LEADING BY BEING LED

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In Leading By Being Led, Phil McKinney II presents an exegetical examination of Biblical leadership as was demonstrated by two of scripture’s greatest leaders: Moses and Jesus. In particular, scripture points to how these two leaders demonstrated a leading from being led by God. God led both his nation and his church, and he continues to lead his people today. Biblical leadership is built upon following rather than taking the lead. This is a difficult path for most to take. It is human nature to want to take the lead and be in control. However, scripture demonstrates a leadership that is contrary to that of the world and human nature. In Leading By Being Led, readers discover the primary principles of leadership that rely on God’s guidance and direction rather than human will and initiative. This example of a “God who goes before us” is evidenced in five specific ways: (1) prophet, (2) presence (3) provisions, (4) prompting, and (5) passages. An examination of this “following the Father” is demonstrated through Moses and then paralleled in Jesus and is followed by an assessment of the implications for church leadership today.

Leadership is a buzzword in churches today. Many publications have been and are currently being produced with the intent to build-up leaders in the Lord’s church. Unfortunately, much of what is being produced is man-centered and taken from current business models. Yet, Biblical leadership is not man-centered. Instead, Biblical leadership takes its lead from the creator and the descriptions of leadership he laid out in scripture.

From this perspective, Biblical leadership is recognized first as taking its lead
from a God who goes before his people. In the song of Moses and Miriam recorded in Exodus 15, God is recognized as the one who is leading them. “In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.”1 Hence, Biblical leadership is built upon following rather than taking the lead. This is a difficult path for most to take. It is in human nature to want to take the lead and be in control.

However, scripture demonstrates a leadership that is contrary to that of the world and human nature. In fact, Biblical leadership is demonstrated when one moves “from slave of man to servant of the Lord.”2 Howell goes on to state, “The great leaders of the Old Testament are commonly designated ‘servant of the Lord.’ This is the title of honor par excellence for those who discover a joyful abandonment to the will of the Lord.”3 This sort of total abandonment is further seen in New Testament leaders as well.

This article seeks to do an exegetical examination of Biblical leadership as was demonstrated by two of scripture’s greatest leaders: Moses and Jesus. In particular, scripture points to how these two leaders (and others) demonstrated a leading from being led by the Father. God led both his nation and his church and continues to lead today. This example of a “God who goes before us” is evidenced in five specific ways: (1) prophet, (2) presence (3) provisions, (4) prompting, and (5) passages. An examination of this “following the Father” is demonstrated through Moses and then paralleled in Jesus. A brief assessment of the implications for church leadership today follows.

I. GOD LEADING HIS PEOPLE

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt? . . . O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue. . . . O Lord, please send someone else to do it.”4 Have these thoughts ever passed through your mind? These words are what Moses spoke to the Lord when God called him to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses, as is the case with many Biblical leaders, was a reluctant leader (yet, he was not always reluctant—see below). He felt unworthy of the task to the point of asking if someone else could do it. Nonetheless, God had a plan bigger than that of one individual. It was a plan that he himself would unfold to his glory and not to glory of man.

God would lead his people to the promise land as he unfolded his grand metanarrative (redemptive history) in the process. Through this, God demonstrates a pattern for how he led his people. Though this pattern is not laid out in specific terms, it is evident through the experiences of Moses and the Israelites and Jesus and his followers. Woven through this plan is God’s great love for his people and his desire for them to grow and know him better. Love is ultimately God’s greatest form of leadership.

1 Ex 15:13. All scripture references are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.
3 Ibid., 7.
4 Ex 3:11, 4:10, 4:13.
He begins leading the Israelites and the early church with a prophet.

**God Leading Through Prophet (Moses)**

“The LORD used a prophet to bring Israel up from Egypt, by a prophet he cared for him.”

