

MOSES – THE ULTIMATE LEADER

Preface: Many of Moses' experiences in receiving the Ten Commandments from God are included in this article as well as in another article entitled "The Ten Commandments- The Text." Moses and the Ten Commandments are inseparable.

This account begins when the children of Israel, under Moses' leadership, were encamped in front of Mt. Sinai. (Exodus 19:2) It was there that God gave His Ten Commandments to mankind verbally. Moses spoke later of that experience in Deuteronomy 4:36: "Out of heaven He let you hear His voice, that He might instruct you; on earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire."

The occasion of God speaking to the entire assembly of the children of Israel was very frightening to them because it was accompanied by thunderings, lightnings, a thick cloud on the mountain and the sound of a trumpet that was very loud. (Exodus 19:16) The mountain was shrouded in smoke "because the Lord descended upon it in fire...and the whole mountain quaked greatly." (Exodus 19:18 NKJV)

All of this is important because it revealed the heart of the people and the heart of Moses toward God. When the people saw these fearful things, "They trembled and **stood afar off.**" (Exodus 20:18 NKJV) They were very much afraid that if God spoke directly to them and not through an intermediary (Moses) that they might die. (Exodus 20:19) On the other hand, "Moses **drew near** the thick darkness where God was." (Exodus 20:21 NKJV) The difference between the people and Moses? The people wanted to serve God **from afar** and Moses was eager to serve God and **be with Him close up!** What a lesson for us in the present day.

Moses' time with God in the thick darkness described in Exodus 20:21 became an opportunity for God to give Moses many practical ordinances in addition to the Ten Commandments that He had just spoken. These additional ordinances cover many subjects and are recorded in Exodus 20:23-26; 21:1-36; 22:1-31; and 23:1-33. Moses shared these ordinances with the people and then made a written record of all these words of the Lord. (Exodus 24:3-4)

The next assignment for Moses was to come up to the Lord with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders of Israel to worship Him **from afar.** (Exodus 24:1) "And **Moses alone** shall come **near the Lord,** but they shall **not come near;** nor shall the people go up with him." (Exodus 24:2 NKJV) After ordering burnt offerings and peace offerings to be made to the Lord at the foot of the mountain, Moses and Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel went up "and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity." (Exodus 24:10 NKJV) I can say with full Scriptural backing that they saw only God's feet and **not** His face. Later on, Moses wanted to see God's glory, presumably God's face. But God said to Moses: "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." (Exodus 33:20 NKJV) In John 1:18 (NKJV) we read this: "No one has seen God at any time." And again, in John 6:46 (NKJV): "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father."

Notwithstanding, this group of men whom God invited to come part of the way up the mountain of God were treated to see the feet of God on sapphire pavement, something only a few in Scripture have seen. They were also given something to eat and drink. (Exodus 24:11) One other comment and we will move on. Nadab and Abihu (2 sons of Aaron) were among this

select group to see God (His feet) and be part of an exclusive banquet prepared by God. This is very curious to me because somewhat later (Leviticus 10:1-2) they were guilty of offering profane or common fire to the Lord in their censers with incense placed on their fires. God could not allow the common fire to be a counterfeit for His holy fire not to be mixed with the holy incense. Therefore He consumed them with His fire and they died. They can never say that they had no opportunity to know the awe, the reverence of being close to God and to esteem Him and the priesthood as holy.

Now we will begin to see the depth of character of Moses toward God. He called Moses to “come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the Law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them.” (Exodus 24:12 NKJV) As usual, as Moses went up Mt. Sinai, the mountain of God. “...a cloud covered the mountain.” (Exodus 24:15 NKJV) The next three verses, Exodus 24:16-18 (NKJV), give us a pretty good idea of Moses’ agenda while on the mountain. It involved considerable waiting on God for the revelation of His Law and commandments. These same verses also give us some idea why the Israelites began to think Moses might not live to come back down to them. Exodus 24:16-18 (NKJV): “Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain, and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.” No doubt without food or water.

Not only did God give Moses the two tablets of the Ten Commandments as He had promised, He spoke extensively about the Tabernacle, its furnishings and its governing priesthood and prescribed apparel for the priests. God even told Moses who to appoint as priests and how to consecrate them for their duties in the Tabernacle. He also told Moses to gather the various materials for everything needed to complete the Tabernacle by conducting a free will offering from within the congregation of Israel. Lastly, God gave Moses the names of the skilled craftsmen in the camp who would be able to accomplish the intricate work of the Tabernacle, having been given the wisdom of God to do so. God told Moses to speak to these “gifted artisans” so they would know what to make and God’s pattern for each item to be made.

