"May the Lord Put His Spirit (rûḥô) Upon Them" (Num 11:25–29b): Reading Moses' Prayer for the Nigerian Contemporary Situation

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ABSTRACT

The expression "may the Lord put his Spirit (rûḥô) upon them (Num 11:29b)…" is a known "prayer or wish of Moses," Israel's greatest prophet. It is from the eleventh chapter of the Book of Numbers. Numbers as a whole, narrates how generations of Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness, and how God walks, marches with, provides, and acts towards his chosen people, in spite of their grumbling and stubbornness. Numbers 11, especially vv.25–29, the focus of this work, is the scene when God takes some of Moses' prophetic spirit and bestows them on seventy elders. While this new divine gift of the Spirit (hârûaḥ) to a disgruntled-OT community displeases Joshua, Moses' prayerful response "that the Lord would bestow his Spirit upon them," (v. 29b), is worth reinterpreting historically and theologically for contemporary communities, particularly, Nigeria.

Introduction

The expression "may the LORD put his Spirit (*rûḥô*) upon them" (Num 11:29b) is a known "prayer or wish of Moses", Israel's greatest charismatic leader and prophet.[287] It is drawn from Numbers 11, which narrates how generations of Israelites spent forty years in the wilderness. Numbers 11 provides a retrospective understanding of Moses' paradigmatic leadership led by the Spirit of God, who walks with, guides, provides for, and accompanies the Israelites through the wilderness despite their grumbling

[287]Vincent P. Branick, *Understanding the Prophets and Their Books* (New York: Paulist, 2012), 250.

and rebellion. Drawing on Exodus 33:7–11, Numbers 11:25–29b narrates how God took some of Moses' prophetic Spirit and placed it in seventy elders outside the tent, as well as Eldad and Medad. This outpouring of the divine Spirit (*hārûaḥ*) displeases a young man (Num 11:27) and the zealous Joshua (Num 11:28), which in turn prompts Moses to pray: "would that the LORD would bestow his Spirit upon them" (Num 11:29b).

This passage raises the question of which Spirit Moses refers to here. Is there any Holy Spirit in the Old Testament? Questions regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament are often met with shocking resistance, challenges, or negligence by religious people, Christians, and scholars both within and outside of Africa and Nigeria. When such questions are addressed, they are done so on the basis of the New Testament due to the lack of explicit use of the phrase "Holy Spirit" (*rûaḥ qōdeš*) in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible.[288]

Existing research on this scene or Moses' prayer often lacks sufficient application of its relevance to the Church in Nigeria, which is filled with talents and gifts manifested both inside and outside of the church.[289] Indeed,

[288] The phrase "Holy Spirit" only explicitly occurs in three places in the Old Testament: in Psalm 51:11–13 and Isaiah 63:10–11. For debates on the place of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament, see Carl Armerding, "The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92, no. 367 (1935), 222–291; John F. Walvoord, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 92, no. 387 (1940), 410–441; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," in *Evangelical Quarterly* 82, no. 4 (2010), 308–315.

[289] Representatives of the past studies referenced in this wok include: William Ross Schoemaker, "The Use of רוּחַ in the Old Testament and of πενευμα in the New Testament," in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 23, no. 1 (1904), 13–67; Armerding, "Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," 277–291; Walvoored, "Work of the Holy Spirit," 410–434; Leon J. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20,* Anchor Bible, Vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 319–343; Gary Fredricks, "Rethinking the Role of the Holy Spirit in the Lives of The Old Testament Believers," in *Trinity Journal* 9 (1998), 81–104; Fredrick Baumgärtel, "Spirit in the Old Testament," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 359–68; Herman Leinknecht, "πνευμα πνευματικος," in Gerhard Friedrich (ed.) and Geoffrey W. Bromiley (trans.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 332–359; S. Tengström, "רוּחַ *rûaḥ,*" in *TDOT* 13:365–96; John Goldingay, "Was the Holy Spirit Active in Old Testament

the Nigerian Church is similar to the ancient Israelite community of the book of Numbers in many respects. It is a church and society in transition—from the British, from the Irish, and from successive governments. It is a church and society searching for food, nourishment, and a better life for its citizens and members. And it is a society that is burdened with leadership issues as well as socio-political, economic, and religious challenges.[290]

Using faith hermeneutics as its exegetical point of departure (i.e., "the harmony of faith and reason, exegesis and theology, biblical and systematic"),[291] this paper historically and theologically explores related

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Times? What Was New About the Christian Experience of God?" in *Ex auditu* 12 (1996), 14–28; Thomas Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers," in Leander Keck (ed.), *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 1–268; Roger D. Cotton, "The Pentecostal Significance of Numbers 11," in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 1 (2002), 3–10; Elliot B. Gertel, " Moses, Elisha and Transformed Spirit: The Height of Biblical Prophecy?" in *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2002), 73–79; David Hymes, "Numbers 11: Pentecostal Perspective," in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 13, no. 2 (2010), 257–281; Kaiser, "Indwelling Presence of the Holy Spirit," 308–315; James M. Hamilton Jr., "God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old & New Testaments," in Ray Clendenen (ed.), *Nac Studies in Bible & Theology* (Nashville: B&E Publishing, 2006); Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2006); David Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds. *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2011); Richard E. Averbeck, "Breath, Wind, Spirit and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2011), 25–36.

