

Numbers 11:24-29; Joel 2:28-29

Women in the Kingdom: Spirit-Filled Leadership

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / May 22nd, 2022

Who does God want to lead his people? Who does God want to serve as pastors, elders, and leaders in the church? It's easy in a series like this to jump right to gender, "only men lead," or "men and women can lead." But I think if we look at the broad scope of scripture, the question of leadership and God's people, we find a surprising twist and maybe a different answer. Let's look at Numbers 11, Joel 2, and Acts 2.

Numbers 11 – God desires Spirit-filled leaders.

Numbers 11 is a really weird chapter. It starts with the people complaining to the Lord, and God sends fire down on some of the outskirts of the camp. It doesn't say anyone died, but at least part of the camp went up in flames. But Moses prays for the people, and the fire goes away. You would think the people learn their lesson, but they don't. They begin to complain about their diet and lack of meat. This time, when God gets angry, Moses gets angry back at God and complains to God that these people are too heavy of a burden for him to carry. Listen to what Moses says:

Numbers 11:12, 14 (NIV)

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? ... ¹⁴I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.

They're a bunch of babies! It's too much, God! Moses's back is hurting because he's been carrying the team. Moses is tired of leading God's people alone. And you know what God does? He doesn't send more fire but answers Moses' complaint with a solution, shared leadership.

Numbers 11:16-17 (ESV)

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.

The part we always remember is right after this when God floods the people with quail meat till they get sick. But before this, God does something really significant. God tells Moses to bring seventy of Israel's men who are elders, bring them to the tent of meeting, and God will pour out his Holy Spirit on them, anointing and filling them in a special way for the task of leadership. He gives his Holy Spirit to a team of leaders. God has never done this before! God desires Spirit-filled leaders for his people. See what happens next.

Numbers 11:24-25 (NIV)

So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent. ²⁵Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.

God could have appointed Moses and the priests to lead Israel, but he didn't. He appointed Moses and elders. That's really significant. New Testament elders are not parallel with Old Testament priests. Priests were not every man, but only from the line of Aaron, Levites, and they could not have any physical limitations

(Leviticus 21:16-23). But the requirements for elders here were broader; physical limitations did not matter. They had to be men who were known as leaders and officials among the people. But look how the story takes a surprising turn, which sets up our connection to Joel and Acts.

Numbers 11:26-28 (NIV)

²⁶ However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”

Moses tells the elders to gather outside the tent of meeting, probably the tabernacle, but two men, Eldad and Medad, don’t listen. They do their own thing! They remain in the camp, but the Spirit still rests on them, and they still prophesy. God desires Spirit-filled leaders. But if we think what they’re doing is okay, a young man goes and reports them, and Joshua tells Moses to stop them! Before this, time and time again, God had given very specific regulations and guidance and expected Israel to follow his commands exactly. We can’t have this, or we risk God’s wrath!

Numbers 11:29 (NIV)

But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!”

This is very surprising! Moses says, “I don’t care! I wish all God’s people were prophets and filled with the Spirit.” And then they go back to camp, and that’s it. God doesn’t judge Eldad and Medad. God does his own thing. God works how God wants to work. One author wrote about this passage with a similar illustration.

My daughter Evangeline loves to mess with me. I tell her not to touch the black wet paint on our front door. What do you think she does? She sticks out her hand and walks slowly forward, giggling and looking at me with a big smile. And she is so beautiful and funny, and it annoys me, but I love her so much.¹

That’s kind of what God does. God knows our expectations. He even tells us what they should be. Then he messes with us. Here’s how to have godly, Spirit-filled male elders. Oh, but this isn’t going to go the way you think, and that’s okay. While this passage does say “men” who are “elders,” I think its emphasis is on the filling of the Holy Spirit. *God desires Spirit-filled leaders*. But the story doesn’t stop here because Moses wished that all the Lord’s people were prophets and filled with the Spirit, and God doesn’t forget that wish.