Exodus tells the story of God’s people under the yoke of slavery through Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God hears the Israelites groaning and cries for help and remembers his covenant with Abraham. Concern for his children fills God’s heart. It is time to act. God’s first agenda item to lead his people from slavery is to choose a leader, but not just any leader. His leader must be someone who will follow him first in order to be his voice. In order for that to take place, his prophet must be a man of great humility.

Moses’s first attempt at leadership ended pitifully. In Exodus 2:11-12, Moses witnesses his fellow Hebrews being mistreated by their Egyptians captors. Moses has compassion for his brothers (Israelites) and desires to deliver them. He kills an Egyptian in a feeble attempt to rescue and secretly hides the body. Stuart writes, “These two verses explain how Moses had by this time identified with the Israelites over against the Egyptians and how his zeal against the oppression of his people got him into trouble. This was his first attempt at delivering his people—acting alone and in secret and relying on his own strength and wisdom—and though it failed miserably, it certainly shows the strength of Moses’ sentiments on behalf of his people.”

Moses goes on (Ex 2:13-14) to attempt to bring resolution between two Hebrew brethren. Once again, his attempt (though made with good intentions) failed. He again acts independently and without any authority. Laniak says, “The personal journey of Moses is one that begins with a misplaced sense of his independent capacity as a leader of his ‘own’ people.” His lack of authority and status is the very reason why he acted in secrecy. His Hebrew brothers “challenged his authority” and rebuked his actions through ridicule. While Moses thought he was helping, his “lone-ranger” arrogance placed its recipients in danger. However, God was working this situation for his purposes and ultimate glory. This was the way in which he would humble his future prophet and the leader of his people. As Stuart points out, “Here is God at work in a way that Moses surely did not recognize at the time, just as we can virtually never understand how our own miseries and emergencies, at the time we are experience them, might end up leading to blessing.”

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5 Hos 12:13.
6 Ex 2:23-25.
8 Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherd's After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 87.
Moses leaves (escapes) to enter a “wilderness” time in which God was preparing him for his future role. As Laniak writes, “Moses would one day be the judge of this people (Ex 18), but only after he made his own forty-year sojourn in the wilderness that would later become their temporary home.”

Through this “wilderness experience,” Moses gains a family (which can be a humbling experience) and becomes a shepherd. It is very interesting that God leads Moses to become a shepherd (perhaps foreshadowing the role he would soon take with the Israelite nation). Through a burning bush, Moses encounters the Lord and is called by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. The text reads:

“So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” But Moses said to God, “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

It is evident from this discourse that God would be leading Moses (his prophet) to lead his people (the Israelites) out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. God could have simply spoken and it would be, but he instead chose to use one of his created children to demonstrate his power and love. Moses was reluctant with this call. Stuart writes, “It was not easy for Moses to hear the command of v. 10, with its demand that he go as God’s prophet (‘I am sending you’) to Pharaoh to bring Israel out of Egypt. Not only was Moses to be involved in the exodus but he was to lead it.”

With this understanding, it is evident that God leads his people through human leaders. However, God chooses those leaders, humbles them, and explicitly requires them to listen to his voice and none other. This same pattern is expressed through Christ as God sent him to lead his people.

**God Leading the Church Through Prophet (Jesus)**

“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.”

Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is commonly referred to as a prophet (Lk 7:16, 9:18-19). What is most interesting is his status as a prophet being linked with that of Moses. There are two specific passages that attest to this linkage: Acts 3:14-26 and Luke 9:34-35. Acts 3:14-26 speaks to Jesus as the prophet whom Moses himself foretold (“He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people”). This passage is from Deuteronomy 18:15-19 where Moses warns the Israelites. Bruce speaks to this saying, “The primary reference of these words of Moses is to the institution of prophets in Israel, as a way appointed by God for making his will known to his people. But well before apostolic times this prophecy was interpreted as

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12 Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 87.
13 Ex 3:10–12, italics added.
14 Stuart, *Exodus*, 118.
15 Lk 24:19.
16 Ibid.
pointing to one particular prophet, a second Moses, who would exercise the prophet's full mediatorial function as Moses had done.”

