

Old Testament Mentoring as A Divinely Ordained Discipleship Model: A Design for Spiritual Formation, Leadership Succession, and Mission Continuity

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Abstract

This study surveys mentoring within the Old Testament context as a foundational model of discipleship that fosters spiritual growth and the transmission of faith and leadership responsibilities across generations. It analyzes some key mentor-mentee relationships in the Old Testament context. Employing qualitative research, the paper employs a biblical analysis and theological approach. It explores how these biblical examples illustrate mentoring as an intentional asset in character formation, leadership development, and spiritual empowerment. Mentoring relationships in the texts reveal a pattern of imparting wisdom, authority, and faithfulness for the continuity of God's mission. For instance, Jethro prepares Moses to lead the Israelites and Jonathan mentors David to the extent of rescuing his life from the hand of Saul his father. Moses prepares Joshua to assume the same responsibility of leadership, and Elijah's commissioning of Elisha ensures prophetic succession. Naomi's role in mentoring Ruth highlights faith transmission within family and community contexts. Similarly, Elisha's mentorship of the sons of the prophets reflects ongoing spiritual formation for ministry perpetuation. The findings emphasize mentoring as a transformative discipleship strategy integral to faith deepening and legacy building. This model provides contemporary Christian ministry with a biblically grounded paradigm for nurturing emerging leaders and sustaining spiritual heritage through relational discipleship.

Keywords: Mentor, Mentee, Mentorship, Spiritual Formation, Discipleship, Leadership

1. Introduction

The term mentoring can be defined as a discipleship relationship that focuses on equipping younger believers for the work of ministry so that they grow in maturity and unity in the faith with the ultimate goal of glorifying God.¹ Discipleship is learning from Jesus how to live life as He lived.² Mentoring describes a person who deliberately and purposely fosters a relationship between a protégé and mentor. Mentors typically are older or more seasoned and have a level of experience to provide guidance, support, and a frame of comparison for protégés to guide their behaviors, choices, thoughts, attitudes, and emotions.³ This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, employing a biblical analysis and theological approach to examine mentoring as a foundational model of discipleship in the Old Testament. The qualitative method is appropriate for this research because the study seeks to interpret texts, meanings, relationships, and theological patterns rather than measure variables quantitatively. The study surveys selected Old Testament narratives that portray mentoring relationships in order to identify recurring themes related to discipleship, leadership formation, and faith transmission. The study is not exhaustive but representative, focusing on key mentor–mentee relationship that demonstrate continuity of leadership and mission.

2. Mentorship in the Old Testament

There are several examples of mentoring in the Old Testament that can serve as discipleship models to help mentor believers in the church. It is observed that the basis of the leadership transition in the Old Testament involved God and considered two factors: succession and leaving a viable legacy. Giving the reasons for the successful growth of leadership from Moses to Joshua, Clifford states, “This is because the transition was not based on the desire by Moses to preserve his legacy, but rather on having the right candidate identified and appointed by God to take over ... this was because

¹ Melissa B. Kruger. *The What and Why of Mentoring*, 2022.

<https://www.crossway.org/articles/the-what-and-why-of-mentoring/>

² Dallas Willard. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 35-39.

³ Stephanie R. Johnson and Christopher L. Edwards, “Mentoring,” *Encyclopedia.Com*, last modified 2018, accessed February 24, 2020, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences-and-law/economics-business-and-labor/businesses-and-occupations/mentoring>.

God was coordinating the succession.”⁴ God was in the business of succession of leadership in the Old Testament, and spiritual leaders desired to leave a feasible legacy.

The Old Testament provides several examples of spiritual leaders who exercised mentorship as discipleship for the purpose of imparting practical skills to their disciples preparing them to take over when they step down or retire. Biblical examples of mentoring as discipleship cases in the Old Testament scripture include great people such as Jethro and Moses (Exod18), Moses and Joshua and Caleb (Num.13:3, 6, 8, 16; Josh. 1:1, 2), Elijah and Elisha and the sons of the prophets (1 Kgs. 19:9-21; 2Kgs. 2:2, 4, 6, 15; 6:1-7).

