

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

ISRAEL'S REBELLION IN NUMBERS 11-21:
ITS CHALLENGES TO *Moses* LEADERSHIP AND
LESSONS FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH
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BY
LUBUNGA W'EHUSHA

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in
Partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Theology

JUNE, 2003

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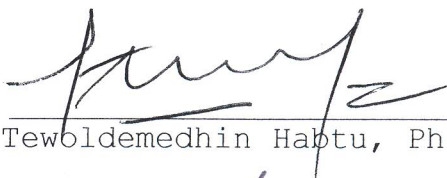
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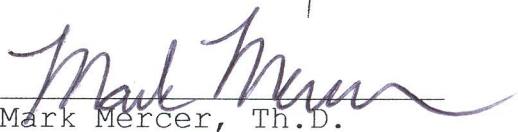
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Approved:

Supervisor:


Tewoldemedhin Habtu, Ph.D.

Second Reader:


Mark Mercer, Th.D.

External Reader:


Fabian Dapifa, Ph.D.

June, 2003

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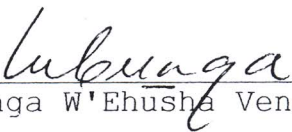
STUDENT'S DECLARATION

ISRAEL'S REBELLION IN NUMBERS 11-21:
ITS CHALLENGES TO MOSES' LEADERSHIP AND
LESSONS FOR THE AFRICAN CHURCH.

I declare that this is my original work and has not been
Submitted to any other college or university for academic
credit

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology or the
examiners

(Signed)


Lubunga W'Ehusha Venance

June, 2003

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the rebellion of the people of Israel in Numbers 11-21 and highlight its challenges to Moses' leadership. The findings of this inquiry then draw lessons for the African Church. The covenant of Sinai and the presence of Yahweh manifested by the cloud by day and the fire by night could not prepare the people to face confidently the hardships of the wilderness. The section of the book of Numbers we have studied shows that Israel persistently murmured against Yahweh and against his servant Moses during the wilderness journey. This rebellious attitude constituted a real challenge to Moses who struggled, on the one hand to provide for their daily need and, on the other hand pleaded with God so that he may forgive their rebellion. We identified three major causes for the rebellion of the Israelites, namely complaints due to the privations of the wilderness, complaints against Moses' leadership, and complaints against God. Moses was challenged to find solutions for the survival of his people in the wilderness and to make sure that they finally made it to the Promised Land. It was not an easy task but Moses was successful in living up to his assignment because of his intimate relationship with God and his own exemplary character. Whenever his leadership was challenged, Moses was so patient not only in handling the provocation but also in relying on God to miraculously provide to all the needs of the people and the vindication of his chosen leaders. Even though the generation of those who left Egypt, including Moses himself, did not enter Canaan, this study shows that he had been a successful leader of his people.

From the wilderness journey experience African church leaders can learn how to handle a murmuring and rebellious attitude displayed by their constituencies. This study focuses on the quality of the leadership as a tool in dealing with a grumbling spirit. The Church should seek to confer the position of leadership to: (1) leaders with a genuine call from the Lord and chosen according to biblical standards, (2) leaders whose heart is burning with compassion and willingness to meeting people's need, and (3) leaders who can identify themselves with their congregation. If the Church displays such a capacity of handling members' discontent, it will become a source of inspiration even to the political leadership of the continent.

This work is dedicated to my wife,
Esther Kenge Lubunga,
for her support and patience during the
five years of my study at NEGST.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Moses was chosen and called by God to lead out of Egypt a people who had in common primarily the desire to be free from slavery. Under Moses' leadership, the Israelites set out for the wilderness of Sinai where they entered into covenant with Yahweh and became his people. At Sinai, the people acquired the consciousness of their identity, a common way of life, the laws and the religion, and important features for their settlement in the Promised Land. The Israelites were also assured of the presence of Yahweh who rescued them as they confessed "the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders" (Deut. 26:8 NIV). The Bible declares that the presence of God was manifested daily in the journey across the wilderness, by the cloud over the tabernacle by day and fire by night (Exod. 40:38). The chief leader of the people was Moses, a man who held a special relation with God, and who spoke with him face to face (Num. 12).

Surrounded by God's care and protection on the one hand, and the leadership of a man of outstanding spiritual and moral qualities on the other hand, there was the temptation to believe that Israel would be assured of crossing the desert peacefully - defeating her enemies and settling in the Promised Land. Unfortunately, that was not the case. The journey was fraught with many hardships and uncertainties and on many an occasion they longed for the 'fleshpots of Egypt.' In his account on the wilderness journey, Anderson remarks:

The journey was difficult. Freedom in the desert was, to many of the pilgrims, a poor substitute for slavery in Egypt. Water was scarce, there was no food; existence was precarious. . . It was a time of murmuring, discontent, internal strife, rebellion against Moses, and above all, lack of faith¹

Anderson shows that despite God's grace the people experienced affliction under the leadership of Moses, the sojourn in the wilderness had been a time of hardship, testing and deficiencies for the Israelites. This situation had led the people to revolt against their leaders. Israel encountered several crises in the wilderness that a series of murmurings and revolts dominated the account of the journey given in Exodus and Numbers. Lawrence Boadt gives the following list of incidents in the two books where

¹Bernhard W. Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), 55.

