

Numbers 11:29

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

Analysis

Moses' response to Joshua reveals remarkable humility and expansive vision for God's Spirit being poured out on all believers. Joshua had just reported that Eldad and Medad were prophesying in the camp though they hadn't gone to the tabernacle with the seventy elders (Numbers 11:26-28). Joshua's concern—'My lord Moses, forbid them'—reflects natural human protectiveness of institutional authority. Moses' rebuke—'Enviest thou for my sake?'—exposes the carnal motivation behind religious exclusivism. The Hebrew word 'qana' (קָנָה, 'enviest') suggests zealous jealousy, the same word used of God's jealousy for His glory. But Moses rejects misplaced zeal that would restrict God's Spirit. His fervent wish—'would God that all the LORD's people were prophets'—envisioned universal prophetic empowerment, fulfilled on Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out on all believers (Acts 2:16-18, quoting Joel 2:28-29). The phrase 'the LORD would put his spirit upon them' uses 'nathan' (נָתַן), 'give' or 'place,' indicating God's sovereign bestowal. This passage condemns religious territorialism and celebrates the democratic distribution of God's Spirit in the New Covenant.

Historical Context

This event occurred during Israel's wilderness wandering when the people complained about lacking meat (Numbers 11:4-6). God provided quail but also shared the Spirit that rested on Moses with seventy elders, enabling them to prophesy (11:16-17, 24-25). The unusual case of Eldad and Medad prophesying

though absent from the official gathering demonstrated God's sovereignty—He distributes His Spirit according to His will, not human protocol. Moses' inclusive response contrasted sharply with the exclusivism common in ancient Near Eastern religious hierarchies where spiritual power was jealously guarded by priestly elites. This incident foreshadowed the New Covenant when God's Spirit would indwell all believers, not just selected leaders (Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:26-27).

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Moses' response challenge our tendency toward religious exclusivism or territorialism?
2. In what ways might we be 'envying for someone's sake' by protecting human authority over God's freedom?
3. How does this passage inform our understanding of spiritual gifts and their distribution in the church?
4. What does Moses' wish for universal prophetic empowerment teach about God's ultimate purposes for His people?
5. How should church leaders respond when God works outside established institutional structures?

Interlinear Text

וְמַיְלֵא אֶת־אַתֶּר
said H0 And Moses unto him Enviest H859 H0 H4310

H559 H4872 H7065

כָּל־עַם־יְהוָה
thou for my sake would God that all the people LORD'S were prophets H3588

H5414 H3605 H5971 H3068 H5030

רוּחַ־עַלְיָקְםָן
thou for my sake would God that all the LORD'S his spirit H5921

H5414 H3068 H7307

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 14:5 (Parallel theme): I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Luke 10:2 (References Lord): Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

James 4:5 (Spirit): Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

James 5:9 (Parallel theme): Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.

Philippians 2:3 (Parallel theme): Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.