The impact of Jethro’s mentorship is significant. The court structure that Israel used by then had been adapted from Jethro’s counsel to Moses. The court system in Israel today shows how succession became a substantial factor for mentorship as discipleship in Israel. Moses learnt from Jethro how to judge God’s people by delegating power. Langston states, “Moses’ meeting with his father-in-law Jethro produces the judicial system by which the Israelites would operate and sets the stage for receiving the law code on Mt Sinai.”⁵ Moses learned from Jethro an organized protocol for administering justice among the people of God, which significantly reduced his burden of adjudicating all disputes alone.

Furthermore, the purpose of mentoring relationship between Elijah and Elisha was to get a successor as Keil and Delitzsch state, “According to what follows, all that Elijah accomplished immediately was to call Elisha to be his successor.”⁶ Smyth and Helwys exhort, “Either way, Elisha is recruited as the follower and successor of Elijah.”⁷ Thus, Old Testament discloses mentorship hollow of which Jethro mentors Moses, Moses mentors Joshua and Caleb, Elijah mentors Elisha, Elisha mentors the sons of the prophets, Jonathan mentors David and Naomi mentors Ruth for the same purposes.⁸ Generally, mentors desire to leave a worthwhile legacy and have successors for the development of the work even

4 Clifford Todd Hartley, “About My Father’s Business: Pastoral Succession from Father to Son” (Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 47.

5 Scott M. Langston, *Exodus: Through the Centuries* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006), 170.

6 Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, “1Kings. 19:4,” *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1900).

7 Walter Brueggemann, ed., *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Series: A New Paradigm in Bible Commentaries Serious Scholarship in a Multi-Media Format* (Atlanta, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 239.

8 Isacka Vitus Ndaruhekeye. *Discipling Through Leadership: The Power of Networking in Leadership* (Arusha, Joystan Tanzania, 2022), 48-56.

when they are no longer working. This routine considered more beyond the view of holding a position as described in the following subsections.

2.1 Jethro Mentors Moses

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, had a personal interest in Moses. He is interested in Moses because his daughter is married to him; possibly, his wish is to see the prosperity of the entire nation of Israel (Exod. 18:1). Commenting on the reasons for Jethro's visit to Moses, Wesley states, "Jethro to congratulate the happiness of Israel, and particularly the honor of Moses, his son-in-law; comes to rejoice with them, as one that had a true respect both for them and for their God."⁹ Influenced by love, Jethro is concerned with the holistic safety of the life of Moses (Exod. 18:17-24).

Jethro was a God-fearing person, for, in his statements, he never excludes God. Everything he advises, he wants it to be approved by God before it is practiced, "Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you." (Exod. 18:19). A mentorship relationship like this is needed because mentors are not infallible or all-knowing. Jethro admits that whatever he advises is to be approved by God. This is because he does not want to take the credit and honor to himself once Moses succeeds in applying the principles (Exod. 18:23). Honoring God is what matters in Jethro's address. He knew God as the source of all adequate counsels; it reveals that he knew what was written later about the coming of the counselor (Isa 9:6). Wesley comments, "Jethro knew that Moses had a better counselor than he was, and to his counsel, he refers him."¹⁰ Thus, mentorship should convey spiritual values that recognizes God in any leadership position. It is advised that experienced and faithful mentors in the church should not impose things on their mentees. Instead, they should discuss and allow God to approve them for His glory.

2.2 Moses Mentors Caleb and Joshua

Moses is described as a leader with the spirit of humility (Heb. 3:1-5; Num. 12:3). As the leader of the Israelites, it is needful to mold young people into leadership. Moses sees some potentials in Caleb

9 John Wesley, "Exodus 18:4," *John Wesley's Notes on the Entire Bible: The Book of Exodus* (Garsington, UK: Benediction Classics, 2010).

10 Ibid.

and Joshua. Since mentorship as discipleship consider two important factors; succession and legacy to be mandatory, Moses wishes to impart these merits to others. Being convinced of Caleb and Joshua's trust in God and readiness to serve Him, he sends them with the other ten spies. In this mission, God is involved in appointing them. This shows how important it is to involve God in mentorship as a discipleship relationship.

