be considered in each transition.

⁸ Samuel Mau-Cheng Lee, "A comparative Study of Leadership Selection Process among Four Chinese Leaders" (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1985), p. 75, for example, states, "According to the Chinese proverb, 'One mountain cannot accommodate two tigers.' Proof is not lacking from Chinese church history that when a co-worker is added to the church, two churches will eventually result due to conflicts."

2.1 Moses to Joshua

2.1.1 *Source of authority*

There is no doubt that the source of Moses' authority is God's call, recorded in Exodus 3. The point of interest in this discussion is the source of Joshua's authority to lead the nation after Moses' death. It is clear that Joshua's authority comes from two different sources. Firstly, and most importantly, he is God's choice to be Moses' successor, and secondly, as a consequence, he is Moses' choice also. As Mott pointed out we should "not overlook or minimize God's part in the calling of men. There could be no more disastrous mistake than to think and to act as though it were possible for men alone to recruit the ranks of the ministry of Jesus Christ."⁹ It is clear in this instance that the source of Joshua's authority was in God's choice. Moses' affirmation of that choice simply adds to Joshua's authority, but it is not really the source of that authority.

2.1.2 *Divine approval*

In Numbers 14, after Joshua and Caleb had brought back a good report about the Promised Land, God clearly states his approval, first of all regarding Caleb (v. 24), but then also including Joshua (v. 30). God's approval of Joshua rested not on his ability to lead Israel in battle, but in his determination to trust God and obey despite the difficulties which could be foreseen. While his ability as a warrior was undoubtedly important for the role he would fulfill in bringing the Israelites into the Promised Land, it is not this ability, but rather his faith and vision, which brought God's declaration of approval.¹⁰ "The survival of Joshua and Caleb is based on their actions reported in 13:30 and 14:6-9, which were judged as worthy of life by Yahweh."¹¹

2.1.3 *Transfer of Power*

The actual transfer of power took place in Num 27:18-23 which is paralleled by the account in Deut 31:7-8, 14, 15 and 23. This records the public commissioning of Joshua by Moses. It also records the transfer of

⁹ John R. Mott, *The Future Leadership of the Church* (New York: Young Men's Christian Association, 1908), p. 188.

¹⁰ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1990), p. 33.

¹¹ Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 269.

authority from Moses to Joshua by the laying on of hands.¹² This event happened as a direct response to Moses' prayer for a successor. Apart from the public ceremony, there seems also to have been a more private meeting between God, Moses and Joshua in which the Lord spoke first to Moses,¹³ and then directly to Joshua.¹⁴ The people witnessing the event were able to see the pillar of cloud standing over the entrance to the tent while God speaks with the leader and his chosen successor.

2.1.4 Popular recognition

Probably as a result of the above two items, the people were ready to accept Joshua's leadership. However, as Kouzes and Posner point out in relation to leadership in general, "The people's choice is based, not upon authority, but upon the leader's perceived capacity to serve a need."¹⁵ They go on to explain that "above all else, people want leaders who are credible,"¹⁶ and that "credibility, like reputation, is something that is earned over time."¹⁷ Boehme also states that "authority is based on character."¹⁸ Therefore, it is perhaps not so much because of God's and Moses' choice, and the public declaration of Joshua's succession that he is accepted by the people, but rather because of his early success on the battle field (Exod 17:8-14),¹⁹ and his ability to stand up against popular opinion and show himself to be a person with vision and faith (Num 14:6-9). Joshua had established credibility with the generation of people whom he was to lead. The parents of that generation died in the wilderness because of their unbelief, rebellion and fear, but Joshua was

¹² Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10-34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary 6B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), p. 759.

¹³ J. Ridderbos, *Deuteronomy*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. Ed M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 277.

¹⁴ J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1974), pp. 292-93.

¹⁵ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *Credibility: How Leaders Gain and Lose It, Why People Demand It* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁶ Kouzes & Posner, *Credibility*, p. 22.

¹⁷ Kouzes & Posner, *Credibility*, p. 25.

¹⁸ Ron Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century: Changing Nations through the Power of Serving* (Seattle, WA: Frontline Communications, 1989), p. 70.

