

LEADERSHIP

The Bible is a book built on human experience, and the experiences of leading and following form part of the fabric of our existence. The Bible does not sketch out a theory of leadership, but as is so often the case, it comments on leadership more by showing examples of leadership (both good and bad) than by direct comment. In this article, analytic categories have been used to help classify the numerous cases of leadership. Many of these leaders served in some way in all of the categories (e.g., priest, king), but they are mentioned in their primary sphere of leadership.

The Quintessential Leader. Perhaps no other person in the Bible so graphically embodies the role and character of the leader as Moses. He serves as [prophet](#), bringing the word of the Lord to Israel and to [Pharaoh](#) ([Ex 3–11](#)); as [priest](#), officiating over the first [Passover](#) and the consecration of the firstborn ([Ex 12: 13](#)) and confirming the [covenant](#) between Israel and God ([Ex 24](#)); as judge and wise man, hearing the various complaints of Israel (e.g., the daughters of Zelophehad, [Num 27:1–4](#)); and as political leader for the nation of Israel, leading Israel out of Egypt ([Ex 12:31–15:21](#)), commanding military campaigns (e.g., the Amalekites at Rephidim, [Ex 17:8–16](#)) and directing espionage (e.g., the exploration of Canaan, [Num. 13:1–3](#); see [SPY STORIES](#)).

When examined according to the leadership of Moses, the characters of Aaron and Miriam present a marked contrast. Even though Aaron has essentially seen and experienced all of the works of God that Moses has seen, beginning with the preliminary negotiations with Pharaoh ([Ex 5](#)), he does not have the moral fortitude that a leader of Moses' caliber possesses. Aaron quickly caves into the people's demand for an idol; in fact, he facilitates their request by fashioning the golden calf himself ([Ex 32:4](#)). He also quickly shifts blame off of himself and onto the people, effectively denying the responsibility a leader has for his followers ([Ex 32:22](#)). Aaron and Miriam speak maliciously of Moses, their own immediate leader, and try to assert equal rights of leadership, claiming that God has spoken through them just as much as he has through Moses ([Num 12:1–2](#)).

Political Leadership. The most easily identified leaders in society are the various political heads of state that bear titles like prince, king, judge, emperor, Pharaoh, ruler and Caesar. The rule of these various leaders is never secure, and the Bible is filled with political intrigue as distraught family members, court officials, ethnic splinter groups, religious zealots and political rivals attempt (and often succeeded at) toppling the ruler. The king serves as a symbol for power and [authority](#). Yet the biblical writers delight in showing how fleeting the power and life of a king actually is: the king can fall to a randomly shot arrow ([2 Chron 18:33](#)); the king can be assassinated ([1 Kings 16:16](#)); a king may be felled by mental illness ([Dan 4:33](#)); and a king may be deposed by a foreign power ([2 Kings 25:7](#)). The absolute power of the king and, at the same time, its fragile nature, is reflected in the [proverb](#): "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" ([Prov 21:1](#)).

The [image of God](#) as [king](#) is very prominent in the Bible (see [ROYAL COURT](#)), as in [Psalm 84:3](#), "O LORD Almighty, my King and my God" (NIV), and in [Jeremiah 10:10](#), "eternal king" (NIV; cf. [Ps 48:1](#); [Dan 4:37](#); [1 Tim 6:15](#); [Rev 15:3](#)). The language and imagery of kings and [courts](#) is used frequently in connection with God. Examples include God's royal courts ([Ps 100:4](#)), his [throne](#) ([Ps 47:8](#)) and his [scepter](#) ([Ps 45:6](#)).

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In the wilderness we find Moses becoming weary as he sits judging all the cases brought to him ([Ex 18:13–27](#)). On Jethro's counsel he sets up a system of deputies to judge routine cases, with the more difficult cases being handled by himself. This system of judges is institutionalized in Deuteronomy which provides for the appointment of "judges and officials for each of your tribes in every town the LORD your God is giving you, and they shall judge the people fairly" ([Deut 16:18](#) NIV). Under the monarchy, judges are employed to carry out both judicial and administrative duties. Under David, "Kenaniah and his sons were assigned duties away from the temple, as officials and judges over Israel" ([1 Chron 26:29](#) NIV). Judges play an important role in Jehoshaphat's attempt to have the nation ruled by the law, and to this end he "appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the LORD and to settle disputes" ([2 Chron 19:8](#) NIV), and he charges them to "serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the LORD" ([2 Chron 19:9](#) NIV).