Joel 2 – God promises to pour out his Spirit on sons and daughters.

The prophet Joel wrote a short book about “the day of the Lord.” In chapter one, Joel describes a past day of disaster, a locust swarm that came on Israel. The people repent, and so does Joel. And in chapter two, Joel describes another day of the Lord, which also seems like a coming disaster, but this one is more like a military disaster. So again, he calls the people to pray and repent, not just on the outside but from the heart. Joel quotes **Exodus 34:6** that “God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13). Then they all repent, and God shows them compassion by defeating their enemies, restoring their land, and by God dwelling among them. And God promises one day to send his Spirit on them:²

¹ The Numbers 11 interpretation and illustration are inspired by Immeasurable: Reflections on the Soul of Ministry in the Age of Church, Inc. by Skye Jethani. <https://www.amazon.com/Immeasurable-Reflections-Soul-Ministry-Church/dp/0802416195>

² BibleProject references Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:23-28.

Joel 2:28-29 (NIV)

²⁸ “And afterward,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.

²⁹ Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

This is the linchpin that is going to turn the desolation of God’s people into a new Garden of Eden (Joel 3:1-21). God is going to renew all his people, and he starts by pouring out his Spirit, like Moses desired, not just on the male elders in Israel, but on all people, men, and women. *God promises to pour out his Spirit on sons and daughters.* These are the kind of people, Spirit-filled people, who are going to lead God’s new kingdom. And we find Joel 2 fulfilled in the church at its very formation.

Acts 2 – God pours out his Spirit on men and women in the church.

After Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension, God sends his Holy Spirit to his people.

Acts 2:1-4 (NIV)

Then the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. ² Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Just like God sent his Holy Spirit on the tabernacle in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, God sends his Holy Spirit to the New-Testament church with tongues of fire. There’s even a blowing violent wind. The Hebrew word for wind is the same as that for Spirit. This Spirit, this violent wind, is not a tame wind. It’s a wind that is going to fit in line with all our expectations and systems. It’s not a wind that is going to bow to by-laws and will stretch our imaginations to their furthest limits. This is how God has come, in his Spirit, as a rushing, violent wind to fill men and women with his Holy Spirit to lead his church.

This is the formation of the church, and there are no Jew, Gentile, or gender divisions (Gal 3:28). The Holy Spirit doesn’t just come on just the men. The Holy Spirit comes on sons and daughters, men and women. Does this outright say that now women can be elders or pastors? No. But there is an interesting biblical theme. I think we’re supposed to prioritize, above all, spirit-filled leadership at Cornerstone, regardless of gender. *God pours out his Spirit on men and women in the church.* Let’s pray.

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

Stained Glass Artwork

Jesus' Baptism: <https://pixabay.com/photos/stained-glass-color-baptism-jesus-4329142/>

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Service & Sermon

You can [watch the full service on Facebook](#) or [only the sermon on YouTube](#).

Discussion Time

Ice-Breaker – What's the weirdest thing you've ever seen?

Prayer – Do you have a prayer or praise you'd like to share?

Bible – Read Numbers 11:10-30. What surprises you about this passage? What new things do you notice? Read Joel 2:28-29 and Acts 2:1-4. What similarities and themes do you notice?

Inward – What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

Outward – What does a Spirit-filled church look like? How about Spirit-filled leadership?

Recap – What's your one-sentence takeaway from today?

Follow-Up

Dear Church,

Thank you for listening to this past Sunday's sermon, where we looked at Numbers 11, Joel 2, and Acts 2. As I finished up my message on the Holy Spirit, I stumbled across two beautiful songs: [Wind by Joseph \(lyrics here\)](#) and [Come Holy Ghost](#). If interested, you could also listen to this [YouTube conversation where Monica and I chat with Pastor Alison Gerber](#) about her journey and whether women can serve as pastors. I briefly talk about Numbers 11, Joel 2, and Acts 2, much like I did in Sunday's sermon. God bless.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan