

Moses and Theocratic Leadership James Coke

There are many examples of business leadership to be found on a bookstore shelf. Contemporary management texts advocate structured decision-making and decisive action. We love biographies of leaders that are thrust into difficult situations and by sheer force of will push the limits of convention to snatch victory from defeat. Such icons include John Rockefeller, Alfred Sloan, and Jack Welch. Great leaders, we are taught, have confidence, strong personalities, and innate talent that lead to personal success. They operate from a place of political or economic authority over others, often arousing simultaneously both our admiration and disdain.

Another form of influence a person can exert is moral leadership. This is leadership based on vision and example, not directional authority. It operates through principles and ideals, not methods, and is often willing to fail in the name of doing what is right in an unjust world. Think of leaders concerned with social justice like Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Success for them was not measured in personal power or fame. It is measured by changes evoked in mass values that better mankind.

Authoritative and moral leadership occupy two ends of a continuum characterized by human effort.

There is a third and lesser known form of leadership known as theocratic. Its leaders carry divinely delegated authority to direct or influence the activities of others based on a revelation of God's will for humanity. Examples include persons such as those holding the office of Catholic Pope, Mormon President/Prophet, or Islamic Ayatollah. They are believed to interpret God's intent in the written scriptures, and receive revelation directly from Him. Human decision making is subject to the will of God as King, and his will is considered perfect in every situation. A leader of this type functions as a servant in the King's court.

This essay will concern itself with this third form of leadership, and evaluate its attributes based on the life of history's greatest such human figure – the man Moses (Moshe) who led his Hebrew nation from bondage in Egypt to its covenantal land in Canaan (modern-day Israel). If a man's theocratic authority is validated by God's use of that man to do supernatural signs, then Moses is clearly the best example we have of such a public leader.

Before proceeding, however, we need to address one point. Some may object that Hebrew history in the Torah reflects didactic teaching and not literal history as westerners understand history. Certainly, there is little archeological evidence or external documentation to corroborate the amazing journey undertaken by the Hebrews under Moses' leadership. Nevertheless, we can still take away the same lessons from an inspired parable that we can from actual fact if we will accept that the principles being taught remain equally valid in either case. For our purposes here, we will exercise the faith necessary to accept that this is so.

Following God's Ways

To begin, God had a particular purpose in appointing Moses one of his ambassadors in the earth. Moses articulated this purpose at the conclusion of his life when he asked God to select a successor to take his place. Moses' prayer contains the elements of divinely delegated leadership:

"May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd." [Numbers 27:16-17]

The picture here, reflecting Israel's nomadic experience of animal husbandry, is of the shepherd leading his sheep out of the safety of their nighttime pen to the green pastures for feeding during the day. The shepherd keeps track of the sheep and ensures no predators get close. At night they are led back into their protective pen where they can be cared for more easily in the darkness. It is an image of leadership through service in accordance with the times and seasons set by God. During the desert wanderings, God's pillar of fire and cloud would move before the people and then settle over a place for a time. God told Moses when to move, when to settle, and how the people were to live. (Exodus 40:36-37) Moses' job was to take care of the daily details of making sure the people did what God needed, and when. When all went according to plan, the Hebrews enjoyed the peaceful blessings of protection, provision, prosperity, and health.

Many in the west today are discomfited by this notion of being the "sheep" of an authoritarian God. It connotes passive slavery and offends our prized independence and self-sufficiency. Perhaps it is helpful to think of God more as a parent that watches over his kids until they become spiritually mature. The fleshly independence we crave is really nothing more than

spiritual immaturity that has not yet learned to trust our loving parent in a simple, childlike way. Moses learned the ways of God as parent, and spent his life of leadership in close relationship with this heavenly over-shepherd. This relationship was so close that Moses would appear radiant after meeting with God. (Exodus 34:29)

We think we know the best way to obtain life's objectives, but all too often we find that it is a winding path that gets off track. Yet we push on, striving toward our goal with our own energy and initiative. God's chosen path for us is one of peacefully letting him go before us to make the way, with the end goal of close relationship with him. He is not particularly interested in whether we become an entry in the history books, leave a large inheritance to our children, or invent something of lasting value. He wants us to know him, and by doing so use our time on earth to bless others in his name. He is perfectly capable of taking us to our place of greatest potential in this life, but we have to choose his path, not our own. His takes the least effort, but it does not always appear quickest and all too often we impatiently and repeatedly take back from him the job of navigation. Moses understood the benefit of letting God lead him to safe and fruitful pasture.

It is also interesting that the leadership model chosen by God for Moses was not that of a King or General - as were Saul, David, Solomon, and those that came after. Moses was a Prophet and Judge. (Exodus 18:13) This is God's first choice for his earthly leaders, and it was only after the people petitioned God for a king like the other nations that God agreed to change the system. (1 Samuel 8) Interestingly, when Messiah returns at the end of this age to establish his kingdom, it too will be marked with many of the elements of judgeship. (John 5:30) Moses' father well summarized Moses' job description as a Judge:

...You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. [Exodus 18:19-20]

God does not prescribe every action we can take. He has given us some general laws for relating to him and to each other, and there is much we are free to do with our time that is not covered by the heavenly legal system. God wants us to enter into a legal agreement with him (covenant) that specifies the blessings he will give us for obeying a set of laws of living. It also holds him accountable for those blessings if we are obedient.