One of the more colorful sets of leaders to emerge in Israel are the "judges." The term *judge* here is really a misnomer and *governor*, or *leader*, seems more fitting. They arise during the time of the disorganization, discord and military defeat which follows Joshua's [death](#). When the people "cried out to the LORD, he raised up for them a deliverer" ([Judg 3:9](#) NIV). These [charismatic](#) leaders, who display no pedigree and at times lack what would seem to be the prerequisite experience, arise and serve as "deliverers" ([Judg 3:9](#)), and most seem to judge over Israel (see [SAMSON](#)).

While political and national leadership in the biblical world is largely masculine and patriarchal, we can actually find examples of a small number of women who fill virtually every leadership role that men fill. We read about [queens](#) as well as the customary kings; the list includes Jezebel, Athaliah and Sheba. Deborah, termed a prophetess, is the only leader in the book of Judges who actually judges ([Judg 4:4–5](#)), and she also fills the role of military leader of an army ([Judg 4–5](#)). We also read of the prophetesses Huldah ([2 Kings 22:14](#)) and Noadiah ([Neh. 6:14](#)), and the wise person and teacher, the so-called Lady Wisdom, appears repeatedly in [Proverbs 1–9](#).

Leadership in the Tribal/Social Realm. The sense of governmental control and influence was far different in ancient Israel than what we experience today. In the OT we find law enforcement carried out at the local level by the elders of the clan, and social pressure is far more powerful in day-to-day life than governmental decrees. For instance, when a man fails to provide for his dead brother's wife by marrying her, the elders summon him, and if he still refuses, "his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, 'This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line' " ([Deut 25:9](#) NIV). In the shame-based culture of Israel such a man's lineage is known as "The Family of the Unsandaled" ([Deut 25:10](#)). The leadership in the clan moves beyond the disciplinary, but this is the level where [authority](#) resides for the typical Israelite. It is here where the eyewitness ([Deut 19:15](#)), the wise person ([Prov 9:9](#)), the elders of the [gate](#) ([Deut 21:19](#)), the teacher and Levite ([2 Chron 17:7–9](#)) exercise considerable sway.

Leadership in the Family. The family plays a central role in the very drama of [redemption](#) seen in the Bible. The parents, or more typically the elder figures within an extended family, are held up as figures of benevolent care who are generally well intentioned. Thus Jesus can say, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in

[heaven](#) give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” ([Lk 11:11–13](#) NIV). Within extended and somewhat complex family and household relationships, the parental figures must exercise wisdom and diplomacy.

Typically the parent is not portrayed as a benevolent dictator, but as a wise guide. For example, when [Abraham](#) and his nephew’s herdsmen dispute over limited water and grazing land, Abraham suggests that they separate. And Abraham defers to his nephew when it came to choosing their respective territories ([Gen 13](#)). Abraham, as with other patriarchs, should be seen as a princeling, or clan leader. The positive leadership of the parent is portrayed as consisting of loving ([1 Chron 17:13](#)), correcting ([Prov 29:15](#)), disciplining ([Heb 12:7](#)), instructing ([Prov 1:8](#)), providing ([Mt 7:11](#)), praying ([1 Sam 1:27](#)) and nurturing in the [faith](#) ([Eph 6:4](#)).

The marriage relationship, too, possesses a well-defined pattern of leadership in the Bible. The headship of the husband and submission of the wife are the implied pattern throughout the OT, and it is visibly imprinted—though subsumed and modified under the new order of Christ’s headship—in the so-called household codes of [Ephesians 5:22–6:9](#), [Colossians 3:18–25](#) and [1 Peter 2:13–3:7](#) (cf. [1 Cor 11:3; 14:34–35](#)). Within the structure of the headship of the husband and father, though, wives and mothers are family leaders, too. While religious instruction is more often a fatherly image ([Ps 44:1](#); [78:3](#); [Prov 4:1; 13:1; 15:5; 27:10](#)), we also find mothers instructing ([Prov 1:8; 6:20](#)). The portrait of the industrious wife and mother that concludes the book of Proverbs ([Prov 31:10–31](#)) clearly shows her to be the leader in household management. And the story of Abigail shows a woman who, when her husband fails to function as a wise leader of the family, ably and honorably steps in to compensate for her husband’s abdication ([1 Sam 25](#)).

