

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 11:24 And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

26 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.

27 And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

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

29 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!

30 And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

31 And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let *them* fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits *high* upon the face of the earth.

32 And the people stood up all that day, and all *that* night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread *them* all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

33 And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.

34 And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.

35 And the people journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth.

NOTES

God Sends Quail and Plague

Lesson Text: Numbers 11:24-35

Related Scriptures: Psalm 105:37-41; Psalm 78:18-31;
Philippians 1:15-18

TIME: about 1444 B.C.

PLACE: Desert of Paran

GOLDEN TEXT—"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!" (Numbers 11:29).

Lesson Exposition

PROPHETS AMONG THE PEOPLE—Num. 11:24-30

Moses obeys the Lord (Num. 11:24). After Moses voiced his displeasure with God, as we studied in last week's lesson, God instructed him to gather seventy elders at the tabernacle. They would "bear the burden of the people" with him (vs. 17). Even after this assurance, Moses questioned God's ability to fulfill His promise to provide meat for all the multitude—a claim that seemed not quite credible.

Although Moses was not a bastion of faith at that moment and was properly rebuked, he nonetheless did what God said and gathered seventy elders at the tabernacle. These elders would assist Moses in providing spiritual leadership for the Israelites. They would not be able to do this in their own power, however, so they met with the Lord at the tabernacle to be equipped for the work ahead.

The seventy elders prophesy (Num. 11:25). When the seventy elders were gathered together, the Lord descended in the cloud that hovered

above, speaking to Moses and imparting to the elders of Israel the Spirit who was on Moses. The wording here does not suggest the power of the Spirit on Moses was reduced; it simply means that the same Spirit who was on Moses was now residing on the seventy elders as well.

The result of the Spirit's coming upon the elders was that they began to prophesy. The text does not provide specific details as to what type of prophetic activity took place.

This event points forward to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost on those believers who were gathered in Jerusalem after the ascension of Jesus (cf. Acts 2:1-4).

Eldad and Medad prophesy (Num. 11:26). Although the seventy appointed elders were told to gather at the tabernacle, two of them, Eldad and Medad, were still in the camp when the Spirit of the Lord came upon all the elders.

Instead of being disciplined or chastised, these two men received the Spirit inside the camp the same as did

those who were gathered at the tabernacle.

Just as the other sixty-eight elders were prophesying at the tabernacle, Eldad and Medad also prophesied in the camp. There was no difference in the administration of the Spirit or in the administration of the prophetic gift they received. All seventy prophesied in unison.

Joshua protests against the prophesying (Num. 11:27-28). Because of the prophetic activity taking place through Eldad and Medad, it was very evident that something unusual was happening with them. Since they were prophesying within the camp, it aroused the people's concern.

A young, unidentified man saw how Eldad and Medad were behaving, and his first (and perhaps natural) instinct was to report it. This young man ran and told Moses what was going on with these two elders (and now prophets).

Upon hearing about the activities of Eldad and Medad, however, Joshua pleaded with Moses to make them stop. To him, apparently, their absence from the tabernacle indicated they were not acting according to God's plan.

Moses' refusal (Num. 11:29-30). Moses inquired as to why Joshua demanded that Eldad and Medad be stopped from prophesying. He surmised that it was because Joshua was so devoted to him that he saw these two men as trying to compete for Moses' position of authority.

Moses stated that he wished everyone could prophesy the way Eldad, Medad, and the other elders were prophesying. Moses did not see this as an affront to his leadership. He knew what God had called him to do and also understood that God was in control of the entire operation.

PLAGUE AMONG THE PEOPLE— Num. 11:31-35

God sends quail to the people (Num. 11:31). A divinely ordered wind brought an enormous amount of quail into the Israelite camp quite suddenly. If anyone wondered whether or not God could provide food for such a large multitude, this definitely settled the issue.

The massive amount of quail God sent by the wind fell next to the camp, making it rather easy for the people to gather them for food. They did not have to hunt for their game. Instead, God brought the game to them. The quail surrounded the camp on all sides up to about a day's journey away (twelve to fifteen miles). The quail were piled up two cubits (three feet) high, making this an enormous provision from the Lord.

God sends a plague (Num. 11:32-33). The people were delighted to see such a bountiful supply of quail all around them, going presumably as far as the eye could see. They spent the next two days gathering their unexpected delicacy to their heart's content, with each person gathering at least ten homers (about sixty bushels).

Some of the meat would have been prepared to eat right away. It seems the rest was spread out on the ground to be dried and salted for later consumption, which was a common Egyptian method of preserving fish and fowl.

As the people began to chew the meat—even before they had swallowed and digested it—God's anger came against them. His judgment came upon them as swiftly as the quail did. Immediately, God sent a plague that struck the people down as they ate from their bounty (cf. Ps. 78:27-31).