¹⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary 4 (National, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 83.

not of the same mind as them, and by his actions he had established credibility with those whom he was destined to lead.²⁰ Moses' actions also play a part in establishing Joshua's credibility. Maxwell says, "The transfer of leadership is an important theme in Deuteronomy.... By bringing this subject up so often, Moses was not only encouraging Joshua, but he was giving him his blessing and his approval as the next leader."²¹

2.1.5 Relationship between Moses and Joshua

Joshua was Moses' servant for almost all of the wilderness period, which is approximately thirty-eight years.²² Although he had already proven himself a capable warrior in leading the Israelite army against the Amalekites (Exod 17:8-14), he spent most of the wilderness years simply being Moses' personal attendant (Exod 24:3; 32:17; 33:11). There is a tendency to think of Joshua as a youth in relationship to Moses. But we should consider that Joshua was leading the Israelite army in the battle against the Amalekites, early in the Exodus period, and that he was chosen as a representative of his tribe to go and spy out the Promised Land. Then we have to recognize that he must have been at least twenty years old at that stage in order to be recognized as a warrior fit for battle (Num 1:3). The fact that he was a leader, both in his own tribe and over the national army, indicates that he was in fact considerably older than that. Yet, for nearly forty years, he humbled himself in order to simply serve Moses.

²⁰ Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1981), p. 121 says, "Though Joshua's appointment as Moses' successor is not discussed for many chapters, the stepping forward of Joshua at this moment [Num. 14:6] adumbrates the future. He will be their new leader, who will bring their little ones into possession of the land."

²¹ John C. Maxwell, *Deuteronomy*, Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), pp. 84-5. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, p. 69 also sees the training of Joshua as a major theme of Deut 1-3 and 31-34.

²² Maxwell, *Deuteronomy*, p. 56 makes it forty years.

2.2 Elijah to Elisha

2.2.1 *Source of authority*

As with the transition from Moses to Joshua, we see again that Elisha is God's choice as Elijah's successor (1 Kings 19:16), and therefore, he is also Elijah's choice (1 Kings 19:19).

[T]he figure of Elisha is unique. He is the only example of a prophet being designated and appointed as the direct successor of another. Indeed, Elisha is represented not just as a disciple but almost as a continuation of Elijah. He not only carries on the spirit of Elijah, but in narrative terms he completes a number of actions in the story which were begun by Elijah, particularly those concerned with Hazael and Jehu.²³

The first introduction we have to Elisha is God's instruction to Elijah. It is interesting to note that God was aware of this man, ploughing his fields after the arrival of the long awaited rain, and had chosen him to succeed Elijah, apparently before Elijah was aware of him. It is also an interesting comparison to note that like Joshua,²⁴ Elisha's choice is a direct answer to the prayer of his predecessor. Out of exhaustion and apparent defeat, Elijah had begged that God would take his life, but instead, God gives him a successor to train, and a new job to begin. In contrast, it was because he was about to die that Moses had requested a successor to lead the people. In both cases, however, the choice is clearly God's.

2.2.2 *Divine approval*

The divine approval of Elisha is evidenced both by God's initial choice and as the answer to Elisha's request for a double portion of the spirit which was upon Elijah. The fact that God had already selected Elisha before Elijah is aware of him indicates God's approval. However, the clearest sign of that approval to Elisha himself is the granting of his request for a double portion of the spirit which rested on Elijah. Most commentators agree that Elisha, in this instance, was not asking to be

²³ Terence Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah: The Redaction Criticism of the Prophetic Books* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), p. 136.

²⁴ Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, p. 137 notes that the parallels in the two accounts "are particularly evident in the motifs of the transference of the spirit and the parting of the water." But he ignores the prayers which preceded both events.

twice as powerful as Elijah, but was asking to be recognized as his heir and successor.²⁵ According to the Old Testament inheritance laws, the firstborn son received a double portion of the inheritance (Deut 21:17), and so Elisha is asking to be recognized as Elijah's true heir. Elijah's response indicates that he cannot simply grant the request. The true heir and successor of Elijah must be indicated by God and not simply by Elijah.²⁶ The fact that God grants this, therefore, indicates His approval of Elisha, and of his request.