The Integrity of Leaders. Throughout the biblical portrait gallery of leaders we find an implied or forthright [judgment](#) of their character. It is God in particular who keenly examines the integrity of a leader. Sometimes the [judgment](#) is implied, but at times it is explicit, as when David implores God to judge him according to his integrity ([Ps 7:8](#)) or when the psalmist remarks that David shepherded Israel with integrity of [heart](#) ([Ps 78:72](#)). God exhorts King Solomon to maintain his integrity and promises him that if he would walk before him in integrity of heart, his throne over Israel will be established and preserved ([1 Kings 9:4–5](#)). A direct correlation exists between the integrity of a leader and the safety of his tenure. The leader with integrity is guarded by [righteousness](#), but his wickedness will result in his overthrow ([Prov 13:6](#)). And the entire history of Israel, from Joshua through 2 Kings is aptly named the “Former Prophets,” in part for its prophetic evaluation of this series of leaders from Joshua through Jehoiachin.

The Leader Under Moral Law. Leadership connotes a heavy responsibility for the affairs of others, for the affairs of those who follow. The leader’s place of power bears an exacting weight of [moral law](#), placed there to bring [righteousness](#) to the mundane manifestations of leadership. Proverbs brims with admonishments for the leader, reinforcing the natural dictates of [conscience](#) and giving instruction on issues such as being faithful to justice ([Prov 16:10](#)) and assuring protection for the innocent ([Prov 18:5](#)), while executing justice against those who oppress the poor ([Prov 14:31](#)) and orphans ([Prov 23:10](#)).

Breaking [moral law](#), even if those who err are only followers, can bring [judgment](#) upon a leader. This reflects the concept that a leader is inextricably bound to his followers, those whom he leads, not unlike the head is permanently attached to the trunk of the body. We see in the story of Achan how the actions of one man brings [judgment](#) upon Israel, even reaching the place of Joshua’s position as leader ([Judg 7](#)).

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The Courage of Conviction. Throughout the Bible we find leaders who honorably and tenaciously maintain their convictions in the face of opposition from peers, followers and enemies. The righteous leader is aided in this struggle by two endorsements, the inner prompting of [natural law](#), providing a strengthening of resolve, and the confirmation of God's will. The prophet Ezekiel is an example of a leader maintaining his convictions in the face of public disapprobation. Ezekiel's life becomes a living parable for the people of Israel as he shaves his head ([Ezek 5:1](#)), cooks his food over excrement ([Ezek 4:12–15](#)), lies down for hundreds of days ([Ezek 4:4–8](#)) and does not [mourn](#) for his beloved wife ([Ezek 24:15–24](#)). In the NT we find Paul refusing to cave in to pressure when "certain men from James" arrive in Antioch and influence even Peter to separate himself from Gentile believers. Paul openly confronts Peter for his hypocrisy and will not back down from the principle that [justification](#) entails the inclusion of Jews and Gentiles in one new humanity without the barriers imposed by Mosaic law ([Gal 2:11–21](#)).

Religious Leadership. When viewed from a social perspective, the pyramid of religious organization in ancient Israel is remarkably flat. Though there is a clear sense of hierarchy in the [Pentateuch](#), the structure of high priest, priests, Levites and people is relatively simple, and it somewhat mirrors the concentric degrees of [holiness](#) represented architecturally in the sanctuary (see [SACRED SPACE](#)). We do not find layers of religious bureaucracy or officially numerous purveyors of religion. The formal religious leadership can be divided into three groups: those with inherited offices (priests and Levites), those with positions that are confirmed as a result of their giftedness (prophets, overseers, elders, spiritual leaders) and those that come through the agency of others (Nazirite, Samuel dedicated in the temple, Jephthah's daughter).

In [Jeremiah 18:18](#) three categories of religious leaders are mentioned: priest, prophets and wise men. In terms of imagery, the leadership of these groups is best seen in some exemplary leaders.

Priest. The teaching of the law is a prime responsibility of the priests. They included Ezra, who "read [taught] from the Book of the Law of God" ([Neh 8](#)), ushering in a time of repentance on the part of the Israelites ([Neh 9](#)). A thought-provoking example of a priest is Phineas, the grandson of Aaron. The righteous zeal of Phineas, who drives a spear through the embraced bodies of an Israelite and a Midianite woman, is called an "[atonement](#)" and results in God halting a plague ([Num 25:6–13](#)).

We find the Priests and Levites teaching "throughout Judah, taking with them the Book of the Law of the LORD they went around to all the towns of Judah and taught the people" ([2 Chron 17:8](#), [9](#) NIV). The priests guide the people of Israel in a disparate array of practical functions, such as ritual [sacrifice](#) ([Lev 1–7](#)), [atonement](#) ([Lev 16:29–34](#)) and [cleansing](#) from diseases ([Lev 13](#)). The priests also lead the people in the various [feasts](#) that are celebrated before the Lord: the Feast of Weeks, Trumpets and Tabernacles ([Lev 23](#)).

The formal religious establishment, however, comes in for much criticism in the OT. The priests abandon their calling, set up idols ([Jer 2:8](#)), lead people astray ([Ezek 7:26](#)), seek after money ([Jer 6:13](#); [Mic 3:11](#)) and become corrupt ([Jer 18:18](#)). This prophetic criticism continues in the NT, where we find Jesus not only declaiming woes against the Pharisees and teachers of the law ([Mt 23:1–36](#)) but telling a parable against the priests ([Mt 21:33–46](#)). Paul seems to have Jewish leadership in mind when he speaks of those who "killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out ... they always heap up their sins to the limit. The [wrath of God](#) has come upon them at last" ([1 Thess 2:14–16](#) NIV).

Prophet. The OT is replete with the character of the [prophet](#). The prophet acts as a liaison between God and people, bringing [judgment](#) ([Ezek 13](#)), encouragement ([Mic 4:1–5](#)), exhortation ([Mal 2:1–9](#)) and Leland Ryken, Jim Wilhoit, et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

visions of Israel's future restoration ([Is 40–66](#)). The prophet is to speak God's word, and this is done with integrity by minor prophets like Huldah ([2 Kings 22:14](#)) and major prophets like Jeremiah, whose words are so offensive that the king burns them ([Jer 36](#)). In the case of the prophetess Deborah, her leadership is vigorous enough to extend to the actual political leadership of Israel ([Judg 4](#)).

One of the clearest NT examples of the prophet is John the Baptist. John is a leadership prophet who calls Israel to a great act of repentance, a rebirth as a nation, by descending to the Jordan and recrossing the classic boundary of Israel in a reenactment of their ancestors' entrance into the land of promise. John's eye is on a coming renewal, or deliverance, of Israel from her bondage-and the [judgment](#) of those who would not repent. At the center of John's vision is the "Coming One," Jesus ([Mt 3:1–12](#); [Mk 1:1–8](#); [Lk 3:1–18](#)). Another John, the author of Revelation, unfurls his apocalyptic vision in which the kings and empires of the earth meet their demise before the Lord of [heaven](#) and his Lamb.

Wise man. The wise man is often a counselor in government or state affairs. The OT [archetype](#) of the wise man is [Solomon](#). At the beginning of his reign the young king offers a sacrifice at Gibeon, and [Yahweh](#) promises to fulfill one request. Solomon asks not for power or riches but for a discerning heart, the ability to judge wisely. The story of the two contending women ([1 Kings 3:16–28](#)) provides a cameo of Solomon's wisdom, as does the visit by the Queen of Sheba, who personally tests his wisdom and then declares, "How happy your officials, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!" ([1 Kings 10:8](#) NIV). Another memorable image of a wise man is Ahithophel. Both David and Solomon agreed that "the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God" ([2 Sam 16:23](#) NIV).

Negative examples of the wise man also appear in Scripture. The Pharisees and Sadducees are supposed to supply wisdom and counsel for the people, both in matters of religion and temple but also in matters of daily life. However, they are quick to demonstrate that theirs is a wisdom that runs against the grain of the [kingdom](#) of God as they are emboldened to challenge Jesus himself for his words and behavior. These wise men grouse concerning Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners ([Mt 9:11](#)), they conspire to test him ([Mt 16:1](#)), and they plot to take his life ([Jn 11:45–53](#)).

The ultimate wise man is Jesus himself. He speaks in parables and aphorisms as a wise man, and he compares himself to Solomon, saying "one greater than Solomon is here" ([Mt 12:42](#) NIV; [Lk 11:31](#)). He regards himself as an envoy of wisdom ([Mt 23:34–36](#); [Lk 11:49–51](#)) and wisdom's revealer who beckons to Israel to follow ([Mt 11:25–27](#); [Lk 10:21–22](#)), and he implies that those who respond to him are "wisdom's children" ([Mt 11:16–19](#); [Lk 7:31–35](#)).