It is inferred that Jesus would then lead God's church in like manner of Moses. Even Jesus “commissioning” is not unlike Moses as seen on the Mount. There, while Jesus was speaking, a cloud came down and enveloped him and his companions. Then a voice was heard that proclaimed, “This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.” The cloud's appearance is representative of not only God's presence, but also (perhaps) a new beginning in and around Jesus not unlike that of Moses. “The cloud's presence seems to be God's answer to Peter's suggestion: no booths are needed since God has wrapped the disciples in his glory and presence. God's very presence is associated with Jesus, through whom they have access to full communion and presence with God.”

It is clear that scripture attests to Jesus as prophet and links him with Moses's leadership. Jesus came to free his people from the yoke of slavery (sin) and lead them to the Promise Land (heaven, God's presence). It is in this fashion that the Lord's church is to continue leading people: From slavery to freedom to promise. It is also important to note that God does not leave his leaders once he has placed them. Instead, God goes with them and his presence is felt every step of the way.

God Leading Through Presence (Pillar of Cloud/Fire)

When God called Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, he also promised, "I will be with you." This statement is theologically deep as it is echoed throughout scripture. This statement is reiterated by the son prior to his heavenly ascent (Mt 28:20). These comforting words were witnessed through God leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Primarily, God's presence was manifested in a pillar of cloud/fire.

God's presence was constantly felt and seen by the Israelites. The text writes, "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people." The pillar of cloud/fire was God's constant abiding presence and was the means by which he led his people. It should not be understood as two separate pillars, but one. Exodus 14:24 reads, “During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.” This is also the same pillar that would cover the mountain and the tent, indicating God's presence and guidance. Stuart rightly notes, “It is clear that there was only one cloudlike

18 Lk 9:35.
20 Ex 3:12.
21 Ex 13:21-22, italics added.
22 Ex 14:24, italics added.
pillar, which represented God’s presence, and that it appeared as a great column of dark cloud when viewed during the bright sunlit day but as a column of fire when viewed at night.”

Yet, the point of the pillar of cloud/fire is clear: God was present and leading. It was evident from the beginning that the Israelites could not go forth without God’s guidance. Laniak says, “YHWH’s presence, physically manifest in the glory-cloud (kāḇôd) and pillar of fire, was the means by which Israel was led (nhh).” Stuart beautifully sums up the purpose of God presence with the Israelites by saying:

By reason of being guided by the pillar, the Israelites knew all day every day that God was present with them. Here was a supernatural, huge, and visible reminder that Yahweh was at the head of his people as they marched or encamped, whether by day or by night. Therefore, even the seemingly erratic route described by 13:20 in combination with 14:1-3 could be trusted because Yahweh was directing them on it. Yahweh chose the odd route—not they. Again, the pillar was not merely a sign from Yahweh—it was Yahweh (“The LOR D went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light,” 13:21). He manifested himself in the form of a pillar of cloud/fire for their benefit.

The pillar of cloud/fire was a constant encouragement that God was near and leading. Even though the path did not make sense at times, it was evident that it was God taking them in that direction. However (as is evident from scripture), that was not enough for the Israelites. In fact, grumbling set in amongst the Israelites and it became clear that presence and guidance was not enough.

**God Leading the Church Through Presence (Incarnation)**

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel’—which means, ‘God with us.’” Jesus is God’s presence. The Greek here, μεθ’ ημῶν ὁ θεός, is best rendered as “God is/will be with us.” “It is the unfolding of the story that will clarify the precise manner in which God’s presence will be manifested.”