[290] Some of these challenges have been discussed in Chinua Achebe, *Trouble with Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1984); Michael Ufok Udoekpo, *Corruption in Nigerian Culture: The Liberating Mission of the Church* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1994); *The Limits of a Divided Nation* (Enugu, Nigeria: Snaap Press, 1999); and *Rethinking the Prophetic Critique of Worship in Amos 5 for Contemporary Nigeria and the USA* (Oregon: Pickwick, 2017), 117–125.

[291] This is drawn from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Behold the Pierced One: An Approach to a Spiritual Christology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 42–62; Scott H. Hahn, *Covenant and Communion: Biblical Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 41–62; and Udoekpo, *Worship in Amos*, xxx–xxxi, which describes "faith hermeneutics" irrespective of the biblical text as a "scientific" reading with an "explanatory power" from the heart of the Church in an ecclesial spirit. It has twofold power: (1) the power to hold fast the entire testimony of the sources, and (2) the power to transcend differences of culture, division, time, people, civilization, and values.

terms, metonyms, uses, meanings, activities, and theological functions of the Spirit of the Lord (*rûaḥ ʾădōnāy*) in Moses' prayer (Num 11:29b) for the situation of contemporary Nigeria, including the Church in Nigeria.

Rûaḥ in the Old Testament and Other Ancient Texts

The Old Testament Hebrew term *rûaḥ* is translated with the Greek term *pneuma* in the Classical Writings, the LXX, Deutero-Canonical texts (the Apocrypha), the writings of Philo and Josephus, and the New Testament.[292] Leon Wood and Tengström view *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* as "spirit", "breath", and "wind", depending on the context. Usually in the Old Testament, *rûaḥ* occurs as a feminine, but sometimes it occurs as masculine. The term occurs in noun and verb form about 388 times in the Old Testament, including eleven times in the Aramaic portions of Daniel.[293] It occurs thirty-eight times in the Torah. There are zero occurrences in Leviticus, two in Deuteronomy, seven in the Primeval History, and forty-seven in the Deuteronomistic History. It occurs rarely in the writings of the eighth-century classical prophets; a notable exception is Amos 4:13, which references God as the creator of the spirit (*bōrēʾ rûaḥ*).[294] *Rûaḥ* occurs seven times in Hosea, twenty-nine times in proto-Isaiah, twice in Micah, and eighteen times in Jeremiah.

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[292] On this, see John H. Walton, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Spirit of the Lord in the Old Testament," in *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2011), 38–67 for a comprehensive orientation or comparative study of the Spirit of the Lord in the *ANET* and Old Testament. See John R. Levinson, "The Debut of the Divine Spirit in Josephus's Antiquities," in *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (1994), 128–38 on "Josephus's Antiquities." Also useful may be the chapter on "the Manifestations of the Use of Charisms in the First Eight Centuries of the Church" in Ayo Emmanuel Efodigbue, *Charisms for Ministry: An Exploration of How the Manifest Charisms in the Early Church Can Be Recovered and Restored for Ministry in the Catholic Church Today* (Xulon Press, 2017), 93–146. Others are Henry Barclay Swete, *The Holy Spirit in Ancient Church: A Study of Christian Teaching in the Age of the Fathers* (London: Macmillan & Co, 1912) and Albert Mitterer, "Die sieben Gaben des Hl. Geisters nach der Väterlehre," in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 49 (1925), 529–66.

[293] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 16; S. Tengström, "רוּחַ *rûaḥ,*" in *TDOT* 13:372.

[294] Tengström, "רוּחַ *rûaḥ*," 373. That is "*andibot spirit*" in Efik Bible, *Edisana Nwed Abasi Ibom* (Lagos: The Bible Society of Nigeria, 1985).

