

Assistance for Moses in Governing the People

Numbers 11:16-25

Numbers 11:16-25 - *“So the LORD said to Moses: “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷ Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone. ¹⁸ Then you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the LORD, saying, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. ¹⁹ You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, ²⁰ but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?””’ ²¹ And Moses said, “The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.’ ²² Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?” ²³ And the LORD said to Moses, “Has the LORD’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.” ²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.”*

Background Notes

When the Lord granted seventy elders to Moses for help in governing the people, was this **God’s perfect will** for Moses, or was it **God’s permissive will** for Moses? Bible scholars are not in agreement on this question.

Remember, Moses himself was complaining at this point. Numbers 11:11-15: *“So Moses said to the LORD, “Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I beget them, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a guardian carries a nursing child,’ to the land which You swore to their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all these people? For they weep all over me, saying, ‘Give us meat, that we may eat. I am not able to bear all these people alone, because the burden is too heavy for me. If You treat me like this, please kill me here and now—if I have found favor in Your sight—and do not let me see my wretchedness!”*

Some commentators say that Moses was wrong to complain, and thus God permitted him to have seventy assistants – but this was only God’s **permissive** will for Moses. This view goes on to say that If Moses had fully trusted the Lord, he would not have needed help - because God always gives His people the strength to do whatever He calls them to do. That’s one view.

Other commentators say that even though Moses didn’t have a good attitude here, God graciously met the needs of His overworked and exhausted servant by giving him seventy men to assist him in his difficult job. In this view, the granting of seventy assistants was God’s **perfect** will for Moses.

So what’s the answer? I believe it was not wrong for Moses to have assistants to help him in the ministry. It is certainly true that God gives His servants the strength and ability to do whatever He calls us to do, but sometimes that help comes in the form of other people - people whom the Lord sends along to help in the ministry.

Here’s an illustration. Over 30 years ago, the Lord prodded me to start the ministry that I am now involved in full-time - “Growing Christian Ministries.” GCM started out as a small devotional newsletter sent by mail, but over the years it has expanded into a radio program, CDs, courses, and a website. In the early days, Margie and I did all the work ourselves. You should have seen our basement - it looked like a small post office and tape duplicating shop! But the workload got to be too much - we just couldn’t handle it on our own. I hope that we didn’t complain as Moses did, but believe me, there were definitely times of frustration as we tried to carry the load.

Sometimes there’s a fine line between asking the Lord for help and complaining out of frustration! (And I’m sure many of you can identify!) Although we still do a lot of the ministry work ourselves, we’re so thankful that the Lord has graciously continued to send along the help that’s needed. He has granted both people and funds to keep GCM going and **growing!**

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord graciously relieves the workloads of His servants.

Moses may not have had the right attitude at this point, but at least he went to the right place with his problem of the heavy workload! **He went to the Lord** - and so should we, when we need help. Are you facing a heavy workload right now? In your family? In your job? In your Christian service? What should you do? (The teaching gets practical here -- even though it’s given under “Doctrinal Points”!)

If you’re facing a heavy workload, follow this three-step procedure:

- a. First, determine if your heavy workload really is an overwhelming workload. I tend to think I have too heavy a workload when I want to find time to play golf – or another favorite sport! (Interesting, isn't it?) Although it's not wrong to play golf now and then, if you cut down on some of the "extra" things, you may find that your workload is not overwhelming!
- b. Determine if what you're doing is what the Lord has actually called you to do. If you're over-extending yourself, even in the ministry, you may not be doing what God has called you to do. You may be doing good things, even ministry, but that's not necessarily what the Lord has called you to do. Remember, you're only a small part of the body of Christ, and you're not supposed to do everything! Read 1 Corinthians 12 in this connection. Your workload in your family should also follow this step, too. In your family, are you doing more than what the Lord calls you to do? There are probably many over-worked "Christian soccer moms" who are doing more than what the Lord has called them to do in the family, and that's why they're exhausted (and, dare I say it? - complaining!) On the other hand, there are probably many Christian dads who are **not** doing all that the Lord has called them to do in the family.
- c. After you've determined that you really do have a heavy workload, and you're doing what God has called you to do, then simply ask the Lord for help and assistance. The Lord will answer your prayer. And the answer may be closer than you think.

In the illustration that I just gave you about Growing Christians Ministries, the answer was closer than we thought. The Lord's answer was our own son, Ron. Ron now works with us full-time in the ministry. Without his help and technical expertise, the extent of the ministry would be greatly curtailed. God provided him to give us the help we needed, and he has been a tremendous blessing! As long as you're faithfully doing what the Lord calls you to do, the Lord graciously relieves the workloads of His servants.

2. The Lord reluctantly answers the complaints of His children.

In verse 20 we have a good example of the use of *hyperbole* in the Bible. Hyperbole is a figure of speech in which purposeful exaggeration is used to get the point across. For example, if I said, "I told you a **million** times not to fall asleep during my sermons!" -- that's hyperbole! Some Christians have a hard time admitting that hyperbole is used in the Bible, because they feel that hyperbole is a form of lying. No, hyperbole is not lying -- it's purposeful exaggeration! In verses 19-20 the Lord said, "*You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days,*²⁰ *but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?"*" The Lord didn't mean that quail meat would literally drip out of their noses! He meant they'd have so much meat that they'd be sick of it.

Have you ever had so much of a good thing that you became sick of it? I remember a ski trip in Colorado when the snow was perfect, and I "gorged myself" on skiing in powder snow for a whole week! But by the end of the week, I was sick of skiing and ready to come home. (But it didn't take long for me to get over that form of "sickness"!)

Seriously speaking, though, I learned a lot of lessons that the Lord wanted to teach me during that experience.

Sometimes the Lord disciplines His children by giving them so much of what they desire that they become sick of it - and that's what was going on in Numbers 11. Quails are little short winged birds that are considered a delicacy. This was not the first time that the Lord had given the children of Israel quail to eat. In Exodus 16, when the manna was first given, God also gave them quail. This time, however, the Lord said He would send so many quails into the camp that the people would become sick of them! This was the way that God chose to answer their complaints about having no meat.

God can teach this way today, too. Don't assume that God is pleased with your life and lifestyle when He gives you what you want – some “thing” that you desperately desire. No. God may be reluctantly answering your complaint or your desire in such a way that you will learn a lesson. This can apply to all areas of life. The Lord reluctantly answers the complaints of His children.

Practical Application

Don't forget the size of the LORD's arm!

When Moses asked where would all the meat to feed such a large number of people come from, the Lord said, “*Has the LORD's arm been shortened?*” (v23). Moses had forgotten the size of the Lord's arm! He had forgotten the Lord's power and ability to do what He says He'll do!

Do we forget the size of the Lord's arm? Jesus said, “*With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible*” (Mark 10:27). What is the context of Mark 10:27? **The context is salvation!** Maybe you're not a Christian, and you think that you've gone too far in sin, and there's no way you can be saved. What?! Has the Lord's arm been shortened? The Lord can save you! He can save anyone! He will save you, if you simply turn to Him and believe. “*If you declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*” Romans 10:9).

Are you a believer and you're facing certain needs - emotional needs? Financial needs? Ministry needs? God arm is not too short, and He can meet these needs! Ask Him for His help!

Don't forget the size of the LORD's arm!