2.2.3 Transfer of Power

The actual transfer of power is indicated by the receipt of Elijah's mantle (2 Kings 2:13). The mantle was Elijah's way of indicating Elisha's calling (1 Kings 19:19), a symbol which Elisha evidently understood immediately.²⁷ Elisha's receipt of the mantle, when Elijah is taken up into heaven, indicates that God has appointed him as Elijah's true successor. The mantle is a symbol of the power of Elijah, and of his being "clothed" with the Spirit of God, and thus its receipt marks the transfer of that power from Elijah to Elisha.²⁸ Having returned to the Jordan, Elisha then proves the power transfer by using the mantle to part the river just as Elijah had done.²⁹

²⁵ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1987), pp. 159, 163; Russell H. Dilday, *I, 2 Kings*, Communicator's Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 265; Mordechai Cogan and Hayim Tadmor, *II Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1988), p. 32; W. Phillip Keller, *Elijah: Prophet of Power* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1980), p. 155; T. R. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary 13 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 21.

²⁶ Dilday, *I, 2 Kings*, p. 265.

²⁷ Simon J. DeVries, *1 Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary 12 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 239; Raymond B. Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy: The Gospel According to Elijah & Elisha* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), p. 61; Paul R. House, *I, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary (National, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), p. 225; Keller, *Elijah*, p. 134.

²⁸ Dillard, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, pp. 61, 87; Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 22.

²⁹ Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 22; Keller, *Elijah*, p. 160; Cogan & Tadmor, *II Kings*, p. 34; Dilday, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, p. 266; Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, pp. 162-63.

2.2.4 Popular recognition

As with Joshua, so with Elisha, we find that not only did he have God's call, and Elijah's confirmation of that call, but he had demonstrated his fitness for the task. He built credibility with the sons of the prophets who witness his first miracle 1) by not abandoning Elijah in his final journey, 2) by specifically requesting to be recognized as the true heir, and finally 3) by public display of the power he had received.³⁰ The further fruitless search for Elijah proves beyond doubt that Elisha is now their leader and the true successor of Elijah.³¹ The narrative then records two more supernatural events at the hands of Elisha, which serve to confirm his succession to Elijah (2 Kings 2:19-25).

2.2.5 Relationship between Elijah and Elisha

While there is some difficulty reconciling the dating of the various events in the early chapters of 2 Kings, it can be argued that Elisha was probably Elijah's servant for a period of some twenty-six years. Although the succession narrative occurs in chapter 2, it is clear that Elijah was still alive during the reign of Jehoram, king of Judah, since he wrote him a letter rebuking his apostasy and predicting his painful death (2 Chr 21:12-15). Thus it would appear that the narrative in 2 Kings 2-3 is not necessarily in chronological order. The succession narrative concludes the story of Elijah's life, and introduces Elisha, and so it is fitting to place it here. It does appear, however, that the revolt of Moab recorded in 2 Kings 3, where Elisha is said to have "poured water on Elijah's hands" (2 Kings 3:11), could have preceded the succession narrative chronologically.³² If this is the case, then Elijah's ministry

³⁰ Dilday, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, p. 270; Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, p. 137.

³¹ Dilday, *Faith in the Face of Apostasy*, p. 270. Keller, *Elijah*, p. 160. Hobbs, *2 Kings*, p. 27.

³² This seems to be the consensus of most of the commentaries. The following accept Elijah's letter as authentic and having indicated the problem of chronology, opt for the solution given above. Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1994), pp. 435-36; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, New Century Bible Commentary (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), p. 307; J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, New American Commentary (National, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), p. 299; Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary 15 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), pp. 167-68. Sara Japhet, *I & II Chronicles*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), p. 812; Eugene H. Merrill, *1 & 2 Chronicles*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids,

extended from the reign of Ahab until the reign of Jehoram. If this order is correct, then Elisha's training as his servant, perhaps included this opportunity to develop his own gifting of operating in the miraculous, and lasted from early in Ahab's reign (874-853) until perhaps as late as 848 B.C. The point of this discussion is to clarify the fact that, like Joshua before him, Elisha was a servant for a significant portion of his adult life. Even perhaps after developing ministry in his own right (such as is recorded in 2 Kings 3), he continued to accompany his master in the capacity of a servant until Elijah was taken up into heaven. This was not a brief sojourn into the ranks of servanthood by a young man from a wealthy family,³³ it was a commitment of a considerable portion of his life, a commitment which indicated not only that he was capable of serving, but that in the process of serving he developed a servant's heart.