When God was finished speaking to Moses, He released him to return to the camp with the two tablets of stone upon which God had written the Ten Commandments. God spoke urgently to Moses: “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.” (Exodus 32:7 NKJV) The people had “gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, ‘Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’” (Exodus 32:1 NKJV) So Aaron abetted their insistence on making a god by collecting gold which was molded in the likeness of a calf. “Then they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” (Exodus 32:4 NKJV) Their idolatry immediately blinded their eyes to the truth. They began their rebellious, idolatrous outcry by referring to Moses as the one who brought them out of Egypt, but abruptly attributed their deliverance from Egypt to their new molded god – the golden calf. (Exodus 32:1, 4)

Aaron did not help solve this deteriorating situation by building an altar to this false god and proclaiming a feast day to the Lord (or to the Golden calf). The people “rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” (Exodus 32:6 NKJV) At this point, under the influence of prevalent idolatry in the congregation, the word “play” really meant that they engaged in unrestrained lewd

dancing and behavior. Without question, the Israelites had “turned aside quickly out of the way which I (God) commanded them.” (Exodus 32:8 NKJV)

God was so angry that He wanted to consume the nation of Israel and start over by establishing a new nation emanating from Moses. However, Moses pleaded earnestly with God not to do as He intended but to “relent from this harm to Your people.” (Exodus 32:12 NKJV) Finally, “...the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.” (Exodus 32:14 NKJV)

When Moses arrived in the camp, he was carrying the two tablets God had given him to use in teaching the people. But when Moses saw the idol and the lewd dancing, he was furious with anger and “...cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.” (Exodus 32:19 NKJV) But his anger did not stop there. He also “...took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and **made** the children of Israel drink it.”(Exodus 32:20 NKJV) I wonder if, in his actions of extreme anger, Moses was really saying in his heart – the covenant has been broken and the idol has been utterly destroyed. Now, Israel, which will it be from here on out? Covenant or idolatry??

God then brought heavy punishment on the people for their great sin of idolatry. But God’s determination not to go any farther toward the Land of Promise with Israel was of even greater concern to Moses than anything else. God told Moses that He would very likely decimate the nation of Israel before they could reach Canaan if He went with them. So He would send His angel with them but would not accompany them any farther Himself.

Moses enjoyed a very close friendship with God as evidenced by the following: “So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friends.” (Exodus 33:11 NKJV) So Moses was able to question God to see if He would change His decision and go with him and with the people to the Land of Promise. Finally, God said: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14 NKJV) Moses underscored his gratitude to God for His change of decision by saying: “...If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here.” (Exodus 33:15 NKJV) Moses really said with this statement to God – If You’re not moving, neither am I because I want to be with you! That was always Moses’ passion, but the strength of that passion became greater as he drew near to God on a consistent basis.

“And the Lord said to Moses, ‘cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. So be ready in the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain.’” (Exodus 34:1-2 NKJV) This would be another forty days and nights with God in the thick cloud atop Mt. Sinai. During that time, God wrote the Ten Commandments on the new set of stone tablets that Moses brought up with him. God also proclaimed His own name and character qualities to Moses, causing Moses to bow his head and worship God. Other items that God discussed included receiving His people back to Himself to perform marvelous works in their midst, with a warning to them to remain loyal to Him and to worship Him alone. He referred to the people’s idolatry with the making and worshipping of the golden calf by saying: “You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.” (Exodus 34:17 NKJV) Finally, God commanded the people to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (the Feast of Passover), the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) and the First fruit Offering to the house of the Lord your God. (Exodus 34:18-26)

God then told Moses to write all of these things that He had just said because they were a covenant with him (Moses) and with all the people of Israel. (Exodus 34:27) Moses was **with** the Lord for forty days and nights and during that entire time “he neither ate bread nor drank

water.” (Exodus 34:28 NKJV) Not too long before this time He had earlier been **with** God for forty days and nights, presumably also without food and water.

The time interval between these two segments of forty days and nights **with** God (and **without** food and water) is not clear. The events recorded in Exodus chapters 32 and 33 provide the benchmark for that time interval but not the precise time period. It could have been as few as 10 to 14 days or as many as perhaps 3 or 4 weeks. In any case, Moses fasted for a total of 80 days with only about 2 to 4 weeks between the two 40 day segments. This could only have been possible by Moses being in the actual presence and glory of God for all 80 days. The glory of God gave Moses the strength that would later be captured in Deuteronomy 8:3 (NKJV): “...man shall not live by bread alone; but **man lives by every word** that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”

In addition to Moses’ supernatural ability to fast because of being in the presence and glory of God for an extended period of time, another clear evidence that he had been with God became visibly apparent: “...that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him (with God).” (Exodus 34:29 NKJV) When Moses came into the camp, his own brother Aaron and the rest of the people were afraid to come close to him, perhaps thinking he was an apparition. But when Moses identified himself to them, the rulers in the congregation came near Moses so he could talk with them. (Exodus 34:30-31) Finally, the rest of the congregation came close to Moses and he told them everything that God had told him on Mt, Sinai.