The term *rûaḥ* is not found in Nahum and Zephaniah. However, it occurs fifty-two times in Ezekiel, twenty-three times in Deutero-Isaiah and Trito-Isaiah, twice in both Jonah and Habakkuk, four times in Haggai, and twelve times in both Zechariah and Malachi. A statement concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is found in Joel 3:1–2. *Rûaḥ* is also used frequently in the Psalms (thirty-nine occurrences) and Wisdom literature (thirty-one occurrences in Job, twenty-one in Proverbs, and twenty-four in Ecclesiastes, sometimes as "vanity" [*heḇel*]). As stated earlier, context must be our guide in discerning whether *rûaḥ* is in reference to the "spirit of man" or "spirit of God" in these texts.[295] A few occurrences also appear in the Chronicler's History (1 Chr 5:26; 12:19; 2 Chr 20:14; 21:16; 24:20; 34:22; Ezra 1:1, 5). In these occurrences its most basic meaning is "God's wind". It is a living "breath" (*nəšāmâh*), a "life principle in man", invisibly "controlled and given by God".[296] The term does not occur in Ruth, Song of Songs, or Esther.[297]

In the Classical Writings (e.g., Homer, Plato, Aschylus), the LXX, Deutero-Canonical literature (the Apocrypha), the writings of Philo and Josephus, and the New Testament, the Greek term *pneuma* corresponds to the Hebrew word *rûaḥ,* with the basic meanings of "wind" and "breath". In the New Testament and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, however, the term "became an exclusively religious and psychological term . . . the word is seldom employed to mean wind or breath, but is use much more frequently in the sense of spirit of God and (especially in Pauline Writings) of the spirit of man".[298]

In his comparative analysis of *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* in the Old Testament and New Testament, Wood affirms that the latter is the Greek equivalent of the former. He stresses that *pneuma* was used frequently in New Testament times. He cites about 378 uses of *pneuma* compared to 388 occurrences of

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[295] See Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 17–20 for "identifying references to God's Spirit" as "divine nature and vital energy" about 97 times and "spirit of man" 84 times.

[296] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 16–17.

[297] Tengström, "רוּח *rûaḥ*," 373.

[298] See Schoemaker, "Use of רוּח in the Old Testament," 35–67 for a detailed and impressive study of the use of *pnuema* in the Classical Writings, LXX, Deuterocanonical books (the Apocrypha), the writings of Philo and Josephus, and the New Testament, which is impossible to discuss in great length because of the limited scope of this paper.

rûaḥ. He argues that if the New Testament is about one-fourth the length of the Old Testament, then *pneuma* must have been used in reference to God four times more frequently. The term occurs in the phrase "spirit of God" no less than 261 of the 378 occurrences in the New Testament, approximately ninety-four times with the adjective "holy" (*hagios*). Saint Paul also uses the phrase "spirit of holiness" (*peneuma hagiōsunēs*) in Romans 1:4.[299]

We can reach several conclusions from this brief lexical survey. First, it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully categorize and systematize the use of *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* in the Old Testament, except to highlight a few representative texts. Second, it invites us to appreciate the unity of the two Testaments.[300] Third, it reminds us of the use or functions of *rûaḥ* and *pneuma* in different texts and contexts in the biblical period.[301]

In addition to offering a lexical survey, Wood offers a chronological arrangement of this divine *rûaḥ* divided into five Old Testament periods: (1) creation to the patriarchs, (2) Moses to Samuel, (3) the united monarchy, (4) the divided monarchy, and (5) the postexilic period. Wood includes significant and informative examples as well. The creation story, for instance, references activities of the *rûaḥ* ("wind" or "breath") of God in the priestly account of Genesis 1:2. In this account, "the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God

[299] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 20–22.

[300] See Pope Paul VI, *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1965), no. 12; Pope Benedict XVI, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), nos. 39–41.

[301] See Schoemaker, "Use of רוּחַ in the Old Testament," 13–35, where an alternate development of the meaning of *rûaḥ* and related terms and metonyms is arranged into the following four Old Testament periods: (1) the use of רוּחַ in the oldest documents of the Old Testament, dating approximately 900–700 BC (J and E materials of the Hexateuch, oldest sections of Judges, Samuel, Kings, eighth century prophets, Amos Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah); (2) the use of רוּחַ in the Deuteronomic period dating ca. 700–550 BC (i.e., the D section of the Hexateuch, Judges, and Kings, with exception of later additions, the prophecies of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk); (3) the use of רוּחַ in Babylonian (exilic) and early Persian periods, dating ca. 550–400 BC (Ezekiel, Babylonian Isaiah, Zechariah 1–8, Haggai; Malachi, Holiness and Priestly materials in the Hexateuch, the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, and many Psalms); (4) the use of רוּחַ in the later Persian and the Greek periods, dating ca. 400 BC to the Maccabean times (Joel, Jonah, Job, Proverbs, Chronicles, Ecclesiastes, Daniel, certain Psalms, and later additions to the prophets).