This may catch the reader by surprise, but we must keep in mind that God was still displeased by the people's incessant complaining and their often-expressed desire to return to

Egypt. They had despised God's plan and provision and therefore despised God Himself. Some say that time heals all wounds, but time does not soften the punishment that comes from unconfessed sin. Only repentance does, and there is no record of repentance from the people.

Graves of craving (Num. 11:34-35).

The place where the Israelites were encamped was renamed Kibroth-hattaavah, which means "graves of craving." The strong craving that drove them and led to their complaints against the Lord (vs. 4) resulted in a number of deaths. We are not told how many died, but it seems likely that the instigators of the complaining—those most motivated by their fleshly cravings—were the hardest hit.

There is no mention in the text that anyone had paused to thank the Lord for His bountiful provision. They appear to have dived right into the feast, greedily satisfying their appetites.

God clearly was angry with them, not for being hungry and wanting to eat, but for allowing their cravings to dictate their behavior. It seems that whenever circumstances became difficult, the people complained.

There is nothing wrong with having a strong craving. The problem is when the object of our craving is something other than the Lord Himself or His will for our lives. The people of Israel treated God like a hateful enemy, not a loving Father. They refused to remember the many times He had protected, delivered, and fed them.

The grace of God can be seen again in Numbers 11:35 as the survivors of the plague resumed their journey, this time traveling to Hazeroth, a site of uncertain location in the wilderness. What is significant about this verse is that the journey resumed in spite of the judgment that God had just brought upon the people. God was not

through with the Israelites, and He still led them. Those who failed to believe would never be allowed to go into the Promised Land but would die along the way (cf. Heb. 3:16-19).

Be careful to avoid craving the things that are not of God. We all have a part of us that wants to go our own way and pursue our own desires. If we feed an appetite for destruction, however, we will certainly be destroyed. As followers of Jesus Christ, it is important to crave the things that will satisfy our souls and move us closer to Him. Above all, we must remember the admonition in Philippians 4:6 to make all our requests "with thanksgiving."

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. How did Moses show obedience to God after first expressing distrust and anger?
2. What was the immediate result of the Spirit's coming upon the seventy elders?
3. To what future event did the Spirit's coming on the elders point?
4. Who were Eldad and Medad, and where were they prophesying?
5. Why did Joshua want Moses to stop Eldad and Medad from prophesying?
6. How did God bring quail into the Israelite camp?
7. What indicates how many quail came into the camp?
8. What happened when the people started eating?
9. Why did God send a plague on the people?
10. How was God's grace demonstrated to the people of Israel?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. If we are doing the Lord's will in ministry, He will provide for our needs (Num. 11:24-25).
2. We should rejoice when God uses others to further His kingdom, not react with jealousy (vss. 26-29).
3. Even when we do not deserve it, God provides for our needs (vss. 30-31).
4. We should never take the Lord's blessings for granted; we should be good stewards of His gifts (vs. 32).
5. It is only God's mercy that holds back His wrath from us; we should never test His patience but live in keeping with true repentance (Num. 11:33; cf. Rom. 2:4).
6. Throughout our lives, we should always remember God's chastisements and blessings (Num. 11:34-35).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean to prophesy? Do people prophesy today (Matt. 7:21-23; I Cor. 14:3)? Why or why not?
2. How should we respond when someone tries to provoke us to jealousy? How can we prevent ourselves from becoming jealous of the gifts of others?
3. What does it say about our attitude toward God when we are wasteful of or ungrateful for His provision?
4. We should both fear God and understand His grace and mercy. Which of God's attributes do you tend to ignore?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“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!” (Num. 11:29).

Our golden text is Moses' response to a report that two anointed elders were outside prophesying in the midst of the camp rather than prophesying within the tabernacle along with Moses and all the other elders. Apparently this was interpreted by some as an insult against Moses. A young man was dispatched to tell Moses of the perceived impropriety, and Joshua, upon hearing of the report, asked Moses to forbid the men from prophesying.

But Moses saw the men's prophesying in a more positive light. For Moses, the prospect of having any sort of help in carrying the burdens of governing God's impossibly stubborn, stiff-necked people was a great blessing!

If your church is blessed with a pastor who faithfully preaches God's Word and leads your congregation in prioritizing sound doctrine, outreach to the lost, and ministering to the needy of your community, I admonish you not to make his leadership more burdensome with complaining motivated by selfish or petty causes, as the people of Israel did in our lesson text.

I exhort you rather to lighten his burdens and add to his delight in his service to God on your behalf. Be one who assists and supports his calling. As was the case with Moses you can be sure that his desire is that all those in his spiritual charge would become fellow ministers and fellow servants of the Lord.

—John Lody.