Moses’ shining face was a distraction to the people when they saw it so when he was teaching them the things God had commanded him to teach he covered his face with a veil. Then when Moses went before the Lord, he took his veil off until he came out of God’s presence, at which time he put the veil on again. (Exodus 34:34-35 NKJV) Moses was unquestionably a reflection of the glory of God because he had spent a lot of **time** with Him!

Looking ahead in Scripture, it is no surprise to me that Moses was one of the two persons (with Elijah) who appeared to Jesus, Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses and God together on a mountain seems to be the perfect combination. But the real reason for referring to this event is to allude to Jesus’ transfiguration in front of the three disciples whom He brought with Him. It is described in Matthew 17:2 (NKJV) in the following way: “...**His face shone like the sun**, and His clothes became as white as the light.” It is remarkable that both Moses and Jesus experienced, each in his own lifetime, exceedingly shining faces that reflected the true glory of God upon them. First Moses, the conveyor of the Law. Then Jesus, the fulfillment of the Law and conveyor of grace and truth. (John 1:17 and Matthew 5:17) First Moses, who required a veil over his face when he taught the Law. Then Christ, in whom the veil is taken away when one turns to the Lord. (Exodus 34:33-35 and 2 Corinthians 3:13-14, 16)

Looking through all of Scripture, Moses become one of the most notable leaders ever chosen by God, but his human weaknesses sometimes became quite evident.

(1) When God called Moses to be the deliverer who would bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, he tried to excuse himself from the assignment:

- (a) “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11 NKJV)
- (b) If the Israelites ask me Your name, what shall I tell them? (Exodus 3:13-14)

(c) Suppose the Israelites don’t believe what I tell them and say You

didn't appear to me? (Exodus 4:1)

(d) "O my Lord, I am not eloquent"...but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (Exodus 4:10 NKJV) Moses followed this by saying: "...O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send." (Exodus 4:13 NKJV) (Please send somebody else to do this job). Later on, Moses said to God the following: "The children of Israel have not heeded me. How then shall Pharaoh heed me, for I am of uncircumcised lips?" (Exodus 6:12 NKJV) (one who does not speak well)

(2) Moses became exceedingly frustrated and angry with the people at the water of Meribah:

(a) The children of Israel were encamped at Kadesh and the people had no water (Numbers 20:1-2)

(b) The congregation complained to Moses and Aaron, using their often-repeated complaints that were **very** frustrating to Moses (Numbers 20:3-5)

(c) God told Moses to "speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water...." (Numbers 20:8 NKJV)

(d) However, Moses' frustration and anger toward the children of Israel because of their incessant complaining caused him to **strike** the rock twice with his rod rather than **speak** to the rock before the assembly as God had told him to do. (Numbers 20:10-11)

(e) Despite Moses' serious mistake, God gave the congregation plenty of water for all the people and their animals. But Moses (and Aaron) were severely penalized: "**Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.**" (Numbers 20:12 NKJV) Although Moses appealed God's decision in the matter, God finally told Moses that His decision would stand by saying: "Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter." (Deut. 3:26 NKJV)

CONCLUSION

Finally, the true measure of a Godly leader is not apparent when everything is going well all the time, when there is no complaining or rebellion within the people being governed. So when Moses finally agreed with God to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt toward the Land of Promise, he quickly learned that it would take everything God saw in him to deal with the repetitive complaining, murmuring, and grumbling of the assembly of God's people.

Moses began his life's work for God as a very tentative leader; but soon became the strongest of leaders. He spoke boldly to Pharaoh, he introduced the Israelites to God and His Law, he often asked God to pardon Israel's iniquities and his intercession for a disobedient people caused God to spare Israel's total destruction three times. But perhaps the most amazing leadership quality ever displayed by Moses (or anyone) came when God abruptly shut the door on any possibility of his entrance into the Promised Land. But Moses, even in his extreme disappointment, actually prayed that God would set a good man in place as the new leader of Israel so that "the congregation of the Lord may not be like sheep which have no shepherd." (Numbers 27:17 NKJV) Imagine! Moses' concern was still for the "sheep," the children of Israel, **who caused him to lose his temper** at Meribah so that his life's goal was denied. But there's more – Moses, despite the loss he must have felt, did **everything** that God commanded him to do in preparing Joshua to be the next leader of Israel. (Numbers 27:18-23 and Deut. 3:28)

Although Moses was denied entrance into the land promised to Israel, he certainly was not denied access to the holy hill of the Lord. His appearance on the Mt. of Transfiguration with Jesus should be proof of his acceptance into heaven despite a major disobedience that cost him his life's dream. Moses' legacy as a leader is of one "...who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully." (Psalm 24:4 NKJV) Leaders in the church! Take another look at Moses!

See also: "Unfulfilled Dreams"
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