(*wərûaḥ ’ĕlōhîm*) swept over the face of the waters”. Similarly, Job 26:13 references the Spirit’s role in creation when Job says to Blida, “by his wind (*bərûḥô*) the heavens were made”. Similarly, in Job 33:4 Job says to Elihu, “the spirit of God (*rûaḥ-ēl*) has made me and the breath of the Almighty (*nišmat šaddai*) gives me life”.[302]

During the Moses-Samuel era (where Wood locates our text, Numbers 11), soon after the Spirit of creation in Genesis 1, God gives divine gifts (*rûaḥ ’ĕlōhîm*) of craftsmanship, skill, intelligence, ability, knowledge, and wisdom to Bezael and Oholiab in Exodus 31:3 (cf. 35:31) for the continuous work of creation—the building of the tent and furnishing of the community.[303] Apart from Bezeael and Oholiab, the non-Israelite Balaam experiences the Spirit of God (*rûaḥ ’ĕlōhîm*) as he speaks on behalf of Israel (Num 24:2).[304] In Numbers 27:18, Joshua is indwelt by the spirit (*’îš-’ăšer rûaḥ*). After Moses lays his hand on Joshua, Joshua is filled with the Spirit of wisdom (*rûaḥ ḥôkmâh,* Deut 34:9). Many of the twelve judges were filled with the Spirit (e.g., Othniel in Judg 3:10; Gideon in Judg 6:34; Jephthah in Judg 11:29; Samson in Judg 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14).

During the period of the united monarchy, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Saul, who was “turned into another man” and prophesied (1 Sam 10:6–10;

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[302] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 23–24. For the most recent studies on the role of the Holy Spirit in creation see Richard E. Averbeck, “Breath, Wind and Spirit and the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament,” in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 25–36; Robert L. Hubbard Jr., “The Spirit and Creation,” in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 71–91; and Richard S. Hess, “Bezalel and Oholiab: Spirit and Creativity,” in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 161–172. It is also interesting to see how Job 33:4 is rendered in Efik Bible, *Edisana Nwed Abasi Ibom* (Lagos: The Bible Society of Nigeria, 1985) as “*Spirit Obong Abasi akanam mi: Ibifik Abasi Ibom okonyung onim mi ke uwem*.”

[303] See Hess, “Spirit and Creativity,” 161–172. It is a commendable work.

[304] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 24–25; and John N. Oswelt, “Is Balaam’s Donkey the Real Prophet (Numbers 24:1–4)?” in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 208–219, for recent exegesis on this.

19:18–24). This prompted the proverbial question: "Is Saul also among the prophets"? (1 Sam 19:24).[305] Soon after David's anointing, the Spirit of the Lord came upon David for his leadership role (1 Sam 16:13). Israel's second king consistently prayed for this spirit, as shown in many other passages (Ps 51:10–12; 139:7; 143:10; 1 Chr 28:12; 2 Sam 23:2).[306]

During the divided monarchy, the Spirit of God was vigorously at work in the ministry of Israel's prophets, such as Azariah (2 Chr 10:1), Jahaziel (2 Chr 20:14), Zechariah (2 Chr 24:20), Elijah and Elisha (1 Kgs 18:12; 2 Kgs 2:9–16), and Joel (Joel 2:28–29). The northern prophet Hosea is called a "man of the spirit" (*'îš hārûaḥ*) in Hosea 9:7. Micah, a contemporary of proto-Isaiah, sees himself as "spirit-filled" (Mic 3:8). Texts such as Isaiah 4:4 speak of a "spirit of judgment" and "spirit of burning", while Isaiah 11:1–9 offers a message of hope for those being anointed with the Spirit of the Lord (wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord).[307] During the exilic and postexilic periods, the prophets Ezekiel (Ezek 2:2; 3:24; 11:5, 24; 36:26–27), Haggai (Hag 2:5), and Zechariah (Zech 4:6) are filled with the Spirit of the Lord.[308]

Exegetical Analysis of Numbers 11:25–29

The foregoing survey demonstrates, among other things, that the Spirit of God was present and active during the Old Testament period. It further demonstrates that Numbers 11 is not the only Old Testament passage to witness to the various roles, functions, and activities of the Spirit of God.

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[305] See David G. Firth, "Is Saul Also among the Prophets? Saul's Prophecy in 1 Samuel 19:23," in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 294–305, for recent comments on the spirit and mission of the prophet.

[306] Although Daniel J. Estes, "Spirit and the Psalmist in Psalm 51," in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 122–134, argues that in Psalm 51 attention is on the *rûaḥ* of the psalmist and faintly anticipates the New Testament doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

[307] See Hilary Marlow, "The Spirit of Yahweh in Isaiah 11:1–9," in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 220–232, where it is argued that Isaiah 11 bore elements of hope and assurance of God's Spirit to the remnant of Judah.

[308] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 26–28.

The Spirit of the Lord (*rûaḥ ʾădōnāy*) appears to be that creative force of order, creation, life, wisdom, knowledge, prudence, fear of the Lord, listening, and humility. It empowered individuals, judges, kings, craftsmen, women, prophets, charismatic leaders, and worshiping communities in the Old Testament. It is an energizing force in the life of the people who journey with God and seek to accomplish God's mission on earth. The exegesis that follows considers the text of the prayer of Moses (Num 11:25–29), its biblical context, and the contemporary situation of the Church in Nigeria.

