

Numbers 11:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But there remained two of the men in the camp, the name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they were of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

Analysis

The situation 'But there remained two of the men in the camp' introduces an irregularity: Eldad and Medad (Hebrew אֶלְדָּד, Eldad—'God has loved'; מְדָד, Medad—meaning uncertain, possibly 'beloved') didn't go to the tabernacle with the other sixty-eight. The text explains 'they were of them that were written'—officially registered among the seventy—'but went not out unto the tabernacle.' Their absence might indicate humility (not presuming to go forward), illness, or providential hindrance. The text doesn't explain their absence but focuses on God's sovereign action despite it.

The remarkable statement 'and the spirit rested upon them' shows that God's Spirit moves according to divine will, not human ritual or location. Though Eldad and Medad weren't at the appointed place, the Spirit came upon them anyway. This demonstrates God's sovereign freedom—He works through established means ordinarily but isn't bound by them absolutely. The Spirit blows where He wills (John 3:8). This wasn't disorder or irregularity from God's perspective but a demonstration that He can work outside expected patterns when He chooses.

The result 'and they prophesied in the camp' created a situation that would test responses. Their prophesying in the camp rather than at the tabernacle appeared

irregular, potentially threatening Moses' authority or creating confusion. How would leadership respond? The next verses show Joshua seeking to suppress them (verse 28) but Moses celebrating God's work (verse 29), teaching that godly leaders rejoice when God works even through unexpected channels or people, rather than jealously guarding their own authority.

Historical Context

The names Eldad and Medad appear only here in Scripture, suggesting they weren't prominent leaders otherwise. Jewish tradition speculated about why they didn't go to the tabernacle—some suggested humility (thinking themselves unworthy), others suggested they refused (knowing Moses would soon die and wanting no part in leadership transition). The text's silence on their motivation keeps focus on God's sovereign action: despite their absence from the appointed place, God's Spirit came upon them. This incident may have influenced later Judaism's understanding that prophecy could occur outside official religious structures.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does the Spirit coming upon Eldad and Medad despite their absence from the tabernacle demonstrate God's sovereign freedom to work outside established patterns?
2. What does this incident teach about responding to genuine work of God's Spirit even when it occurs through unexpected people or in irregular ways?

Interlinear Text

בַּאֲפָתְּ דָּלִי	וְשָׁם	בְּמִצְנָה:	אֲנָשָׁם	שְׁנִי	וַיִּשְׁאַר 1	וְשָׁמָם	בְּמִצְנָה:	אֲנָשָׁם	שְׁנִי	וַיִּשְׁאַר 1
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H419	H8034	H8145	H4312	H5117						
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H1992		upon them and they were of them that were written				H3808				
		H3789								
בְּמִצְנָה:	וְתִתְנַבֵּא 1	בְּאַמְלָה	וְצָא 1							
but went not out	unto the tabernacle	and they prophesied	in the camp							
H3318	H168	H5012	H4264							

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 36:5 (Parallel theme): And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD:

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