Scripture confirms why Caleb is elected to be among the twelve spies. He was a trustworthy leader (Num. 13:3, 6). Scripture reports Caleb was a man of God whose life testified his trust in God (Numb. 13:30; 14:6-9) and he was known for his commitment to Jehovah God. He is remembered for his faith and trust in God. His character contributed much to his power and diligent report to Moses and the entire community of God about the land and the people therein. Trusting in God prepares people for more significant and powerful opportunities to serve. Concerning Caleb, Wheadon states, "Caleb — the spy from the tribe of Judah here begins the minority report, which is characterized by an unwavering trust in Jehovah."¹¹ He has a strong faith in God. Since mentorship as discipleship prepares trustworthy leaders, Moses prepares Caleb as a trustworthy leader for the future. The Church leadership should prepare all willing believers not just for positions, but trustworthy leaders who will to take over and lead the church in the right direction.

The mentorship of Moses to Joshua and Caleb reminds that mentor/mentee relationship and the disciple and disciple maker relationship is not purposeless. Dozeman describes two main goals of the mentor/mentee relationship: to be aware of the unconditional obligation of God to past promises and the conditional promise of triumph based on the observation of the Law.¹² This view echoes the purpose of leadership, making God's people enjoy the fulfillment of the promises of God (Josh. 1:6). Therefore, the relationship between Moses and Joshua in the Bible shows how God prepares young leaders through experienced leaders to lead other realize God's blessings (Num 27:18). "Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17).

The Bible shows a close relationship between Moses and Joshua. Joshua was younger than Moses; he was supposed to learn many things at his feet and gain more experiences from him. The

11 Daniel Whedon, "Numbers 13:4," *Whedon's Commentary on the Bible* (Harrisonburg, VA: Christian Light, 2012).

12 Thomas B. Dozeman, *Joshua 1-12: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries)* (London, UK: Yale University Press, 2015), 257.

relationship between Joshua and Moses helped Joshua be useful in leadership because he closely witnessed Moses's leadership, which had numerous trials. He became a better leader because, under the mentorship of Moses, he learned the success and failures of his mentor with a positive mind of amending the mistakes Moses did.

2.3 Jonathan Mentors David

Mentorship as discipleship in the Old Testament operates as the desire to defend someone entirely. Jonathan and David had a unique relationship, a relationship to death. It is stronger than death because he endangers his life for his friend, David (1Sam. 20:32, 33). Chisholm states, "Jonathan fully supports David, while Saul tries to murder him."¹³ This may demonstrate that mentor/mentee relationships sometimes cost the mentor's life. In this case, Jonathan is the mentor while David is the mentee. Their relationship is strengthened by the covenant made under God's witness (1Sam. 20:12-16). This was serious since God was involved totally.

The covenant engaged all; each one fulfilled the role; Jonathan leads the conversation while both David and Jonathan implement the stated agreement before the Lord. On this, Bodner comments, "Jonathan does all the talking, and David goes along with the stated transaction: 'And the two of them cut a covenant before the LORD'."¹⁴ The relationship in mentoring as discipleship should be done in the presence of God as the witness. This shows how mentoring as discipleship was a serious business in the Old Testament. Jonathan is interested in David's success because God has appointed David to be the next king. And according to the monarchy leadership style at the time, the king's elder son was expected to be the next king. Jonathan, the elder son of King Saul, is not interested in political mediocrity though he deserves it. Instead, he observed and listened to God's will. The authenticity of their covenant was shown after the death of Jonathan. David respects and keeps the oath by preserving the life of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan (2 Sam. 21:7).

True mentors are led by sacrificial love and care for others rather than greed and selfishness. Commenting on love, Robert states, "And Jonathan once again swore to David in his love for him, for he

13 Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel: Teach the Text Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 192.

14 Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 245.

loved him as he loved himself.”¹⁵ Jonathan’s love for David is expensive, as Bodner comments, “It would appear that Jonathan’s love for David is sacrificial, and there are real emotional currents that connect the two friends.”¹⁶ This is in harmony with the Ten Commandments as instructed by Jesus (Matt. 22:39) to “love God and your neighbor with all your heart.” The believers, should be encouraged that there should be friendships-based on trust to help them grow together spiritually among themselves.

2.4 Elijah Mentors Elisha

The relationship between Elijah and Elisha has many lessons to learn in mentorship (1 Kgs. 19:19-21). Elisha is called to join God’s work from his everyday activities of plowing with twelve yokes of oxen. Keith comments, “...Elisha’s reaction reveals that he does understand the demands of the prophetic call despite the cryptic utterance (to go along with the enigmatic mantle-throwing).”¹⁷ The comment suggests that human response demands personal commitment as an appropriate response to God’s calling.