Text and Context

In light of the preceding historical survey, an examination of Numbers 11, especially verses 25–29, within the context of the Old Testament demonstrates that the Spirit of God always accompanied the Old Testament people. Numbers 11 narrates how and why the Israelites had to spend forty years wandering in the desert. It is a classic story of the first generation of Israelites following the exodus from Egypt and of their wilderness transition, prior to the second generation of Israelites' arrival into the promised land. Although scholars, theologians, and commentators may have noticed some topographical, geographical, and chronological data within this account that help them determine the structure of the story, the bipartite "generational structure" adopted in this paper is much easier to follow—especially for non-biblical scholars in our Nigerian parishes.[309]

Part one (Num 1–25) narrates the story of the first generation. It details how the Israelites prepare military and spiritually to march into the wilderness from Sinai (Num 1:1–10:10). Part two (Num 26–36) portrays the second generation's issues of sin, complaints, conflicts over leadership, victories, and conquests while heading to the promised land (Num 10:11–36:13).[310] Numbers 11 is located within this second section; specifically, its context is one of conflict and complaint over Moses' prophetic spirit and sharing of leadership charisms (Num 11–12). Exodus 33 provides a backdrop for Numbers 11. Numbers 11:1–3 serves as an introduction to the Israelites'

[309] See Jean-Louis Ska*, Introduction to Reading the Pentateuch* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 35–38, for a condensed summary of scholarly opinions on the structure of the book of Numbers.

[310] See Tremper Longman III, *Introducing the Old Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 31–34, for similar structural analysis.

complaints (*'ānan*, Num 11:2), noting the Israelites' situation and misfortunes (*ra',* Num 11:1), God's reaction, and Moses' intercessory role upon the Israelites' departure from Sinai (Num 10:11–36).

The Israelites complain about food, mentioning manna, meat, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic (Num 11:4–15). Dozeman sees this episode as part of a "pre-priestly complaint story, in which the subordinate theme of leadership is the central problem".[311] In the following narrative (Num 11:10–15), Moses does not intercede for the people as he previously did (Num 11:1–3). Rather, Moses lays before God his own complaint about the burden of leadership. God directly responds to Moses by gathering seventy elders from the various tribes of Israel that left Egypt around the tent and outside the camp (Num 11:16–24). God puts part of Moses' divine Spirit (*rûaḥ*) into these elders. This divine spirit is one of prophetic charism and leadership as anticipated in the prayer of Moses (Num 11:29b).

Text

Textually, Numbers 11:25–29 is laid out in a manner typical of a Hebrew literary narrative. It offers valuable moral, spiritual, pastoral, and theological lessons for the global Church, including the Church in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. The text is as follows:

	NRSV/Modified	MT Transliteration
v. 25	And it happened that the LORD came down in cloud and spoke to him, and took some of the spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders; and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again'	*wəyyērek ʾădōnāy be'ānān wayyədabēr 'elay wayyā'ṣel min-hārûaḥ 'ăšer 'ālāy wayyitēn 'al-šiḇ'îm 'îš hazzqēnîm wayyehî kənôaḥ 'ăleyhêhem hārûaḥ wayyitnabbə'û wəlo' yāsopû.*

[311] Dozeman, *Numbers*, 105.

v. 26	And it happened that two men remained in the camp, one named Eldad, and the other named Medad, and the spirit rested on them; they were among those registered, but they had not gone out to the tent, and so they prophesied in the camp	*wayyiššā'ărûšənê-'ănāšîm bammaḥăneh šēm hā'eḥād 'eldād wəšēm haššēnî mêdād wattānaḥ 'ălêhem hārûaḥ wəhēmâh bakətuḇîm wəlō' yāṣə'û hā'ōhĕlâh wayyitnabə'û.*
v. 27	And it happened that a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp."	*wayyārāṣ hanna'ar wayyagēd ləmōšeh wayyō'mar 'eldād ûmêdād mitnabbə'îm bamaḥăneh.*
v. 28	And it happened that Joshua, son of Nun, the assistant of Moses, one of his chosen men, said, "My Lord Moses, stop them!"	*wayya'an yəhôšua' bin-nûn məšārēth mōšeh mibəḥurāiw, wayyo'mar 'ădōnî mōšeh kəlā'm.*
v. 29	And it happened that Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them!"	*wəyyō'mer lô mōšeh hamqannēh 'attâh lî, ûmî yîttēn kôl-'am 'ădōnāy nəbî'îm kî-yîttēn 'ădōnāy 'et-rûḥô 'ălêhem.*

