

Leaders on their Faces

Against God's will, the Israelites believed the pessimistic report of 10 spies, and a whimpering spirit took hold of the camp (Num. 14:1-4). Moses and Aaron did something very curious: they, "Fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel" (Num. 14:5).

Later, Korah rose up with 250 men of renown and tried to stage a coup against Moses. Again, Moses, "fell on his face" (Num. 16:4).

God told Moses and Aaron to get away from the assembly so that He could, "Consume them in a moment." Moses and Aaron again, "Fell on their faces" (Num. 16:21-22). This was repeated in Numbers 16:45.

When Israel complained and murmured about a lack of food and water, Moses and Aaron went before the tabernacle of the Lord and, "Fell on their faces" (Num. 20:6).

What can a Bible student make of these statements? Why does Scripture speak so frequently about these leaders falling on their faces?

What these statements say about Moses and Aaron – Whenever trouble reared its ugly head, one of the first responses of Moses was to fall on his face. In so doing, he demonstrates several valuable character traits. First, he was humble. Numbers 12:3 indicates that Moses was, "Very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." Humility demands that we allow God to have the last word in a dispute, and Moses did so. Second, Moses was reverent. How uncomfortably reflective might we become if, in the middle of conflict, a leader suddenly fell prostrate on the ground out of reverence for God? In Numbers 14:5 and 20:6 especially, there seems to be an acute awareness of God's presence and holiness on the part of Moses and Aaron. May such attitudes increase among God's people! Third, he desired to intercede for others. Moses truly loved the people of Israel, and more than once it was his prayer that saved them from utter destruction (Num. 16:22, 45). One cannot truly lead others without sincerely caring for them. Fourth, Moses was prayerful. He fell on his face because he desired to seek the Lord's will and approval. Moses had been appointed by God, and Moses served at God's pleasure. He was an imperfect man, to be sure, but his attitudes in the midst of conflict are noteworthy and remarkable.

What these statements indicate about the nature of leadership – Falling on one's face is not a mere personality quirk of men like Moses and Aaron, it is the response of those who are convicted by the nature and gravity of their work. These statements demonstrate the awesome responsibility of leading God's people. Paul taught that elders are installed by the Holy Spirit and are charged with shepherding the blood-bought people of God (Acts 20:28). What elder could seriously contemplate such a responsibility and not be driven to fall on his face before the Lord? "Falling on one's face" also indicates the difficulty of leading God's people. Moses the intercessor is a

type of Christ, who, “Ever lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). Leaders must be like Moses and Jesus and lovingly intercede to God on behalf of those under their watch (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Additionally, “Falling on one’s face” shows the appropriate heart response to conflict. Arguments and destructive contentions are not to be the normal modes of conduct for leaders (2 Tim. 2:23-26), although there are certainly times to, “Contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3).

May God grant the church more leaders who, in the spirit of Moses and Aaron, “Fall on their faces.”

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