Characteristics of Moses' Leadership

1. Moses was, first, a friend of God. (Exodus 33:11-13) He was also a servant in God's kingdom (Deut. 34:5) who was uniquely graced with a face to face relationship. (Deut. 34:10, Numbers 12:8) He heard from God unusually clearly, so that he could speak God's will to the people as a reliable prophet. (Exodus 4:12) God worked dramatic miracles through Moses when God wanted to demonstrate his superiority over all other gods.
2. Moses was called the most humble man on the earth. (Numbers 12:3) One of the attributes of God is that he is "jealous" (Exodus 34:14) and expects to get all the credit due for blessing the people. God can therefore only delegate real authority to that man who is humble enough not to take for himself the credit for God's works, and mature enough not to become prideful at being chosen to be God's ambassador.
3. Moses performed supernatural signs in God's name. The signs were given to validate God's message to Pharaoh and to the Hebrew people as delivered through Moses in his role as God's prophet. Since it was God's message, Moses only performed signs that were explicitly pre-authorized by God. He never expected to perform a sign that had not been shown to him in advance. Anything else would have been presumption and subject Moses to the punishment of a false prophet. (Deut. 18:20)
4. Moses was absolutely obedient. A common refrain is repeated throughout the Torah. God would make a request such as:

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying..."

And Moses would respond.

"Thus Moses did; according to all that the LORD had commanded him, so he did."

Never do we read that Moses ignored God, or committed to do something and then failed to follow through. He was prone to argue with God, and to negotiate with Him regarding the fate of the Hebrews, but never did he fail to do what was asked of him.

5. Moses accumulated nothing for himself, despite serving as God's chosen leader. (Numbers 16:15) He lived only on his portion of the Lord's tithe as given to the Levites. He never had an inheritance of land to leave his family, and was too busy serving the people from morning to night to raise his own flocks. (Exodus 18:13)
6. Moses desired revelation from God of God's character and nature. This gave him wisdom for leadership – the same gift later requested and given to King Solomon. It was the key to Moses' nearly perfect obedience.

"Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight..." [Exodus 33:13]

7. Moses was a standard bearer for God. He not only told the people what God said about many issues, he also advocated for God before the people. He represented God's presence when God's Presence was not visible. For example, when the Hebrews were attacked during their journey by the Amalekites, Moses stood on a high place and kept the staff of God elevated in his hands signifying God's Presence and authority over the battle. (Exodus 17:8-13) Moses named the place "*The LORD is my Banner*".

Moses reminded the people during their trials that God had made a covenant with them, and that God's Kingdom was worthy of their perseverance. He repeatedly urged them to trust in God's goodness and protection. The scripture below is an example of his exhortation.

But Moses said to the people, "Do not fear! Stand by and see the salvation of the LORD which He will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you have seen today, you will never see them again forever. The LORD will fight for you while you keep silent." [Exodus 14:13-14]

The only serious mistake Moses is recorded as making during his time of leadership was to strike a rock rather than speaking to it. God had ordained that water would be provided for the people if Moses commanded the rock to release it. Moses expressed his anger with the lack of faith around him by striking it instead. (Numbers 20:11) God vindicated His own name by fulfilling what he had ordained, but rebuked Moses for his lack of obedience. The punishment prohibited Moses from entering the Promised Land. As a standard bearer for God, Moses had no right to minister in anger and disobedience. It did not reflect God's character, or the humble servant-hood demanded by God.

8. Moses waited on God for revelation. He spent lots of time in God's presence, both in the tabernacle and praying elsewhere. We are told that his meeting with God on Mount Sinai continued for 40 days and nights (i.e., a "long time"), during which Moses went without food and drink. (Exodus 34:28) Fasting alone before God is a basic skill of spiritual living because quieting the body and focusing the mind opens the spirit to receive revelation.
9. Moses interceded with God on behalf of the people. Intercession is intensified prayer that captures God's heart for something and moves Him to action. It is described by the Prophet Ezekiel as standing in a breach made in the city wall to defend the opening against the entry of the enemy. (Ezekiel 22:30) Moses agreed with God that the Hebrew people he was leading were an argumentative and ungrateful lot. Yet he never failed to stand before God and petition for their needs and their forgiveness. Moses is repeatedly described as "crying out" to God in desperation. (Exodus 15:25, 17:4) God is repeatedly shown to heed his servant's prayer.

This is particularly remarkable given that God on multiple occasions was prepared to do away with or abandon the people after their repeated violations of his covenant. We are given imagery of Moses standing between God and the people to literally block God's wrath from falling upon them. (See for example Exodus 32:11-14, 32:31-34, 34:8-9). Moses appealed not to the people's innocence, but to God's nature as a loving and forgiving parent. One of the best known intercessory prayers of all spiritual literature is found in Numbers 14:13-19.