His coming marked a new era in which God would be with us always. Matthew also speaks to this, quoting Jesus, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Jesus, as leader, would never leave his followers so that his work of freeing his children would be completed and successful. Jesus’ disciples could not do this work without his leading. France speaks to this saying:

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25 Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 79.
27 Mt 1:22–23.
29 Mt 28:20.
But the presence of Jesus himself among his people (cf. 18:20) ensures that it is not simply a relationship of formal obedience. In context this assurance is focused not on the personal comfort of the individual disciple but on the successful completion of the mission entrusted to the community as a whole. In OT commissioning scenes the assurance of God’s presence was to empower his often inadequate servants to fulfill the task he had called them to (Exod 3:12; 4:12; Josh 1:5, 9; Judg 6:16; Jer 1:8; cf. also the angel sent with the Israelites in Exod 23:20–23). So here it is to the commissioned disciples as they set about their daunting task that the divine presence is promised, without which they cannot be expected to succeed. But the difference now is that it is not God himself who promises to be “with” them, still less an angel sent by him, but the risen Jesus, who has just been declared to stand alongside the Father and the Holy Spirit in heavenly sovereignty. 30

Jesus’ abiding presence is the church’s means for fulfilling the Great Commission. Without his presence, the work would surely fail. As God used his presence to lead his people out of the slavery of Egypt and into the Promise Land, so Jesus’ presence leads his people from the slavery of sin into the Promise Land.

**God Leading Through Provisions (Water, Manna, and Meat)**

Scripture is abundantly clear that God does not ultimately leave his people to squander as he leads them. Instead, he provides for their needs, attempting to help them understand who the provider is. It is interesting to note that three days following the miraculous working of God in crossing the sea, the Israelites already begin to grumble against the Lord. “When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What are we to drink?’” 31 God heard their cry through the voice of his prophet Moses and provided sweet water for them to drink. God led them on to Elim where he also provided them with abundant water. In these two instances, God did a great deal to demonstrate to his people that he was not only present with them, but cared for their needs. Durham speaks to this saying, “Yahweh thus provides for the needs of this people: by purifying polluted water, by guiding them through wasteland to an oasis overflowing with both water and fruit. That is the essential point of this section: Yahweh’s provision for his people.” 32

Continuing on, the Israelites find themselves in the desert with no food. The Israelites once again grumble against God in Exodus 16:2. It is important at this point to directly reference this powerful text:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will

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test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

This is a very powerful passage that provides several theological insights. It is important to list each of these to better understand God’s leadership:

• God will provide for the needs of his people.
• God will use this as a leading point and will test them through the careful instructions he provides. God wants to know if his people will be inclined toward his leading.  

• Moses and Aaron remind and emphasize the Israelites that it was God who was leading them and not Moses or Aaron.
• God’s glory and leading would be visibly evident (in food and cloud).
• Moses and Aaron clearly recognized their roles as leaders as being those who followed the leader and passed on the instructions. Their repeated question of “Who are we?” is indicative of humility and of an understanding of the role of being led while leading (servant leadership).
• The people were grumbling against God and not Moses and/or Aaron.
• This demonstration of God’s power will bring understanding that God is God and there is no other.

While a great deal more could be said concerning God’s leading through provisions, it is sufficient to say here that God provides in order to reveal his presence and demonstrate his leading. The depths of God’s provisions are not at the physical level, but a spiritual one. As Durham notes, “Israel’s grumbling thus becomes occasion

33 Exod 16:4-12, italics added.
34 Stuart provides some good insight into this by saying that the passage should be translated “so that I can test them to see whether or not they will walk by my law.” In other words, the people’s willingness to obey the manna-gathering law ( tôrāḥ) would show God whether or not they would be inclined to keep his covenant law ( tôrāḥ) as revealed at Mount Sinai. It was not just a test to see if they could follow instructions but a test to see if their hearts were inclined to be his covenant people. Stuart, Exodus, 372.
for a response of Yahweh that gives further proof of his Presence. But the report of the grumbling and the anticipation of Yahweh’s response points both to and beyond the provision of food to the provision of Yahweh’s supreme revelation of himself in the entire OT.”35 The Israelites continually struggled with this. God’s only desire in his leading was that his people would listen to, learn from, lift up, and love him. Yet, it was those very things that Israel struggled with the most.