The biblical account of Elijah and Elisha illustrates this principle clearly. Elijah found Elisha actively engaged in his work, and upon receiving the call, Elisha abandoned his occupation in order to devote himself fully to God’s service. This narrative demonstrates that God often calls individuals who are diligent and actively engaged in their responsibilities, rather than those who are idle. Concerning Elisha’s commitment to the call, Smyth and Helwys comment, “What counts is that he left his oxen and followed.”¹⁸ Elijah does not pick anyone to succeed him, but by the guidance of God, he picks the committed one who leaves everything for the sake of the mission of God. Preparing effective young people for ministry needs God’s guidance on what should be done.

It needed total commitment to occupy Elijah’s position, as demonstrated in Elisha’s performance. It is not an easy decision for Elisha to make, slaughtering the oxen that enable him to earn his income. Yet, he sacrifices everything he depends on. He was an unexpected heir to his family, but he chose to inherit something

15 Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), 126.

16 Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary*, 218.

17 Keith Bodner, *Elisha’s Profile in the Book of Kings: The Double Agent* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37.

18 Brueggemann, *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Series: A New Paradigm in Bible Commentaries Serious Scholarship in a Multi-Media Format*, 242.

different.¹⁹ Again, the call to discipleship comes with some kind of test, perhaps aiming to strengthen his commitment (2 Kgs. 2:2, 4, 6). He is encouraged by Elijah to remain at one station while his mentor goes to the next station of the schools of the prophets. He never allows his master to go alone, thus, showing his zeal and commitment to ministry.

The double portion of anointing was a difficult request to be fulfilled by a human being; it can be accomplished by God only. Raichur comments that “One can pursue and receive a double portion of the anointing on a servant of God, directly from God.”²⁰ This nullifies the trend of some religious leaders who assume to anoint and give the Holy Spirit to other people.

It should be noted that God can anoint a person through the prophetic symbol of receiving the cloak as Keathley III says, “...Elisha, picks up the mantle, taking his Elijah’s place as a prophet... place as the head of the schools of the prophets, a daunting task to say the least.”²¹ Picking the mantle signifies his willingness to accept the prophetic responsibilities in the prophetic office

Sometimes the call to ministry may come unexpectedly; the people involved may experience surprising signs and symbols to represent the call. This may be unusual, but it makes sense for the called ones. Concerning the call of Elisha Smyth & Helwys exhort, “Elisha understood it as a summons to “follow” (19:20); in the end, he does “follow” and becomes Elijah’s aide (19:21).”²² The sign of the mantle was enough for Elisha to know that God is calling him. Faith in God was needed to discern the signs of the divine call.

Accordingly, the mentorship of Elijah enlightens that the mentor/mentee relationship is characterized by the persistence and commitment of the mentee. The mentee is tested on commitment levels in the work they are going to join. This may create a healthy tension between the mentor and mentee. Knowing that he was about to ascend to heaven, Elijah insists Elisha remain while he goes to Bethel, Jericho, and Jordan (2 Kgs. 2: 1, 2, 4, 6). From this example, the mentorship relationship needs humility and persistence. All those examples of mentorship relationships in the Old Testament are the model to help the church believers to be committed to the faith.

19 R. J. Rushdoony, *Chariots of Prophetic Fire: Studies in Elijah and Elisha* (Vallecito, CA: Ross House Books, 2003), 39.

20 Ibid., 39.

21 J. Hampton Keathley, *Studies in the Life of Elisha* (Washington, DC: Biblical Studies Press, 1997), 14.

22 Brueggemann, *The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary Series: A New Paradigm in Bible Commentaries Serious Scholarship in a Multi-Media Format*, 242.

2.5 Elisha Mentors the Sons of the Prophets

To have a God-fearing generation does not come by chance. A God-fearing generation is prepared. Elisha is the prophet who was closely related to a group of people in the Old Testament as their mentor. Hobbs affirms, “The only prophet directly associated with the group is Elisha.”²³ The association he talks about is the relationship between mentor and mentee (2 Kgs. 2:18-25). That is why he can be described as a prophet who prepared a generation of God-fearers. Elisha works closely with the sons of the prophets; he is concerned with their needs and was interested in solving their difficulties to ease their tensions (2 Kgs. 4:38-41).

Elisha touches the needs of people through miracles as Hobbs comments, “In the case of Elisha, motivation is the desire to respond to pressing human needs. The motivation is compassion.”²⁴ In preparing a God-fearing young generation, the mentor/master must be sympathetic. This compassionate spirit allows sharing the challenges and finding ways to solve them (2 Kgs. 6:1, 2, 4-7). It is not enough to empathize; problems should be resolved.²⁵ A prepared God-fearing young generation will always want to be with their trainer/master wherever they are (2 Kgs. 6:3). A close relationship between mentors and mentees helps to experience holistic healing. In these cases of mentoring a group of people has a significance virtue in mentoring new believers. Faithful members and other experienced church leaders are encouraged individually to take on mentoring new converts by participating them in their daily activities for their growth.

2.6 Naomi Mentors Ruth

The Bible shows the importance of the roles of experienced women with young women. Young women need an explanation about life in marriage and how they can take care of their husbands and their children. The experienced women know the techniques on how to handle men acceptably (Ruth. 3:3-5). Naomi plays a significant role in mentoring Ruth.

23 T. R. Hobbs, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Kings*, vol. 13 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 25.

24 *Ibid.*, 13:14.

25 Hobbs, *Word Biblical Commentary: 2 Kings*. 13:72.

Regardless of her bitterness and agony, she advised a better direction for her daughters-in-law as Sakenfeld states, “Naomi, despite her sense of hopelessness at the loss of her husband and sons, offered a plan for the security and happiness of her daughters-in-law (1:89).”²⁶ Naomi’s dedication to ensuring her daughter’s comfort in life serves as a commendable example for every mentor and disciple-maker. The relationship between a mentor and mentee, or a disciple-maker and disciple, is often reciprocal in nature. Just as mentees seek guidance and support, mentors deeply value the trustworthiness and integrity of those they guide. Ultimately, every mentor or disciple-maker aspires to see their mentee or disciple grow into a reliable and to be trustworthy individuals. Although Ruth benefited much from Naomi’s mentoring skills, in reality, Naomi also benefited from Ruth as Sakenfeld comments, “For Naomi, Ruth’s presence is a reminder of tragedy as it is a potential comfort.”²⁷

The two factors seem to be evident in this mentorship relationship: Naomi knows that these young women need husbands, so she is passionate about seeing them succeed in their life-long marital journey (Ruth. 1:8, 9). Ruth loves her mother-in-law at any cost because the true relationship between mentor and mentee aims to grow each other (Ruth. 1:16, 17). It is evident that God is involved in the oath she made to her mother-in-law. Ruth was converted to Naomi’s God; as Sakenfeld puts it, “...to cast her lot with an older woman rather than seek her welfare in her homeland, goes beyond normal expectations of their relationship.”²⁸ Ruth’s choice to follow her mother-in-law displays Agape love (Ruth. 1:16, 17). Here, faithful and experienced women in the church are expected to help single women find the right husbands and prepare young women to know how to live well in marriage.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, Old Testament mentoring exemplifies a divinely ordained discipleship model that equips believers for spiritual maturity, leadership succession, and mission continuity. By highlighting relational dynamics of wisdom transfer, character refinement, and faithful empowerment, this study offers a timeless

26 Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 12.

27 Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, 35.

28 *Ibid.*, 12.

blueprint for modern Christian contexts. Church leaders, educators, and mentors can harness these biblical paradigms to cultivate resilient faith communities, ensuring the gospel's legacy endures across generations through intentional, transformative relationships.

4. Recommendations

1. **Relationship Building:** Encourage church leaders and educators to invest in relational, long-term mentoring, modeling the mutual trust and commitment seen in Old Testament examples like Moses and Joshua or Elijah and Elisha.
2. **Spiritual and Ethical Formation:** Integrate prayer, Scripture, and ethical guidance into mentoring, ensuring mentees grow in both faith and character.
3. **Leadership Multiplication:** Equip mentees to eventually mentor others, creating a multiplying effect for leadership and spiritual legacy within churches and communities.
4. **Contextual Adaptation:** Adapt biblical mentoring principles to local contexts, considering cultural and generational needs while preserving the core values of wisdom, faithfulness, and discipleship.
5. **Structured Programs:** Develop formal and informal mentoring programs that provide accountability, personal growth opportunities, and ongoing support for emerging leaders.

These recommendations ensure that biblical mentoring remains a dynamic, transformative force for nurturing leaders and sustaining spiritual heritage in modern Christian ministry.