In the Masoretic Text (MT) of the Old Testament, Numbers 11:25–29 is not heavily obscured. But in verse 25 we have *wayyā'ṣel*, a *hiphil waw* consecutive imperfect, third person masculine singular (from the root verb *'ṣel*) meaning "to set apart" or "to take away" (*Qal* form). Perhaps due to scribal or transmission errors, this verb is attested as *wayyāṣel* in the Samaritan Hebrew Pentateuch. Noticeably, in verse 17 (where God promised to come down to take some of Moses' Spirit for others), the form of the verb is *wə'āṣāltî*, with the root "*'ṣel*" but with *alef* (') omitted in the Samaritan Hebrew Pentateuch.[312] Also, in verse 25d, the verb *yāsopû,* meaning "they did not do so again", is attested with similar meaning as

[312] Verse 17 reads in full: *wəyārādtî wədibartî 'imḵā šām; wə'āṣāltî min-hārûaḥ 'ăšer 'āleyḵā waśamtî 'ăleyhem, wənâś'û 'ittəḵā bəmaśśâ' hā'ām wəlō'-tiśśā' 'attâh ləbaddeḵā* (And 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 along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself).

"*y's*" in the Targums and the Vulgate. Scholars suggest that there is a relationship with the Deuteronomic (Deut 5:22) form of *yāsupû* attested with *qibbus* (u) and not *sureq* (û).

Apart from these few errors and scholarly proposals in regard to verse 25, in verse 26 the name *'Eldād*, witnessed with *sere* in the MT, is attested with *hataf segol* and *yod* (*'Ĕlydād*) in other places. The MT apparatus also notes that *Mêdād* is spelled with full *holem* (*Môdād*) in the Samaritan Greek Pentateuch. In verse 28, Moses' assistant Joshua, *mibəḥurāw* in the MT, is attested as *mibəheyrāw*—with *yod* added after *het*—in the Samaritan Pentateuch manuscript. It is attested as *eklektos* (*autou*) in the LXX and Symmachus's Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Syriach version of the Old Testament seems to follow the MT.

In spite of these minor variant readings, the literary construction of this story using the Hebrew *waw* consecutive or conversive is worth noting, no matter the version of the Holy Bible.[313] It is beautiful. In Numbers 11:25–29, the story is arranged in such a way that, with the *waw* conjunction attached predominately to the imperfect verbs, the narrative beautifully, logically, and chronologically follows a sequence of actions.[314]

Numbers 11:25, for instance, logically and chronologically narrates God's fulfilment of his promise to Moses' complaints about the burden of leadership (Num 11:11–15). The LORD came down in a cloud (*wəyyērek ʾădōnāy be'ānān*) and spoke to Moses (Num 11:24) as promised (Num 11:17). He also took some of the *rûaḥ* from Moses and put it in the seventy elders chosen from the people, who prophesied (*wayyitnabbə'û*) momentarily (*yāsopû*). Many commentors, especially David Firth, find it

[313] Usually when "*waw* consecutive/conversive" is attached to a verb in the imperfect conjugation, it converts the action of the verb to that of the perfect conjugation. When it is attached to a verb in the perfect conjugation, it converts the action of the verb to that of whatever verb comes before it.

[314] See Williams, *The Biblical Hebrew Companion for Bible Software Users: Grammatical Terms Explained for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2015), 116–117 for further discussion on the force and exegetical insight of Hebrew "*Waw* Consecutive." In Efik Bible, *Edisana Nwed Abasi Ibom*, the *Waw* conjunction is "*Ndien*"; in the LXX, "*kai*" is attested.

unclear upon first reading whether *rûaḥ* is a reference to YHWH or to Moses' own character as a charismatic leader.[315]

This becomes clearer, however, when one reflects further on the symbolism of the "cloud" (*'ānān*) from which YHWH, the distributor of the *rûaḥ,* came from (v. 25a). Biblical clouds are associated with divine presence (Exod 13:21–22; 16:10; 19:9; Mark 9:7) and glory (Num 14:17–20; 16:10; 1 Kgs 8:10; 2 Chr 5:13). Thus, *rûaḥ* here does not necessarily refer to the *rûaḥ* of Moses, but of YHWH.

The seventy chosen were also probably high quality representative elders from various tribes and sectors of the community, perhaps indicating God's generosity with his grace and blessings (v. 25b). Dozeman sees a symbolic biblical meaning in the seventy. Elsewhere we find seventy sons of Jacob (Exod 1:5), seventy elders accompanying Moses upon Mount Sinai (Exod 24:9–11), and seventy princes killed by Jehu (2 Kgs 10:6).[316]

Also significant in this passage is the verbal form *hithpael* qualifying the prophecy of the seventy elders. As the spirit rested on them, they prophesied (*wayyitnabbə'û*) and spoke in an ecstatic fashion because they were enthused. The same verb is used to qualify the other two, Eldad and Medad (v. 26), and many other prophets in the early periods (Hos 9:7).[317] Saul fell into prophetic ecstasy when the Spirit of God came upon him (1 Sam 10:10–11).[318]

This has prompted questions about whether the early prophets experienced ecstaticism as a prophetic experience. Additionally, what is ecstaticism with reference to Numbers 11? Leon Wood's work *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* addresses these questions extensively.[319] Wood traces biblical ecstaticism, including that in Numbers 11, to Asia Minor, Greece, and Canaanite influence. He cites several scholarly arguments for and against

[315] David G. Firth, "The Spirit and Leadership: Testimony, Empowerment and Purpose," in David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (eds.), *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 264.

[316] Dozeman, *Numbers*, 106.

[317] See Schoemaker, "Use of רוּח in the Old Testament," 13–19, for analysis of prophetic functions in the early period of the Old Testament (900–700 BC).

[318] Dozeman, *Numbers*, 107.

[319] See Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 90–112.

biblical ecstaticism as a prophetic experience. Wood draws our attention to the root meaning of the word "prophet", *nābi'*, a name first given to Abraham (Gen 20:7); he further identifies the related root word *nābā'* for "prophesy", which is used in the episode of the seventy elders in our text. While *nabî'* ("prophet") occurs over 300 times in the Old Testament, *nābā*' occurs either in *hiphal* or *hithpael* forms about 113 times.[320] Johnson believes its derives from the Akkadian term *nabu*, meaning "to speak".[321] Albright prefers its passive meaning of "one spoken to" or "called".[322] Rowley finds its meaning in the Arabic term *naba'a*, meaning "to announce", or the Hebrew term *bo'*, meaning "to come" or "enter".[323]

Ordinarily, Israel's prophets were God's mouthpieces, servants, and messengers, as this verb insinuates. They were conscience of their society, and they were intercessors who prayed and mediated between heaven and earth. They were agents of peace, justice, moral conduct, positive change, and newness of life. Their tasks, as noted by Walter Brueggemann, were also to "nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture", as did the biblical Moses.[324]

However, in his work "Significance of Numbers 11", Cotton Rogers argues that this form of verb "was used for visible physical demonstrations of some kind of prophetic events . . . that testified to contact with God's presence".[325] In the case of the seventy elders (*'al-šiḇ'îm 'îš hazzqēnîm*), God apparently used visible, spirit-empowering prophetic events to publicly confirm his authorization of power upon them and his intimate involvement in their ministries.[326] Wood suggests this visible expression of God's Spirit may have taken the form of singing and dancing, which is also common in

[320] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 107.
[321] A. R. Johnson, *The Cultic Prophet in Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press Board, 1944), 24.
[322] William F. Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1957), 231.
[323] H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterword Press 1952), 209–210.
[324] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 3.
[325] Roger D. Cotton, "The Pentecost Significance of Numbers 11," in *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 1 (2002), 7.
[326] Cotton, "Significance Numbers 11," 7.

African liturgy; this behavior would have been added to the seventy elders in their new form of judging and helping Moses.[327] In his work *The Spirit and Leadership*, Firth interprets their momentary prophecy (*wəlo' yāsopû*) as a reminder to Moses, and perhaps leaders everywhere, that "the *rûaḥ* is not simply Moses' character, but rather points to the divine endowment he has from Yahweh to lead the people".[328]

Dozeman thinks the pre-priestly writers in the book of Numbers did not want these seventy charismatic leaders, even though they were initially "scribes", to be uncontrolled. This is something worth reflecting on by those who are gifted differently in and outside of the Church, especially in Africa.[329]

Like the seventy elders, Eldad and Medad, the two registered men (*wəhēmâh bakətuḇîm*) who were outside the tent of meeting, also received the *rûaḥ* and began to prophesy (*wayyitnabə'û*) inside the camp (Num 11:26). Why they were subjected to registration is not clear. Were they among the seventy or part of the Hebrew community as a whole? The significant paradox here is that even though the placement of the tent of meeting outside the camp was meant to address the problem of charismatic and prophetic leadership, the Spirit of God extended to Eldad and Medad. Eldad and Medad could represent any of us, or they could illustrate God's generosity in doing whatever he wishes with his gifts.

In Dozeman's view, Eldad and Medad's experience could represent the unpredictable side of charismatic leadership and a challenge to the orderly control of the Spirit of Moses (Num 11:24–25).[330] In other words, there is an undeniable divine initiative in calling each of us. The complaining young man thought otherwise, and he voluntarily reported to Moses about the activities of the divine *rûaḥ* in Eldad and Medad (Num 11:27). What spirit was in this young man, one may ask? Perhaps it was the spirit of uncertainty, inexperience, insecurity, and complaint, which had been central

[327] Wood, *Holy Spirit in the Old Testament*, 111.
[328] Firth, "Spirit and Leadership," 164.
[329] See Dozeman, *Numbers*, 102–107 where his thoughts are explained on the basis that "the priestly writers idealize the power of prophecy, while they also wish for its traditional role to cease." Also, in Deuteronomy 17:15–22, a prophet like Moses who speaks oracles from YHWH is idealized. The "Israelites are encouraged to look for another prophet like Moses."
[330] Dozeman, *Numbers*, 107.

to the story of the Israelites' experience in the wilderness (Exod–Num). This same spirit may characterize the experience of some Nigerians in the desert of West Africa today.

Besides this complaining young man, Joshua son of Nun also wishes to control the spirit and urges Moses to restrain (*kəlā'm*) Eldad and Medad from prophesying (Num 11:28). This impossible demand from one of Moses' chosen men—a man who had been with Moses all along (Exod 17:9–14; 24:13; 33:11)—prompts Moses to respond, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them" (*hamqannēh ʾattâh lî, ûmî yîttēn kôl-ʻam ʾădōnāy nəbîʾîm kî-yîttēn ʾădōnāy ʻet-rûḥô ʻălêhem*). Moses wisely chooses the verb *qânâ'* ("envy") to determine whether Joshua and the young man's complaints were driven by human envy, passion, and jealousy rather than an overzealous attempt to protect Moses' given responsibilities.[331] Echoes of Moses' prophetic spirit are heard in his prayer: "Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them" (Num 11:29).

In Numbers 11, it is the work of the Spirit of the Lord that enables the seventy elders and others to assist and follow Moses' paradigmatic prophetic and charismatic leadership without unnecessary complaints, violence, and resistance. If the New Testament is concealed in the Old Testament, while the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament,[332] should not contemporary Christians, including members of the Church in African and Nigeria specifically, pray for the Spirit of God that is in Moses in Numbers 11?

Relevance and Conclusion

The relevance of the book of Numbers for African Christians, particularly those in Nigeria, cannot be overemphasized. Just as Moses' generation was

[331] Baruch A. Levine, "Numbers 1–20," *Anchor Bible*, vol. 4A (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 326 also observes that the verb "*qinnē'* expresses zeal and passion. In Num 25:13 we read that Phineas, the priest, acted zealously in defending God's honor, and Elijah (1 Kgs 19:10–14) defended the honor of God, and act conveyed by the same verb. One can be overly zealous, of course!"

[332] Drawn from St. Augustine. See *Dei Verbum* n. 12 and *Verbum Domini* nos.39–41

involved in a desert transition, the Church in Africa—and Nigeria specifically—is engaged in many transitions. The Church faces issues such as globalization, poverty, epidemics, climate change, diseases, tribalism, hunger, starvation, violence, kidnappings, corruption, religious pluralism, interfaith issues, and a multiplicity of denominations. How do we deal with such social-economic, political, and religious challenges? As part of the universal Church currently led by Pope Francis, with his uniquely prophetic charisms, which are demonstrated in his messages and pastoral outreach, how does the Church in Africa define its prophetic faith and mission in the world today?[333] Just as the generation of Israelites detailed in Numbers—the generation that left Egypt through the desert (*bəmidbar*)—was composed of many tribes (Reuben, Simeon, Judah Issachar, Zebulun , Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Gad, and Naphtali; Num 1:5–15, 20–54; 2:3–29; 7:1–88; 10:11–28; 13:4–15; 26:5–50; 34:19–28),[334] so Nigeria is a nation of many tribes, languages, and cultural challenges. How do we respond to these challenges in light of our discussed text?

In the foregoing paragraphs, we demonstrated that Numbers 11, while stressing Moses' prophetic paradigm and charismatic leadership, also emphasized the role of the Spirit of the Lord in Moses and his subsidiaries—the seventy elders along with Eldad and Medad. To the young man (*hanna'ar*) and Joshua, the issue was not just the lack of melons and fish (Num 11:4–9) or the burden of leadership that Moses complains about (Num 11:10–29b). Rather, the issue is to whom God's spirit of prophecy and leadership should be vested. This question is familiar to the Church in contemporary Nigeria. The seventy elders in Numbers could serve as a reminder of the role of African elders and all spirit-filled believers. They serve as the personification of wisdom, the experience of truth, the Spirit of God, authentic leadership, caring, honesty, justice, equity, patience, magnanimity, courage, fear of the Lord, prudence, and modesty. In contrast, the young man serves as the personification of overzealousness, envy (*qanna*), and inexperience in regard to divine plans.

Finally, Numbers presents us with a journey based on faith and hope. This journey is accompanied by the Spirit of God (*rûaḥ ʾădōnāy*). Though this

[333] See Pope Francis, *Complete Encyclicals, Bulls, and Apostolic Exhortation*, Vol. 1 (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2016).

[334] See also Deut 27:12–13; 33:1–29; Josh 13–19; 21:4–8; 1 Chr 2:1–2; 12:24–38; 27:16–22; Ezek 48:1–29, 30–34 for alternate listings of the tribes of Israel.

journey is rife with challenges, God is present with his people. He is the one who leads, provides for, loves, and never leaves Israel or the Church without the gift of the Spirit of prophecy in its leadership. Echoes of Moses' paradigm are heard in his prayer: "would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit on them" (Num 11:29).

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