In Deuteronomy 8:2-4 and 8:15-18, Moses reminds the Israelites of their wilderness experience and how God used provisions to not only lead them, but also test their hearts. God led them with the purpose to grow and test them. As Merrill points out, “The Lord had led them through the desert in order to humble and test them about their commitment (v. 2). He did this by allowing them to hunger and then to be fed by the miraculous supply of manna (Exod 16:1-30; Num 11:4-9), an act so clearly supernatural that the people had to recognize that it was all of God and not of themselves (v. 3; cf. Exod 16:32).”36 He goes on to say that, “In fact, the manna symbolized more than mere physical nourishment but the word of God itself (v. 4), for the God who could provide in such a mighty and unexpected way was well worth listening to.”37 The point is that God leads and provides in order to care for and grow his children. This care and growth is to be understood not simply in the temporal sense, but also (and more importantly) in the eternal one.

**God Leading the Church Through Provisions**

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”38 The Father knows exactly what his children need. These things will be added to those who will trust and follow. God simply wants his children to trust him to supply all their needs and through this demonstrate their faith in him.39 Perhaps lack of faith has to do more with what Morris points out, “They have a heavenly Father, and that Father knows all their needs. Since God knows them all, there is not the slightest reason for anxiety. Perhaps we should notice that it is need of which Jesus speaks. His followers may expect their needs to be met, but not necessarily their desires.”40

Yet, it is imperative that his children seek him first and not the things of the world that are temporal. Jesus also speaks to a temporal provision when tempted by Satan. After forty days without food, Satan steps in and encourages him to use his ability to make bread out of the rocks. Jesus’ response is through God’s word and about God’s

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35 Durham, Exodus, 221.
37 Ibid.
38 Mt 6:31-33.
word. He quotes Deuteronomy 8:3 and says, “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Laniak speaks to this saying, “Spiritual sustenance is the ultimate reality to which the feeding miracles (in Exod) refer . . . . The most significant ‘food’ in the wilderness was the Law itself. When Jesus relives Israel’s forty-year wilderness experience in his forty-day temptation, he draws support in his hunger from these very words that come from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4).”

God continues to lead his church today through provisions. However, those provisions may or may not look the same as those given to the Israelites. God desires that his people examine provisions from a spiritual sustenance perspective rather than a temporal consummation.

**God Leading Through Prompting (The Spirit)**

God further led the Israelites through the prompting of his Spirit. This is often overlooked due to the immensity of God’s leading through some of the other areas having already been mentioned. Yet, even in the Old Testament there is evidence of God using his Spirit to direct and lead his people. In Exodus 31 (concerning Bezalel), the text states, “And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” (this is also stated in Exod 35:31). What is interesting to note here is that God does not give him four separate things. Instead, God simply (or maybe not simply) gives Bezalel his Spirit, which in turn provides him the skill, ability, and knowledge necessary to complete the work assigned him by God (in essence, God lives in him to lead him).

This being led by God through his Spirit is furthered supported in the commissioning of Joshua by Moses (and God). The author of Deuteronomy states, “Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit (or Spirit) of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.” As Christensen states, “The ‘spirit of wisdom’ that rested on Joshua was a divine gift to enable him to govern justly, like that which Solomon received in 1 Kgs 3:7-12.” Merrill’s commentary on this passage is most helpful to understand how God uses his Spirit to lead:

The formal act by which the community understood that Joshua was Moses’ successor was the ceremony of “laying on of hands,” a rite that symbolized the transference of covenant authority and responsibility from the one to the other. This physical demonstration either accompanied the impartation of the divine Spirit or marked the recipient as one already endowed by that Spirit (v. 9). Thus

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41 Mt 4:4.
42 Laniak, Shepherds After My Own Heart, 83, addition mine.
43 Ex 31:3.
44 Stuart, Exodus, 650.
45 Dt 34:9.
after Moses had been told that he could not lead the people into the promised land, he was told to “take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him” (Num 27:18; cf. Num 11:16–30; 1 Sam 10:1, 10; 16:13).

