

LESSONS ON LEADERSHIP from Moses and the people in the wilderness

Everyone who studies biblical leadership studies Moses, but in this study there is a dual (double top) focus, on Moses, the leader, and on the people that he led.

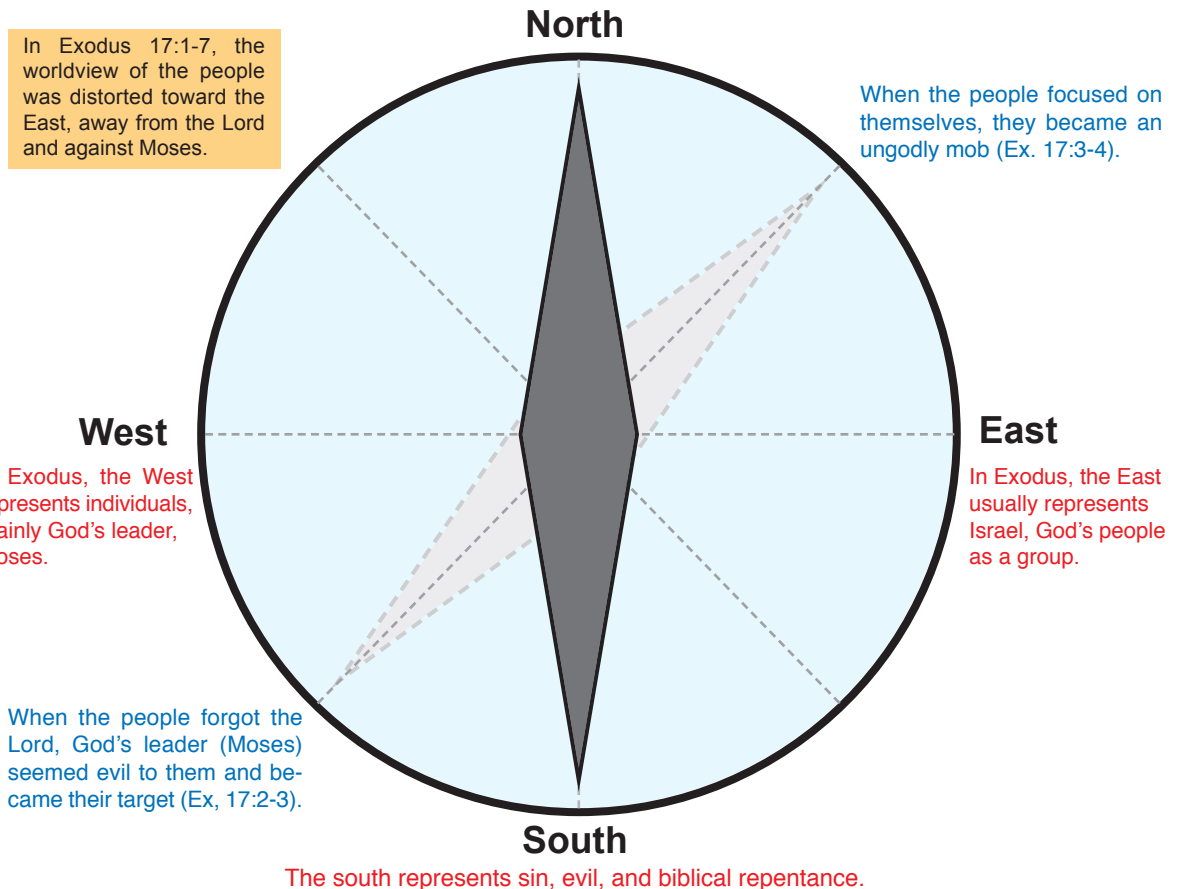
The commentary that follows is from a [Biblical Leadership](#) class at fictitious Quest Bible College.

Dr Quest (on being a good leader and staying on course)

What does a good leader need to know? The most basic answer is that God's man must know how to follow God's instructions. Noah was not a ship designer, but God gave him the best possible design for the ark (Gen. 6:15-16). Likewise, Moses did not know what was the best way to deal with a rebellious mob, but God told him exactly what to do (17:4-6).

So a godly leader will put God first and set a straight course to do what God calls for and avoid what He forbids. That's the point made with two ends of the needle on our worldview compass [below]. Moses stayed on course, but the people did not. They allowed their natural but selfish concern (17:3) to lead them astray by finding fault with Moses and the Lord. [See below.] — If you have any trouble with the diagram, just hang in there! It will all become more clear as we continue.

The North represents the Lord, God's Word, and biblical faith.



Dr. Quest (opening question)

Ok, as we begin, what are your main thoughts on Moses as a leader in Ex. 17:1-7?

Frank (on the two water-from-the-rock passages)

Well, that's easy! He did far better the first time he hit the rock to get water in Exodus 17 than he did the second time in Numbers 20. Frankly, maybe we should be comparing the two incidents.

Dr. Quest (on the two water-from-the-rock passages)

We will some, Frank. Notice the Numbers 20 references in lines A-5 and B-3 [below]. Did Moses keep his cool the first time and lose it the second time (A-5)? If so, was it just because he reacted differently to the people, or was his attitude toward the Lord different as well? To check that out, think carefully about what the Lord said to Moses in Num. 20:12.

Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Moses was God's man.
A-1	() He led the people to Rephidim, as the Lord commanded (17:1).
A-2	() The Lord was with Moses (4:12, 17:6-7, Num. 3:1, Josh. 1:5, 3:7).
A-3	() As God's prophet, he boldly rebuked the sinful people (17:2, 7).
A-4	() He asked good questions (17:2, 4); the people did not (17:3, 7).
A-5	() He did not let the people upset him (17:4, Num. 20:2-13).
A-6	() He was greatly feared (14:31, 17:2, 34:30, Josh. 3:7).
A-7	() He was a wise leader who knew what to do (17:4).
A-8	() He prayed and the Lord answered him (17:4-6).
A-9	() He could perform miracles (15:24-27, 17:2-6).
B	() Moses did not have much human help.
B-1	() Joshua's help is mentioned later, in 17:8-14.
B-2	() Other helpers were chosen later (18:24-26).
B-3	() Aaron is not mentioned in 17:1-8. (Num. 20:2-3.)
B-4	() The people were trouble rather than help (17:2, 7, 9).
B-5	() It was important for the elders to go with Moses (17:5-6).
B-6	() Some of the elders in 17:6 may have become judges in 18:25.
B-7	() God's provision through the rock (17:6) prefigured Christ (1 Cor. 10:4).
B-8	() It is far better to be helped by God than by men (Psa. 108:12, 146:3).
B-9	() Moses did not really need much human help, and neither do we (Psa. 60:11).

Indy (on bad social interaction)

I love the way the second worksheet [below] brings out how messed up the people were. Moses was a great and godly man, but the people got together and blamed him for everything (A-1). Think about what was happening in verse three. It's more than just a list of complaints! The people were interacting with one another as they spoke and prepared to pick up stones (17:3-4, C-5). We must think about the evil social interaction in the passage, as well as what was said.

Socie (on good social interaction)

As usual, Indy makes everything social sound evil, but what about the elders who were called to witness the miracle (17:5-6)? There was more than one of them, and they all would have reported what they saw. So to be fair, we need to think about **that** social interaction as well. Indy, would never mention it. Two of my favorite lines on the worksheets do (B-5, E-3).

	Mark the lines below as either correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).
C	() The angry people lacked water.
C-1	() Their lives were in danger (17:3).
C-2	() They feared for their children's lives (17:3).
C-3	() They were worried about their livestock (17:3).
C-4	() They had good reason to complain to Moses (17:1-3, 7).
C-5	() Their complaining unified them into an angry mob (17:3-4).
D	() The selfish people lacked faith.
D-1	() They went by what they saw (17:1-3, 6).
D-2	() They doubted the Lord's real presence (17:3, 7).
D-3	() They used Moses to get what they wanted (17:1-6).
D-4	() They had seen the Lord provide water earlier (15:22-25).
D-5	() Remembering God is a key aspect of living by faith (2 Pet. 1:12-18).
D-6	() By attacking Moses, they showed that they had forgotten God (17:2-4, 7).
D-7	() Their complaints show that they were unbelievers (Psa. 95:8-11, Heb. 3:16-18).
E	() Moses and the people were reconciled.
E-1	() The people accepted Moses' leadership after the miracle.
E-2	() The final verse (17:7) shows that the people truly repented.
E-3	() The elders probably played a key role in the reconciliation (17:5-6).
E-4	() The victory in 17:8-13 shows that conflict with Moses had ended (32:25-29).

Commentary from various points of view as overheard in a [Biblical Leadership](#) class at imaginary Quest Bible College

Dr. Quest (on good and bad questions)

We have heard from Socie already, but what are some other favorite worksheet lines? Personally, I like line A-4. Good leaders ask good questions, but rebels do not. Yet, after the miracle, the people would have asked the elders what they say (B-4, E-3). That was an improvement.

George (on the livestock complaint)

As a farm boy, I like the line about the livestock (C-3). The animals are always directly impacted before the people. So I suspect the top reason for the complaints was because of the sheep and cattle which were the people's saving and wealth. Sure they spoke loudly about their children being in danger (C-2), but the motives behind their complaints were mixed and based on unbelief (C-4, D).

Pete (on faith and memory)

I love the line about faith requiring remembering what God has done (D-5, 2 Pet. 1:12-18) which the selfish people did not do (D-4). Their minds were on whatever they saw at the moment (D-1).

Indy (on not needing much human help)

Everyone probably knows what my favorite line is. It's the one about Moses not really needing much human help and us not needing it either (B-9). We need God's help (B-8)! Later on Moses had more human assistance (B-1, B-2, B-7), but he had to face down the mob mostly by himself. There was nobody else who could do it for him, other than the Lord. I think that is why Aaron is deliberately left out of the account (B-3, B). [Notice that Aaron is included in the Numbers 20 incident.]

Socie (on needing coworkers)

There goes Indy, again, overlooking the key role of the elders in getting the people to return to Moses (E-1, E-3). Reconciliation is important (E), and a good leader needs coworkers.

Wes (on unbelieving believers)

One of my favorite lines is the one about the people needing to repent. Verse seven does not say that they did (E-2). They went astray with Aaron and against Moses and the Lord again in chapter 32 (E-4). At best, they were unbelieving believers (D-7), who repeatedly needed to return to the Lord. I think that is true of many of us as well, and that's why being a pastor often is so difficult.

Tech (on checking our compass)

The earth's magnetic field is weak. So a compass can give a false reading. Likewise the Lord's leading is not so foolproof that it is impossible to go astray through personal preferences or cultural influences. Thankfully, we can check the way we are going using the Scriptures. Moreover prayer is like a reset button. Good leaders pray because they know that they are fools otherwise (A-7).

Evan (on Christ our Rock)

Hey, what about line B-7, on the rock in Exodus 17 prefiguring Christ, our Savior? Didn't anyone in this class ever read 1 Cor. 10:4? Truly good church leaders, like Paul, proclaim the gospel!