

A Biblical Case Study of the Leadership of Moses

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Dannetta B. Sparks

Beulah Heights University

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One of the more fascinating studies in biblical leadership is provided in the Old Testament historical record concerning the leadership of Moses. The narratives of Genesis 37-Exodus 4, presented under the overarching structure of three periods of forty years each as viewed through the lens of the wilderness, introduce the reader to Moses' life beginning in the wilderness and invariably, ending in the wilderness. It is here that he leads a group of slaves to the Promised Land. Boers (2015) posits that Moses might be one of the greatest Old Testament leadership figures but, his story with all its' accomplishments is not an unambiguously positive leadership narrative (p. 32). Nevertheless, the narratives of Moses' life afford the reader a careful study of the idiosyncratic personality of Moses.

The narrative of the first forty years of his life shows Moses living as Pharaoh's son which gave him the benefit of the finest training in the world at that time. Pharaoh Ramses decrees the death of all Hebrew children, but Moses, placed in a basket in the Nile by his mother, is taken by a royal princess and raised as the brother of the heir to the throne of Egypt, Memefita (Exodus 2:3-6). Moses' life were spent in Egypt, learning first from his biological mother, now his nurse maid, about God (for 12 years), and then learning from Pharaoh the skills needed to run Egypt. Through all of the incredible advantages, Moses after that he learned that was an Israelite, yearned for the fellowship of his people. Moses chose to identify himself with a band of foreign slaves, rather than to retain his inheritance and the advantages of Egypt. In God's leadership arena the character of a person is revealed in the choices he makes in life. So it was with Moses.

When Moses was about 40 he saw one of his own people being beaten, and he tried to take things into his own hands. He killed the Egyptian and because of this impulsive act he had

to flee from Egypt and from Pharaoh. The result of these events was Moses' first trip to the wilderness, in the region that later was the wilderness through which the Israelites wandered. Moses fled to the wilderness to escape the wrath of the king. Moses spent the next 40 years working as a shepherd for Jethro in Midian. God needed to teach Moses patience and trust, virtues that were necessary to effectuate his future as a leader. Working with the sheep day after day taught him both. The Bible says that Moses became the meekest man on earth ([Numbers 12:3](#)). During his years of exile, Moses meets his future wife Zipporah, Jethro's daughter.

When Moses was 80 years old the next major incident in his life was his encounter with God at the burning bush ([Exodus 3:1-15](#)). God told him to return to Egypt and He would free the Israelites from slavery. God gave Moses specific directions on what to do and say. It was here where God called Moses to be the savior of His people. Despite his initial excuses and outright request that God send someone else, Moses agreed to obey God. God promised to send Aaron, Moses' brother, along with him. When God finally did call him into service, Moses was resistant. The man of action early in his life, Moses, now 80 years old, became overly timid, whiny and, lacked confidence as a leader. Burns, Shoup, and Simmons (2015) opine that it is noteworthy that biblical leaders commonly receive their roles unexpectedly, are unwillingly to embrace their roles or view themselves as ungifted and unworthy of leadership. Moses is a notable example of this- offering almost two chapters full of excuses for his inability to lead. Moses and Aaron confront the Pharaoh, demanding that he free the Israelites. Only after the tenth plague - the killing of the Egyptian firstborn - does the Pharaoh allow them to depart.

The third and final chapter in Moses' life is the chapter that Scripture spends the most time chronicling, namely, his role in the redemption of Israel. After the exodus, Moses led the people to the edge of the Red Sea where God provided another saving miracle by parting the waters and allowing the Hebrews to pass to the other side while drowning the Egyptian army ([Exodus 14](#)). Moses led the

children of Israel out of Egypt and to the Jordan River and- into the wilderness. Moses essentially had responsibility over two million Hebrew refugees and his disrespectful sister Miriam. When things began to wear on him, his father-in-law, Jethro, suggested that he delegate responsibility to other faithful men, a lesson that many people in authority over others need to learn (Exodus 18). At Meribah, Moses struck the rock in anger in order to provide water for the people. However, he didn't give God the glory, nor did he follow God's precise commands. Because of this, God forbade him from entering the Promised Land and Joshua led the people there.

Moses brought the people to the foot of Mount Sinai where the Law was given and the Old Covenant established between God and the newly formed nation of Israel ([Exodus 19—24](#)). Wilderness experiences can be discouraging experiences. Deuteronomy 1:2 records that it should have taken only eleven days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea, which was on the border of the Promised Land. Yet, it took the children of Israel forty years to make the journey through the wilderness. Boers (2015) references Gnuse (2011) who so strongly opines that Moses resembled a king (proclaiming laws, leading people) but his was an alternative kingship:

His kingdom was one of slaves, he led no worship in a beautiful temple, he had no palace, he wore no regalia, he possessed no wealth, and his retainers were few and humbled in origin- Aaron, Miriam, and Joshua. His temple was a craggy mountain in the wilderness and therein was the true God to be found, not in the posh palaces or ornate temples of settled society. Moses was not a real king by the world's standards: he was an antiking.... Moses became the ultimate indictment of kings and rulers in this world and Yahweh provided the indictment (pp.53-55).

## Questions

1. What early experiences in Moses' life led to the loss of leadership confidence as an adult?

2. Why did God send Israel through the wilderness?
  
3. As leaders, what lessons can be learned from Moses' wilderness experiences and how would we apply that to our experience?

References

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