

Who were Eldad and Medad?

In Numbers 11, we read of two men named Eldad and Medad. These men were Israelite elders who were traveling with the rest of God's people from Egypt to the Promised Land. As elders, Eldad and Medad would have been looked up to as wise and trustworthy individuals.

In the second year of the Israelites' journey, the people began to crave meat and grumbled to Moses, saying that they wished they were back in Egypt where they had been able to enjoy a variety of good foods (Numbers 11:4–5). The last time the Israelites had complained about the lack of food, God had provided a miraculous source in the form of manna. This bread from heaven was sweet to the taste and looked like coriander seeds, and it sustained the Israelites day in and day out for quite some time (see Exodus 16). But the people were tired of manna, so they fell back to their usual reaction—complaint.

Needless to say, God was angry with the Israelites for their lack of faith and their ungratefulness for how He had provided for them thus far. But Moses, in his turn, was angry with the Lord for the burden He had placed on Moses. He had the heavy responsibility of caring for the people and was weary of their complaining (Numbers 11:10–15). So God told Moses that He would provide so much meat that the people would become sick of it, too; and, as an act of mercy, God instructed Moses to appoint 70 elders who would help Moses bear some of the load of leadership (verses 16–23).

Two of these elders were Eldad and Medad. All the elders were instructed to gather at the tent of meeting (the tabernacle) to receive the power of God's Spirit (Numbers 11:16). However, Eldad and Medad stayed behind in the camp. It is unclear whether Eldad and Medad were disobedient or whether they had permission to remain behind; in either case, when the Spirit of God came upon the elders, Eldad and Medad received power, too. Each elder was given the ability to prophesy for a time, and that included Eldad and Medad. The two men immediately began to prophesy within the camp, apart from the other elders (verse 26).

Up to that time, only Moses had been able to speak on God's behalf. Therefore, some of the people were confused and concerned that Eldad and Medad were prophesying among them. A runner came to inform Moses of this occurrence, and Joshua, Moses' right-hand man, requested that Moses stop Eldad and Medad (Numbers 11:27–28). But Moses reassured Joshua with the words, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" (verse 29). After that, Moses and the elders returned to the camp (verse 30), and God sent quail to the people that night (verse 31).

Moses' words to Joshua, "I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!" shows that Moses' priority was the glory of God, not manmade formality. His words were also a wish that came true with the dawning of the church age. On the Day of Pentecost, God's Holy Spirit was poured out on believers (Acts 2), and since that time every born-again believer in Christ has the Spirit indwelling him and is, in fact, a prophet, in the sense that he is a bearer of God's Word to the world.