10. Moses corrected the people when necessary. Exodus 32 provides a graphic example of the responsibility leadership has for maintaining order. Without it, we are prone to unrestrained behavior. (Exodus 32:25) Moses was forced to act in his delegated authority as the mouthpiece of God and the symbol of His Presence. He first pleaded with God not to destroy the multitude, (Exodus 32:10-14) and then took action in God's name to bring the order required. (Exodus 32:20, 32:26-29)
11. Moses avoided doing God's job. When the people had a need he brought it before God, waited for the answer, and did everything required in obedience. Whenever the people challenged Moses' authority, he "fell facedown" before God and let God be his defense. (Exodus 16:8, 17:2; Numbers 12, 14, 16, 17, 20) As a result, God always vindicated him and his

leadership. When we do what God tells us to, we do not need to apologize for the outcome. It is God's to work out. When we take on the responsibility for our own defense, we remove that responsibility from God's shoulders. Invariably this is a poor choice.

Application

There are no case studies of which this author is aware that describe a contemporary, large business built solely through the leading of God's Spirit and the strict obedience of its managers. Such a business would bathe all its activities in prayer, hire only those appointed by God, and pursue only those projects or customers that have been divinely selected. Decision-making would rest on God's will and await revelation of his will. While most businessmen are comfortable with the notion of submission to authority, including their accountability to shareholders or a Board of Directors, they are not trained at all to serve as priests. There is nothing in modern commerce that suggests a person should lead as Moses did.

But why? Companies are congregations of workers, as are cities and nations. If God would enter into covenant with a group of people 3,000 years ago, and he remains forever unchanging, would he not do the same today? There are two responses to this question. First, God himself sovereignly ordains and calls his leaders to their commercial mission, just as he called Moses out of the desert. Presumably this calling is special and not frequent, for as God told Moses regarding the Hebrews, "I have set you apart from the peoples [nations] to be Mine". (Leviticus 20:26) Second, the Hebrews had been among the Egyptians for 400 years and were increasingly abused by them. They cried out as a nation to God for deliverance. Today, a business in transition has a variety of ways to address growth issues or a significant loss of businesses. There are credit markets, government support programs, bankruptcy and liquidation laws, and a host of other resources available to the chief executive. Prayer is rarely seen as the first and only item on the list. In the case of the Hebrews, there was no other deliverance but through God.

Many faith-filled businessmen do pray for their businesses. Some even commit their businesses to God and covenant that a portion of the profits will be used to support the Church. But it is rare for a person to start a business from scratch with sufficient faith to allow God to bring all the necessary relationships and circumstantial favor to do something extraordinary for His Kingdom. Such a leader must be a priest first and a businessman second, as Moses was a Prophet first and a Judge second.

Running a nation or a business in God's name means that the leader is operating as God's ambassador in the earth. All the company does must reflect God's character of love, holiness, and covenantal relationship. The leader is allowed no glory for himself; all must be publicly attributed to the God who leads the people out and in as corporate shepherd. The leader is acknowledging that God is CEO and the manager's role is just to deal with the daily chores the CEO has specified. There is no room for ego or self-profit.

Yet more difficult is leading other people who do not see God's plan or vision clearly. The people are prone to rebel when they see with rational human eyes the need for action or opportunities missed. People naturally want to build on momentum and "strike while the iron is hot". Worse, when things get tight and jobs are on the line, it is hard to wait upon God's Spirit for direction or open doors. Workers in trouble expect bosses to take action on their behalf. The Kings of Israel invariably failed when they did not consult God for his strategy before a battle. It is hard to fall facedown before the people and God until God's vindication or deliverance comes. It is hard to be a standard-bearer when things look lost and God has not yet intervened. It is hard not to take God's responsibility for deliverance upon ourselves. This type of leadership is just plain hard.

The wisdom to know God's will and to lead effectively results from hearing accurately in the Spirit. Shortly before Moses' death, God instructed Moses to impart a portion of Moses' leadership anointing. Moses was uniquely both a Prophet and leader of the people. Joshua would be a leader filled with the Spirit of Wisdom, but he would not converse with God "face-to-face" as did Moses. As a result, he would require the assistance of Aaron's son Eleazar, the high Priest who would consult the Urim on Joshua's behalf. The Urim and Thummim were stones that exhibit a special behavior when prophetic revelation from God was supplied.

*"You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey {him.}
"Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, {both} he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." [Num 27:20-21]*

Godly leadership requires a combination of revelation, and wisdom to apply that revelation. It is rare that this can be found in one person. God appears to spread the responsibility around so none of us ever becomes confident in our abilities.

Running a business that is truly led of God is hard, because it is a foreign notion to the world. But if God is really in it, we can be confident that he will always vindicate His name so long as his human leaders remain humble ambassadors. It will be wonderful to one day read such a case study in the Harvard Business Review.

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