2.3 Eli to his Sons

2.3.1 *Source of authority*

Any authority which Eli's sons had was derived from the fact that they were his sons. They did not have any calling from God, they were not supported in their attitudes by Eli, and they did not have credibility with the people. They had no authority in their own right, and the authority they had, they used to oppress and dominate. They established their own authority by fear and manipulation for their own benefit (1 Sam 2:16). This is a trait of the kind of leadership that rules in the kingdom of darkness.³⁴

MI: Zondervan, 1988), 131-32. J. G. McConville, *I & II Chronicles*, Daily Study Bible (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), p. 199 suggests that Elijah sent the letter from heaven; Leslie C. Allen, *1, 2 Chronicles*, Communicator's Commentary 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), p. 320 recognizes the problem but casts doubt on the chronology of 2 Kings 2-3; Jacob M. Myers, *II Chronicles*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 121-22 rejects the authenticity of Elijah's letter, calling it "apocryphal"; John Sailhamer, *First & Second Chronicles* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), pp. 97-98 ignores the chronology problem and treats the letter as authentic with no comment.

³³ A family which owned twelve yoke of oxen was certainly wealthy (1 Kings 19:19), and the fact that he sacrificed two of them without any protest or apparent hardship to his family (1 Kings 19:21) seems to suggest that there were more which could be used to continue the farming work after his departure. The feast seems also to indicate a rather large work force associated with his family.

³⁴ Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century*, pp. 50-51.

2.3.2 *Divine disapproval*

It is clear that Eli's sons do not have God's approval. There are two prophecies about their behavior (1 Sam 2:27-36; 1 Sam 3:11-14), both of which indicate that God was not only aware of, but also very displeased with them. There is also the clear statement that their behavior offended the Lord (1 Sam 2:17). There is no doubt that they were living under the shadow of divine disapproval.³⁵ "Their father warned them that their sins were unforgivable. They were the very men whose responsibility it was to intercede for others, and there was no way in which anyone else could intercede with God for them—they were the senior priests. They were quite deliberately flouting God."³⁶

2.3.3 *Transfer of power*

There is, of course, no official transfer of power from Eli to his sons. In fact, it appears that the sons had usurped their father's authority (1 Sam 2:12-16). The only power that they had was based on their overbearing threats, and their manipulation of people for their own ends. They forced obedience to their commands by threats, and resorted to the kind of power which is exercised in the demonic kingdom rather than the kingdom of God. "The sons of Eli were despicable characters who violated the system of donations to the priests in Shiloh and who backed up their greedy maneuvers with threats of violence (vv 12-17)."³⁷

2.3.4 *Popular rejection*

Their behavior at the entrance to the tent of meeting was not only abhorrent to the Lord, but offensive to the people. Some people apparently objected to it, but they were overruled by Eli's sons (1 Sam 2:12-16). Thus they had no credibility with the people, and were not popular. Their godlessness was recognized by those who came to the sanctuary to make offerings, and their reputation was well known, being

³⁵ As Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 10 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 26 points out, "The interweaving of the story of Samuel and of Eli's sons leaves no doubt who has divine approval and who stands under condemnation."

³⁶ David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, Daily Bible Study (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1982), p. 18. See also Cyril J. Barber, *The Sovereignty of God Illustrated in the Lives of Samuel, Saul and David: The Books of Samuel*, vol. 1 (Neptune, NJ, Loizeaux, 1994), p. 57.

³⁷ Klein, *1 Samuel*, p. 23.

reported to Eli by “all the people” (1 Sam 2:23-24).³⁸ As Barber says, “It is no wonder that the sons of Eli aroused the indignation of God’s people.”³⁹ “There was therefore a leadership crisis in Israel; physically, the very elderly Eli was no longer fit to rule, and his sons were obviously morally unfit.”⁴⁰