The principal gift of the Spirit here was wisdom, a necessary endowment if Joshua was to be able to take Moses’ place and successfully complete the conquest and occupation of Canaan.47

The leadership that God commissioned Moses with evidently came with the indwelling of his Spirit. This enabled both Moses and Joshua to lead the Israelites through God’s leading. As Merrill mentioned above, the primary role of the Spirit’s leading tends to be through God’s wisdom being made manifest through the carrier (specifically, Moses and Joshua). For that reason, it would be safe to say that God imparts his Spirit on those he chooses to lead his people in order that he might lead them “from within” through wisdom, skill, and the like.

**God Leading the Church Through Prompting (The Spirit)**

The words of Jesus speak plainly to the leading of the Spirit:

> And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him... All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.48

This powerful text speaks to the prompting of the Spirit of God as leading the church (God’s people). Köstenberger points out, “The entire section of 14:15-24 envisions the giving of the Spirit subsequent to Jesus’ exaltation, at which time Jesus and the Father will make their dwelling in believers through the Spirit. Jesus’ identification with the Spirit, the “other παράκλητος,” is so strong that he can say that he himself will return to his followers in the person of the Spirit (14:18).”49 The Spirit is not only God’s presence with his people, but the means by which he leads them today. Köstenberger continues saying, “As Jesus’ emissary, the Spirit will have a variety of functions in believers’ lives: he will bring to remembrance all that Jesus taught his disciples (14:26); he will testify regarding Jesus together with his followers (15:26); he will convict the world of sin, (un)righteousness, and judgment (16:8–11); and he will

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47 Merrill, Deuteronomy, 454-455.
guide Jesus’ disciples in all truth and disclose what is to come (16:13). The Spirit has several functions for Christians today, but one of the most important is that of leading and guidance.

God Leading Through Passages (The Law)

God’s Law was one of his greatest means for leading his people. Scripture abounds with reference to the Law and the keeping of it. One of the first instances of a specific law being set down for the Israelites goes back to provision of water at Marah. God not only gives the Israelites what they needed physically, but he also provides them spiritual direction through the giving of a decree and law. Specifically, “If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you.” No matter what, God desired that his people continue to follow his lead by keeping the Law.

A great deal of God’s leading through the Law is found in Deuteronomy. Many passages attest to God’s desire for the Israelites to follow (an indication that the Law is God’s leading through written word) and obey or keep. Here are but a few:

Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them (Dt 5:1).

So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left. Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days (Dt 5:32-33a).

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children, and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates (Dt 6:1-9).

God lay out before the Israelites the ways and requirements for living. It was through these laws (or the Law) that God would lead his people to a better understanding of him (that they may know him better). That required the whole of man:

50 Ibid., 437.
51 Ex 15:26.
heart, soul, and strength (the *Shema*'). The *Shema* constituted the whole of the Law by which the Israelites were to be led. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is the essence of the *Shema*. According to Merrill, the sixteen words found in the Hebrew text constitute “the expression of the essence of all of God’s person and purposes.”

“Hear” or “to hear” is synonymous with “to obey,” especially in regards to covenantal passages such as this. It mimics the opening of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) found in Deuteronomy 5:1, indicating the significance of what is about to be stated. With this introduction, all hearers understand that what is about to be said is of utmost importance. Craigie states, “The words introduce a major and important part of Moses’ address.” Wright says that it is a “constant reminder that Israel was a people summoned by God to hear God’s word. They were not merely spectators at a divine ‘show,’ but the recipients of divine revelation in words. They were to hear the truth and to respond to it.”

