

Numbers 11:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

Analysis

Joshua's response 'My lord Moses, forbid them' reveals the mindset of zealous but misguided loyalty. The title 'My lord Moses' shows respect and deference, but Joshua's request was wrong. His statement 'forbid them' (Hebrew *kela'em*, כִּלְאוּם—restrain, shut up, stop) sought to suppress Eldad and Medad's prophesying. Joshua perceived their irregular prophesying as threat to Moses' authority or proper order, yet Moses saw it as evidence of God's blessing that should be celebrated, not suppressed.

The description of Joshua as 'the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men' provides context: Joshua had been Moses' assistant from Egypt onward (Exodus 24:13; 33:11), developing deep loyalty to Moses personally. This personal devotion, though admirable, clouded Joshua's judgment here—he mistook irregular for wrong, different for threatening. His concern for Moses' authority was sincere but misplaced. Moses' authority didn't depend on controlling all ministry but on faithfully delivering God's word. Joshua would later learn this lesson and lead Israel with similar humility.

This incident teaches important lessons about authority and ministry. First, godly leaders don't view others' ministry as threat but as blessing. Second, loyalty to human leaders must never supersede recognition of God's sovereign work. Third, concern for order is good but can become excessive when it suppresses genuine Spirit-work. Joshua's error was natural—most people prefer predictable, controlled

ministry to Spirit-led spontaneity—but Moses' response (verse 29) models the better way.

Historical Context

Joshua's long service as Moses' assistant had begun in Egypt and continued throughout the wilderness period. He had accompanied Moses partway up Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:13), remained in the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:11), and served as military commander (Exodus 17:9-14). This close relationship explains Joshua's protective concern for Moses' position. Yet Joshua still had lessons to learn about leadership—this incident taught that godly authority welcomes rather than suppresses others' ministry. Later, as Israel's leader, Joshua would demonstrate this lesson learned, working through tribal leaders and distributing responsibility rather than concentrating all authority in himself.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Joshua's well-intentioned but mistaken desire to suppress Eldad and Medad warn against confusing loyalty to human leaders with faithfulness to God?
2. What does this incident teach about the danger of viewing others' Spirit-empowered ministry as threat rather than blessing when it occurs outside our organizational control?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּעַן	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	בֶּן	נֹון	מֹשֶׁה	מֹשֶׁה	מִבְּחָרָיו
answered	And Joshua	the son	of Nun	the servant	Moses	one of his young men
H6030	H3091	H1121	H5126	H8334	H4872	H979
וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲדֹנָי	מֹשֶׁה	כָּלֵאֵם:			
and said	My lord	Moses	forbid			
H559	H113	H4872	H3607			

Additional Cross-References

John 3:26 (Parallel theme): And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.

Joshua 1:1 (References Lord): Now after the death of Moses the servant of the LORD it came to pass, that the LORD spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying,