

Eldad & Medad

Num. 11:11-17

11:11 And **Moses** said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? **11:12** Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swearst unto their fathers? **11:13** Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. **11:14** I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. **11:15** And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

11:16 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. **11:17** And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

Moses' other helpers

Moses was exhausted and with good reason. Though Aaron and Joshua were able to help him some, the burden of all the people was mostly upon him (11:11). The people (11:12) were many and difficult to please.

Num. 11:24-29

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. **11:25** 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.

11:26 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. **11:27** And there ran a young man, and told **Moses**, and said, **Eldad** and **Medad** do prophesy in the camp.

11:28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord **Moses**, forbid them. **11:29** 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!

Eldad and Medad were two of 70 who were selected to help Moses. They stand out because they were in the camp rather than at the tabernacle when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This made them appear to be competing with Moses. (*Cf. Exodus 18:13-26.*)

negatives

Obscure people are usually not very controversial since there is little to say about them. Eldad and Medad, however, were controversial from the beginning, opposed by Joshua but supported by Moses.

Prophesying once did not turn Eldad and Medad into famous prophets. Their one-time prophesying was just praising God. So it is questionable if they were prophets at all. Moses' statement in 11:29 implies that they were. But they never prophesied again and their main work was judging practical matters within their tribes (11:17).

Eldad and Medad were like two would-be workers who missed all-important job interviews. Perhaps they had good excuses for not showing up since God gave them work anyway. On the other hand, perhaps the Lord was just gracious to Moses by giving him a full complement of new helpers even though two of them were absent the first day. Either way, there is no reason to praise Eldad and Medad for not being where they should have been. If they did anything that was praise worthy, it was only because the Holy Spirit enabled them to do so.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

A	() Eldad and Medad were controversial leaders.
A-1	() Joshua opposed them (11:28, Luke 9:49-50).
A-2	() They caused a disturbance in the camp (11:26-27).
A-3	() They were not where they should have been (11:24-26).
A-4	() They spoke in tongues like the disciples in Acts chapter two.
A-5	() No other controversial person is mentioned in the context (12:1-15).
B	() Eldad and Medad were not true prophets.
B-1	() We do not know what they said.
B-2	() They only prophesied once (11:25).
B-3	() They are not called prophets (11:29).
B-4	() They were just ordinary men (11:16, 28).
B-5	() They did not perform any miracles (11:26).
B-6	() They prophesied like Saul did in 1 Sam. 19:24.
B-7	() They were just two of Moses' many assistants (11:17).

positives

God himself and various people were involved in the selection of Eldad and Medad. Moses must have known them fairly well. But before he chose them, both men were already leaders within their tribes (11:16). Ultimately, the Holy Spirit gave the two men his stamp of approval. So the misguided objection of Joshua was overruled by God.

The main issue is whether Eldad and Medad acted independently from Moses or not. They appeared to do so, since they were not at the tabernacle with the others. But did they really compete with Moses?

It is easy to question the helpfulness of Eldad and Medad since we know little about what they did. However, Moses' need for help is clear. Several of the points below are based on statements about this in 11:11-17. They must have been helpful because the passage stresses that Moses desperately needed help.

Three key positives about Eldad and Medad which fit with most lines below are: 1.) that they were not false prophets, 2.) that they were closely associated with Moses, and 3.) that they were approved by God.

Mark the points below as correct (C), incorrect (X), or partly correct (▲).

C	() Eldad and Medad were chosen leaders.
C-1	() Moses chose them all by himself (11:16, 26).
C-2	() The Holy Spirit came upon them suddenly (11:26).
C-3	() They were probably respected within their tribe(s). (11:16).
C-4	() God endorsed their selection by enabling their prophesy.
C-5	() They were like the assistants chosen in Acts 6:1-6.
D	() Eldad and Medad were truly helpful.
D-1	() Moses viewed them positively (11:29).
D-2	() Moses needed help (11:11-12, 16-17, 29).
D-3	() They did not compete with Moses (11:28-29).
D-4	() They prophesied more than the others 68 men.
D-5	() God used them to encourage Moses (11:14-17, 29).
D-6	() They helped demonstrate the humility of Moses (11:29, 12:3).
D-7	() Moses was happy to share responsibility with them (11:17, 29).

conclusions

worksheet answers

Eldad and Medad were misunderstood, but the confusion is bigger than that. Biblical leadership, prophesy, and the work of the Holy Spirit are all misunderstood. So there are several thought-provoking but incorrect lines on the worksheets to help expose various erroneous views.

(A-4) There is no reason to think that Eldad and Medad spoke in tongues just because the Holy Spirit is mentioned. They spoke ordinary Hebrew.

(A-5) In 12:1-15, Miriam and Aaron made Moses' Ethiopian wife controversial in an attempt to exalt themselves. However, Eldad and Medad did not compete with Moses (D-3).

(B, B-3) Moses indirectly called his two helpers prophets (11:29) even though they served as judges (B-7).

(B-6) The prophesying of Eldad and Medad was not like that of Saul. The Holy Spirit came upon them to confirm their role as helpers, not to prevent them from harming someone.

(C-1) God's leaders are ultimately chosen by God himself, even though people are involved in the process.

(D-4) Eldad and Medad prophesied as much as the others, but not more.

So what?

Joshua was right about the sinful and harmful nature of competing with God's appointed leader. (That problem comes up in Numbers chapter 12.) But it was wrong for Joshua to view Eldad and Medad as competition. They continued on as helpful coworkers instead.

	harmful competitors	helpful coworkers
Joshua's view of Aldad & Medad (11:28)	✓	
Moses view of Aldad & Medad (11:29)		✓

This is similar to an incident in the Gospels in which Jesus took the side of an outsider who was using the Savior's name to cast out demons. The disciples wanted to stop the man's ministry, but Jesus said, "Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us." (See Luke 9:49-50.)

The main application in both passages is that we should appreciate the ministries of others. There are limitations, however. Jesus did not praise the work of Judas, nor was Miriam praised in Numbers chapter 12.

applications

Apply the points which you believe are most important or seem most useful.