2.3.5 *Relationship between Eli and his Sons*

Eli was an indulgent and somewhat weak parent. “The history of his sons’ insubordination no doubt went back to their youth, when it should have been possible to discipline them.”⁴¹ Although he did attempt to discipline his sons, his attempt was ineffectual, and obviously too late to be of any great import (1 Sam 2:24). They simply ignored him and continued in their evil ways. “It must be remembered that Eli was not simply the chief priest at Shiloh; serving at the most important Israelite shrine, but, he was a man of considerable political importance, indeed a leader (‘judge’) of Israel (cp. 4:18). Yet he could not control his own sons!”⁴² Though they could have expected to inherit their father’s position, authority and power, by their own willfulness and sinfulness, they so offended the Lord, and their father, that they were disqualified from even being servants. It is clear that they did not have servant hearts at all. Perhaps that is why God’s judgment did not wipe out the family completely, but reduced it to begging and servanthood (1 Sam 2:36).⁴³

2.4 Eli to Samuel

2.4.1 *Source of authority*

It appears that the source of Samuel’s authority, may, in fact, have been Eli’s prayer for Hannah. As Menaull points out, “although he has no idea what she is praying for, Eli joins in Hannah’s request. His authority has given way to hers. One day, the child for whom they pray will

³⁸ Klein, *1 Samuel*, p. 23 points out that “Eli confronted his sons with reports spread abroad by the people of Yahweh.”

³⁹ Barber, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 55.

⁴⁰ Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 18.

⁴¹ Joyce G. Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1988), p. 63.

⁴² Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 18.

⁴³ Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 21. Klein, *1 Samuel*, pp. 23, 28.

supplant the authority of Eli's sons among the people."⁴⁴ The source of Samuel's power comes directly from God, and indirectly from Eli. Both, when he reverses his harsh and mistaken judgment of Hannah, and agrees with her prayer, and when he accepts the word of the Lord from the youthful lips of Samuel, he is acting as the judge and leading priest of Israel. In both cases, therefore, he is recognizing God as the source of authority, and releasing that authority in Samuel's direction. As Payne points out, "Eli too was able to bear witness that Samuel heard the call of God, so there could be no doubting the reality and authenticity of his call."⁴⁵

2.4.2 *Divine approval*

In contrast to Eli's sons, Samuel grew up in the same environment and adhered faithfully to the principles of God's commandments. He lived under divine approval (1 Sam 2:26), and at an early age was trusted by Eli with the responsibility of watching the sanctuary. He was also trusted by God with a prophetic word against the house of Eli, although he was still obviously quite young. As he grew, he continued to receive revelation from God, something which the narrative makes quite clear was "rare in those days" (1 Sam 3:1, 21). Clearly Samuel had God's approval.⁴⁶

2.4.3 *Transfer of power*

There is no particular ceremony which transfers the power from Eli to Samuel. However, once Samuel began receiving revelation from God, it was clear to Eli that God had chosen his successor.⁴⁷ Even as quite a young man, Samuel had influence on all Israel because of the revelations which God gave him (1 Sam 4:1). Regardless of any official transfer by Eli, God made the choice quite clear and gave power to Samuel without any request on his side.

Samuel appears as a man who has been associated with the sanctuary from his youth, who has grown up and gained his experience in the

⁴⁴ Marjorie Menaul, "Between Text and Sermon: 1 Samuel 1 & 2," *Interpretation* 55:2 (April 2001), pp. 174-76.

⁴⁵ Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Payne, *I & II Samuel*, p. 18 says, "More important than the people's approval, however, were God's decisions. He too viewed Samuel with favour."

⁴⁷ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, Old Testament Library, trans. J. S. Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), p. 85.

priestly service, and who is destined to become in reality the true priest of Israel. He succeeds to this office, however, only through the revelation of the word accorded to him. In this way he unites the priestly office with the prophetic vocation.⁴⁸

It is unclear whether Eli agreed with, or resented the transfer of power, although he had no choice but to accept what God had already made plain (1 Sam 3:18). Eli seems simply to have been resigned to the fact that God could not use his sons and had chosen someone else, displaying His choice by the transfer of power.

2.4.4 Popular recognition

Prior to Eli's death Samuel had proven himself to the people.⁴⁹ His prophetic anointing was already recognized and widely acknowledged (1 Sam 4:1).