Military Leadership. In the OT, leaders of warfare are sometimes generals or commanders but frequently the king himself. Saul and David are outstanding examples of warrior kings, but we also find heads of state such as Sennacherib personally leading an army ([2 Kings 19–20](#)). The ideals of king and warrior were closely associated in the ancient Near East. There is also a close association between warfare and everyday life. We may observe this in the scene of the young shepherd boy David bringing food to his brothers stationed at the front lines ([1 Sam 17](#)). In the armies that were composed largely of untrained conscripts, it was possible for warriors to rise to formal leadership roles. During the days of Saul we find the Israelite army structure beginning to take shape, and it apparently includes both tribal leadership and people who have come up through the warrior ranks. In the English translations we find the captain, a leader of thousands, hundreds or fifties ([Ex 18:25](#); [1 Sam 8:12](#)). After Saul, Israelite armies are divided into

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companies headed by “captains of thousands” ([1 Sam 17:18](#)). Later we find that David’s army is led by “The Thirty,” those mighty men who had proven themselves as warriors during David’s years as a brigand general.

The NT supplies at least one memorable image of a military leader. The centurion who entreats Jesus to heal his sick servant tells Jesus that he need not come to his house. All Jesus must do is “say the word, and my servant will be healed” ([Mt 8:8](#)). His explanation offers a glimpse of military leadership: “I myself am a man under [authority](#), with soldiers under me. I tell this one, ‘Go,’ and he goes, and that one, ‘Come,’ and he comes. I say to my servant, ‘Do this,’ and he does it” ([Mt 8:9](#) NIV). Jesus is astonished at the [faith](#) exhibited in this man, and then he commands, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would” ([Mt 8:13](#) NIV).

Representational Leadership. There is a strong sense in Scripture that certain leaders represent a nation, and the focus is generally upon Israel. This representation can be for ill; in Leviticus, for example, if a priest sins, he can bring [judgment](#) on the entire nation: “If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring to the Lord a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed” ([Lev 4:3](#) NIV). In a positive way we see Moses interceding on behalf of the nation with the effect of staying God’s hand of [judgment](#) ([Ex 32](#)). Perhaps this representation is seen most graphically in Jeremiah, who delivers a message to the nation that a [judgment](#) is coming that cannot be stayed even by the intercession of righteous ones. To drive home his point Jeremiah declares, “The LORD said to me: ‘even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before me, my heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from my presence! Let them go!’ ” ([Jer 15:1](#) NIV).

In a variety of ways, leadership is offered as people stand and represent Israel, but the most striking image of representational leadership is found in the [tradition](#) of kingship in Israel. In [2 Samuel 19:40–43](#), after the defeat of Absalom, the men of Israel dispute with the men of Judah over who has the greater claim on king David. The men of Israel argue, “We have ten shares in the king; and besides, we have a greater claim on David than you have” ([2 Sam 19:43](#) NIV). Immediately following, Sheba son of Bicri, initiates his rebellion with the shout, “We have no share in David, no part in Jesse’s son! Every man to his tent, O Israel!” ([2 Sam 20:1](#)). This notion of representational, or incorporative, leadership is found in the NT where Christ (the Son of David) and his people are closely bound. Those who are “baptized into him” ([Rom 6:11](#)) experience the reality of his representative [death](#) for his people. What is true of Christ is true of his people.

The Bible abounds with images and metaphors of both leaders and followers. In the list below, these are divided into categories of leader and follower.

Images and Metaphors of Leaders. Various traits, qualities and manifestations of leaders are articulated throughout the NT. The apostles are literally “sent ones,” or “messengers” (cf. [1 Tim 2:7](#); [2 Tim 1:11](#)), a [witness](#) to God and the [gospel](#) ([Lk 24:48](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). In the interest of maintaining humility and preserving that honor for Jesus himself, they should not take on the title of “Rabbi” ([Mt 23:8](#)). They should regard themselves as [servants](#) ([Jn 13:16](#); [Acts 4:29](#)) who, following the example of Jesus, “wash one another’s feet” ([Jn 13:14](#)). In the same vein, Peter exhorts elders in the [church](#) not to lord it over the [church](#) ([1 Pet 5:1–3](#)) but to serve willingly and not for personal gain. Leadership also entails collegiality,

and Paul calls Titus a partner and fellow worker ([2 Cor 8:23](#)) and so demonstrates his humility even while being the archetypal leader within the early [church](#).