The next statement (“The Lord our God, the Lord is one”) is the crux of the *Shema*. As Merrill states, “Postbiblical rabbinic exegesis understood the role of the Shema to be the heart of all the law.” The statement reiterates the idea that the command is being given to the nation of Israel with the use of “our.” The next statement to “Love the Lord your God” is a recurring phrase that is central to the message of the whole book of Deuteronomy (10:12; 11:1, 13, 22; 13:3; 19:9; 30:6, 16, 20). Here the command to love is also linked to a command to obey. The very fact that love is commanded with an understanding to obey indicates that love is not merely an emotion. It is also a commitment to God that moves the believer to act according to his word (this can be linked to passages like 1 John 5:3). As Christensen notes, “The effect is to emphasize that God’s actions in the historical events that make up the exodus-conquest provide the motivation for a covenant relationship between God and his people.”

The Israelites are commanded to place the commandments “upon their hearts.” With the understanding that the “heart” was the center of intellect, will, and intention it is evident that God wished for his children to think on and meditate about “these words” (the *Shema*). This was so that “obedience would not be a matter of formal legalism, but a response based upon understanding. By reflecting on the commandments, they were reflecting on God’s words (6:1); and by understanding the path of life set down by the commandments, they would at the same time be discovering the way in which God’s

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52 Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 162.
53 Ibid.
56 Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 163.
57 Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 169; Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 98.
58 Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 95.
Christensen points out that God intended for his people to internalize his word as Jeremiah declared, “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people (Jeremiah 31:33—NIV).”

All of this but briefly underscores the importance of the Law (in light of the Shema’) to God’s method of leading his people. Out of his deep love for his children, he instituted the Law (his decrees and commands) so that they could be led properly in the everyday routine of life. However, this was something that the Israelites could never live out in totality. Hence, the need for Jesus Christ and the fulfillment of God’s ultimate plan seen throughout his grand metanarrative of redemptive history.

God Leading the Church Through Passages (The Word)

God’s word leads his people today as it did for the Israelites thousands of years ago. As was mentioned earlier, God’s word is the spiritual sustenance of his people. God’s word contains the words of life and the way by which to live it. However, the word is greater than that which is written. John records, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.” He goes on to say, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

This indicates that Jesus Christ is God’s Word, both in flesh and in written form. That word came and dwelt amongst us (God’s presence in Jesus as mentioned earlier) yet lives on through both what has been written and the lives it has been passed on through.

John also says, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Carson comments on this saying, “The law that was given through Moses, and the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ (v. 17), alike sprang from the fullness of the Word (v. 16), whether in his pre-existent oneness with the Father, or in his status as the Word-made-flesh. It is from that ‘fullness’ that we have received ‘one grace replacing another.’ God’s word continues to lead and guide his people today. It is the standard by which all decisions are made when considering course in life and the leading of the Lord’s church.

II. IMPLICATIONS FOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP

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60 Craigie, Deuteronomy, 170.
61 Christensen, Deuteronomy, 143.
63 Jn 1:14.
64 Jn 1:17-18.
So, what can be gained from this in practical implications for church leadership? The following are some potential takeaways church leaders might glean from this study:

1. Church leadership must follow the “God who goes before us.”

2. God will lead his church through the prophet Jesus. As Jesus led, so should his followers.

3. God provides all the sustenance we need through his word and by physical means as well. Church leaders would do well to consider what physical “needs” the church really has as opposed to physical “desires.” God will provide the “needs” but perhaps not the “desires.” If the “desires” are granted, they are either a gift are not of God.

4. God’s presence through the Spirit will continue to lead his church. It is for church leadership to stop and listen to the still, gentle voice that is calling in order to honor God above all things and to trust in his power and not their own.

5. God’s word should direct each step. Current books, philosophies, worldviews, and culture should never supersede that which has been given through the word.

Church leadership can continue to honor God today by following his lead and then in turn leading in like manner. To God be the glory and honor in all that his people set out to do.

About the Author
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