Such was Samuel's introduction to the prophetic calling. Though he had been committed to priestly service from his earliest days, there is now a new dimension to his ministry, for he has received the word of the Lord, and he unites with his priestly office a prophetic task. This will bring him to prominence in the land at a time when people need to know the word of the Lord to them, for they are facing powerful enemies. Already Samuel is learning that his words will not always be easy either for him to speak or for his hearers to receive, but he will continue to deliver God's message without fear of the consequences, and so establish God's rule in the land.⁵⁰

He already had credibility in the eyes of the people, and it was natural, when Eli died, for them to turn to Samuel for advice and direction (1 Sam 7:3). Payne says, "God showed his care for Israel; before Eli's death he had already provided better leadership, already known to the whole nation, in the person of Samuel."⁵¹ Even though they consecrated Eleazar to "guard the ark of the Lord" (1 Sam 7:1), they did not seek him out in times of trouble. "Samuel now resumed his prophetic ministry to Israel as the Lord's spokesman, and as intercessor on behalf of Israel. Both tasks he was able to fulfill only because the Lord had called, appointed and equipped him, and because the people recognized

⁴⁸ Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel*, p. 43.

⁴⁹ Klein, *I Samuel*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ Baldwin, *I & 2 Samuel*, p. 64.

⁵¹ Baldwin, *I & 2 Samuel*, p. 24.

and accepted his authority.”⁵² Because of his godly life, and the power of God’s prophetic anointing upon him, Samuel was both the naturally and supernaturally selected leader of Israel for the rest of his life (1 Sam 7:15-7).

2.4.5 Relationship between Eli and Samuel

Matthew suggests that Samuel’s training included “partly being a temple-servant.”⁵³ It appears that he continued in this role until Eli died. Thus, although he was primarily a servant in the temple, he related to Eli in the way a servant would relate to a master, rather than in the way a child relates to his father. “Samuel was still the young apprentice, learning from Eli and subject to him.”⁵⁴ As with Joshua and Elisha, we find that Samuel’s servanthood lasted for a considerable portion of his life. From as early as three years of age, until the time of Eli’s death, Samuel served faithfully in the sanctuary at Shiloh. Although we have no way of knowing exactly how long this was, it is highly likely that Samuel reached the age of thirty years before he could be accepted as a leader in his own right.⁵⁵ This would suggest that he continued as a servant, both at the sanctuary and to Eli personally, for a large portion of his life.

3. Summary and Conclusions

From the foregoing examination, the parallels between the Moses/Joshua transition and the Elisha/Elijah transition are strong. Collins indicates, “Parallels with the continuity between Moses and Joshua are inescapable in this account of the commissioning of Elisha in 2 Kings 2.”⁵⁶ We have also seen above that both successors were approved and selected by God, and affirmed by their master as a result. There was a clear transfer of power from leader to successor in both

⁵² Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 78.

⁵³ Matthew, “Biblical Leadership,” p. 27.

⁵⁴ Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 63.

⁵⁵ To serve in the sanctuary as a priest a man had to be between 30 and 50 years old (Num 4:3, 23, 30, 35). Klein, *1 Samuel*, p. 35 indicates, “The next time we hear of Samuel, he will be an adult, associated with a great deliverance from the Philistines.” Hertzberg, *1 & II Samuel*, pp. 42-43 suggests that he was already a young man when he received the first prophecy about Eli’s house.

⁵⁶ Collins, *The Mantle of Elijah*, p. 137.

cases. The popular recognition of their leadership status was not only the result of this selection and approval, but also of their ability to perform the required leadership functions. They both spent a large portion of their lives simply serving the men whom they were to succeed.

While the parallels with Samuel are perhaps a little less evident, they are still considerable.⁵⁷ Samuel was clearly accepted by God, and by the people as a result of the prophetic anointing on him. Although in this case there was no clear transfer of power from leader to successor, the fact that Eli accepted Samuel's report of God's word regarding his house indicates that Eli recognized Samuel as the rightful inheritor of the power. Finally, Samuel also was a servant for a good portion of his life.

In the case of Eli's sons we have contrasts to all of these events. They were clearly not called by God, i.e., they had no divine approval, and hence no real authority. There was no transfer of power to them from Eli, perhaps because he accepted the prophetic word, confirmed by Samuel. As a result of all of these things, they were not the popular choice for leadership either. Finally, they obviously lacked any inclination towards servanthood.