Jesus tells a parable of a shrewd manager [*oikonomos*], or steward, in a wealthy household who, called to give an accounting of his management, shrewdly deals with his situation ([Lk 16:1–12](#)). This image carries over from Jesus' setting into the world of Christian leadership, where a leader can take the role of an administrator (*kybernēsis*, [1 Cor 12:28](#)). Other workaday images evoke agricultural settings, with the leader as a hardworking [farmer](#) who "should be the first to receive a share of the crops" ([2 Tim 2:6](#) NIV), or a [shepherd](#), exhorted to care for and feed the [sheep](#) ([Jn 21:15–16](#); [Acts 20:28–29](#)). Or the building trade comes into play as Paul likens himself to an expert builder laying a [foundation](#) with others building upon it ([1 Cor 3:10](#)), or Timothy as a "workman who does not need to be ashamed" ([2 Tim 2:15](#)). From another perspective the leaders of the [church](#)—apostles and prophets, with Jesus as the "chief [cornerstone](#)"—form the foundation of God's new temple. ([Eph 2:20](#)). The Bible in general lifts up those who are "used" by God. It is honorable to be a leader who is a chosen instrument, or vessel, such as Paul ([Acts 9:15](#)), to be an article of [gold](#) or [silver](#) in God's household, "an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work" ([2 Tim 2:20–21](#)).

Paul can evoke the dynamism of the sports arena in the image of the leader as an [athlete](#), dedicated to competition for the sake of God ([2 Tim 2:5](#)), or a disciplined [runner](#) in a [race](#) ([1 Cor 9:24–27](#)). These competitors are reaching out for the victor's [crown](#). But Paul just as often portrays the apostolic leader in paradoxically negative images: a fool for the sake of Christ ([1 Cor 4:10](#)), or one regarded by the world as scum or refuse ([1 Cor 4:13](#)).

What images are employed to portray the desirable qualities of leaders? The great leader Joshua, who meditates on Scripture ([Josh 1:8](#)), presents a [model](#) for all. Those who follow in his train are devoted to study of the law ([Ezra 7:10](#)), flee impurity ([Is 52:11](#)), are not filled with [fear](#) ([Jer 1:7](#)) and do not trade in falsehood ([Mal 2:6](#)). The prophecy against the house of Eli is concluded with God's promise of a future leader, "a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind" ([1 Sam 2:35](#) NIV).

Jesus shows uncommon "street smarts" as he sends out the Twelve "as sheep among wolves" and expects them to be "as shrewd as [snakes](#) and as innocent as [doves](#)" ([Mt 10:16](#)). From the human world we have the image of a leader who does not "lord it over" others ([Mt 20:25](#)) but is humble ([Mt 23:8–10](#)), one who is faithful in small matters ([Lk 12:42–44](#)) and yet possesses spiritual power ([Lk 24:49](#)). A leader is not merely a "hired hand" ([Jn 10:2–15](#)) but a true servant ([Jn 13:13–16](#)), one who recognizes that it is ultimately God who is at work ([1 Cor 3:5–9](#)) and so seeks to be proven faithful ([1 Cor 4:1–13](#)). In this context, worldly boasting in one's own accomplishments is out of place ([1 Cor 9:16–23](#)). Paul, the [apostle](#), led by God in the triumphal procession in Christ, spreads the "fragrance of the [knowledge](#) of Christ," which to those who are being saved is the fragrance of life and to those who are perishing the fragrance of [death](#) ([2 Cor 2:15–17](#); see [SMELL, SCENT](#)). For leaders in Christ's [church](#), integrity is essential ([2 Cor 4:2](#)): they flee immorality ([1 Tim 6:11](#)), do not act from impure motives ([1 Thess 2:3](#)) and avoid presenting [stumbling](#) blocks for others ([2 Cor 6:3](#)). The [truth](#) of the [gospel](#) is a trust that is passed on, and so leaders must keep to sound teaching ([2 Tim 1:13](#)), maintain a singleness of focus ([2 Tim 2:1–23](#)) and faithfully exercise their gifts ([1 Pet 4:10](#)).

