

Numbers 11:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

Analysis

The LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel... and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them. God provides Moses with leadership assistance by distributing the Spirit. The number seventy recalls the seventy descendants of Israel who entered Egypt (Exodus 1:5) and creates a governing council. The phrase 'I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them' shows God's Spirit empowering leadership. This wasn't diminishing Moses' Spirit (like dividing a limited resource) but sharing God's unlimited power. The Spirit's distribution enabled the elders to bear the burden with Moses. This teaches that God provides spiritual enablement for delegated authority. Leadership multiplication requires divine empowerment, not mere human organization. The principle anticipates Pentecost's Spirit-outpouring on all believers. Reformed theology emphasizes that ministry effectiveness requires the Spirit's power.

Historical Context

Moses' complaint about bearing Israel's burden alone (Numbers 11:11-15) prompted God's provision of the seventy elders. Ancient Near Eastern governing councils often numbered seventy; Jewish tradition later established the Sanhedrin

with seventy-one members. The Spirit's distribution to the elders caused them to prophesy temporarily (Numbers 11:25), validating their calling. Jethro had earlier advised Moses to delegate judgment responsibilities (Exodus 18:13-26), and this appointment formalized such delegation. The seventy's role apparently included both governance and prophetic ministry. The distribution illustrates the principle that God's Spirit enables ministry—human ability alone proves insufficient for leading God's people. The New Testament pattern of multiple elders in each church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5) follows this plurality leadership model.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does God's distribution of His Spirit to the seventy elders teach about empowering delegated authority in ministry?
2. How does the principle of plural leadership (Moses plus seventy elders) inform church governance today?

Interlinear Text

שְׁבַע יְמִים לֵאמֹר
unto me seventy
gather unto Moses unto the LORD said
H7657 H4872 H3068 H559

אִישׁ אִישׁ יְלִגְּבִּי זְלִגְּבִּי
whom thou knowest of Israel of the elders men
H3045 H3478 H2205 H376

אַל אַתֶּם לְקַחַת
over them and bring and officers and people of the elders
H3947 H7860 H3471 H2205

עֲמָקָם שְׁמִינִי מִזְבֵּחַ תְּמִימָה
that they may stand of the congregation unto the tabernacle them
H3320 H4150 H168

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 24:1 (References Lord): And he said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off.

Exodus 24:9 (References Moses): Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel:

Genesis 46:27 (Parallel theme): And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

Deuteronomy 1:15 (Parallel theme): So I took the chief of your tribes, wise men, and known, and made them heads over you, captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, and captains over fifties, and captains over tens, and officers among your tribes.

Deuteronomy 16:18 (References Lord): Judges and officers shalt thou make thee in all thy gates, which the LORD thy God giveth thee, throughout thy tribes: and they shall judge the people with just judgment.

Exodus 4:29 (References Moses): And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel:

Luke 10:17 (References Lord): And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.

Luke 10:1 (References Lord): After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come.

Ezekiel 8:11 (References Israel): And there stood before them seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel, and in the midst of them stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, with every man his censer in his hand; and a thick cloud of incense went up.