From these accounts we can derive some principles for leadership transition. It is obvious that God does not intend to leave his people leaderless or without direction. Firstly, since in all of the examples we have considered, God made it clear who his choice was for continued leadership, and God is still the same (Heb 13:8), surely in the church, it must be possible for missionary leaders, aging leaders, church boards, or denominational leaders to seek the Lord for some indication of the person or persons who should succeed key leaders in the church. This would seem to be the necessary first step in a leadership transition. Ward points out the danger in today's church, that when "authority is not thought to come from God, thus leadership of the church is as relative as anything else."⁵⁸ Boehme also warns that "leadership, in the sense of the biblical

⁵⁷ John E. Harvey, "Tendenz and Textual Criticism in 1 Samuel 2-10," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 96 (2001), pp. 71-81 draws out considerable parallels between Moses/Joshua, and the Eli/Samuel passage in. There is, however, one significant parallel which he does not mention. In the transfer of power from Moses to Joshua, a pericope regarding Moses' sin and the reason why he will not enter the Promised Land is inserted (Num 27:14). In the Eli/Samuel transition, there is also divine criticism of Eli and his sons connected to the calling of Samuel (1 Sam 2:27-36; 3:11-14). This is another obvious parallel between these two accounts.

⁵⁸ Ward, "Servants, Leaders, and Tyrants," p. 34.

world view...first of all...is a calling, given by God.”⁵⁹ These examples of smooth transition of leadership clearly indicate that God’s choice is foremost in a successful transition.

Secondly, when a person has been indicated by God as his choice, those in leadership should be prepared to make that choice public. The process of developing public approval of that person should then begin. This should also include the delegation of some authority to the successor, which would provide opportunities for that person to build credibility.

Thirdly, and very importantly, the master/servant relationship in these three situations should be recognized and developed in a mentoring situation in today’s context. As Manus insists, “[a leader should] serve as a mentor to these future leaders, for they are the best hope for the long-term viability of your organization. Be a role model. Discuss your concerns with them. Treat them as colleagues in the constant search for organizational renewal.”⁶⁰ Ward too suggests that “a preferred metaphor for education is to see it as a life-walk to be shared.”⁶¹ It is clear, however, that these three men succeeded their masters, not only because of the things they learned in observing their masters, but also because of the servant attitude which developed in each of them. They were not servants for a few days, weeks, or months. They were all servants for a considerable portion of their youth, and perhaps even adult life. Recognition and development of the important attribute of a servant heart should be a vital part in the selection of leaders for the church of the next generation. Clinton points out that “the servanthood value which is foundational to Christian leadership...is not a natural part of any leader’s inherited personality bent or culturally determined style. It is learned only through growth as a Christian leader via the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶² Ward suggests that “God may be sharpening the focus on leadership as servanthood.”⁶³ He also insists that “it requires the grace of God to

⁵⁹ Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century*, p. 69.

⁶⁰ Burt Manus, *Visionary Leadership: Creating a Compelling Sense of Direction for Your Organization* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992), 185.

⁶¹ Ted W. Ward, “Evaluating Metaphors of Education,” in *With an Eye on the Future: Development and Mission in the 21st Century*, pp. 43-52 (48).

⁶² J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Series: Coming to Some Conclusions on Leadership Style* (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1992), p. 82.

⁶³ Ward, “Servants, Leaders, and Tyrants,” p. 33.

remain faithful to the servant role.”⁶⁴ Boehme identifies “the leadership of servanthood...[as] that of example and loving persuasion.”⁶⁵ He also states, “If we could choose one word to summarize the righteous attitude of leadership, that word would be servanthood.”⁶⁶ Certainly this is a distinctive of these three leadership transitions that is not normally discussed. I believe that this trait, found in these three successors, is not simply coincidence. It reveals God’s heart in the matter, and is certainly confirmed in the New Testament.

Finally, there must come a point, either at death (i.e., Elijah and Eli) or while still living (Moses) when the older leader transfers not just authority but power to the younger leader. There should also be some public element to this power transfer which indicates to those who will be following that the younger leader is now the leader indeed.

Perhaps as we embark on the journey the Lord has for the twenty-first century church, we will see greater success in continuity of leadership if we will learn the lessons of leadership transition indicated by these successful leadership transitions in the Old Testament.

⁶⁴ Ward, “Servants, Leaders, and Tyrants,” p. 38.

⁶⁵ Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century*, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Boehme, *Leadership for the 21st Century*, p. 87.