Images and Metaphors of Followers. As a picture needs a frame, or as a frame needs a picture, the character of the leader is nothing without that of the follower. Two sorts of followers are presented to us: those who are followers of human leaders, and those who are followers of God.

An example, in the good sense, of a follower of a human leader is Joshua, the assistant of Moses. Where Moses goes, there goes Joshua, even ascending the mountain of the Lord ([Ex 24:13](#)). Joshua is so diligent and faithful to Moses that he waits on the mountainside for him, staying forty days and forty nights until Moses returns with the tablets ([Ex 32:15–17](#)). Joshua remains faithful to Moses through the long years in the wilderness. Even though Israel does not trust God and rejects Moses' leadership, Joshua remains steadfast, even at the risk of his life ([Num 14:6–10](#)). Joshua's faithfulness is rewarded, and he is raised up and given [authority](#) after the [death](#) of Moses ([Deut 34:9](#)). But even after Joshua has assumed the command and leadership of Israel, he continues to be portrayed as a humble follower of the heavenly Lord, one who readily submits to the commander of the Lord's army ([Josh 5:13–15](#)).

The Bible is full of followers of God, but no single figure illustrates this as much as Jesus. Like the [suffering](#) servant of [Isaiah 53](#), Jesus is oppressed for the sake of his people but does not open his mouth in protest ([Is 53:7](#)), he is resolved to do God's will even though he suffers God's blows on behalf of his people ([Is 53:4](#), [10](#)). His life is a declaration of what it means to follow God regardless of the bitter consequences ([Mt 26:39](#)) of a shameful [death](#).

Followers of God are chosen ([Deut 10:15](#)). They can be likened to good soldiers of Christ ([2 Tim 2:3](#)), willing to endure hardship. They are slaves of Christ ([1 Cor 7:22–23](#)), bought with a price and ready to do his command ([Jn 15:13–15](#)). Some are deacons, such as Stephen, called to serve the [church](#) ([Acts 6](#)). Or they are workers called on to bring in the [harvest](#) at the moment when the grain has ripened ([Mt 9:37–38](#)). As disciples of Jesus they are also his [friends](#) ([Lk 12:4](#)), agents of Christ's love ([Mt 10:42](#)) and known by their love for one another ([Jn 13:35](#)). Paul speaks of the Philippians as partners in the [gospel](#) ([Phil 1:5](#)), and one of them is his loyal yokefellow ([Phil 4:3](#)). Frequently in Paul we find the imagery of God's household (e.g., [Eph 2:19–20](#)). They may be likened to newborn babies ([1 Pet 2:2](#)) or to obedient, beloved [children](#) ([1 Pet 1:14](#); [1 Cor 4:14](#))—God's children ([Lk 20:36](#)). All are [saints](#) ([Eph 1:1](#)), a royal priesthood belonging to God ([1 Pet 2:9](#)) and citizens of [heaven](#) ([Phil 3:20](#)). As witnesses to the [gospel](#) some of these followers are faithful even unto [death](#) ([Rev 7:14](#)), ever obedient to God and holding onto the testimony of Jesus Christ ([Rev 12:17](#)).

In more indirect metaphors, followers of God—the people of God—are pictured as a [flock](#) ([Ps 77:20](#); [Acts 20:28–29](#)) or as sheep ([Jn 10:1–16](#); [Mt 10:16](#)). God's people are like a [bride](#) or a bridegroom, lavishly adorned with the garments of [salvation](#) ([Is 61:10](#)), or even the guests of the bridegroom—Jesus Christ ([Mt 9:15](#)). They are the [salt](#) of the earth ([Mt 5:13](#)) or the good [seed](#) sown in the world and growing alongside weeds ([Mt 13:38](#)). NT writers employ the imagery of real estate and architecture by speaking of a building or a field belonging to God ([1 Cor 3:9–11](#)) or “living stones” in a new [temple](#) ([1 Pet 2:5](#); cf. [Eph 2:20–22](#)). Finally, God's people are like a [crown](#) ([1 Thess 2:19](#)) or a treasured possession of God ([Deut 14:2](#)).

See also [DAVID](#); [GOD](#); [JESUS](#), [IMAGES OF](#); [KING](#), [KINGSHIP](#); [MOSES](#); [PRIEST](#); [PROPHET](#); [QUEEN](#); [SOLOMON](#); [THRONE](#).