

Numbers 11:1 ¶ *And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.*

Numbers 11:2 *And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.*

Numbers 11:3 *And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.*

Evidently, the people did not enjoy their three-day journey and immediately fell to complaining. When reading through some of the other translations, the implication is that they were blaming the LORD—for whatever it is that they were complaining about. That would explain His becoming angry to the point of sending fire that resulted in the deaths of many that were along the outer perimeter of the camp. The people quickly cried out to Moses; and when he prayed to the LORD, the fire was stopped. Though we aren't given any specifics about the fire, it was obvious that the people knew it was from the LORD. The New Bible Commentary notes that this punishment reminds us that God is a consuming fire.

Deuteronomy 4:24 "For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God."

Moses named the place Taberah, from a root word that means "to kindle or consume by fire."

Practical application: God doesn't like it when we complain—especially when He has shown up so mightily on our behalf.

Numbers 11:4 ¶ *And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?*

Numbers 11:5 *We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:*

Numbers 11:6 *But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.*

Maybe this section is providing more insight as to who instigated the complaining and why. We were reminded that when the people left Egypt, a group of non-Jews went with them.

Exodus 12:37–38 "And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle."

It was the mixed multitude that first began complaining about the "delights" they had left behind in Egypt. The children of Israel soon joined in and began to bemoan the fact that they had no meat to eat. In Egypt they had eaten fish in abundance along with cucumbers, melons, leeks (an herb), onions and garlic. Point being—They were tired of the manna.

Application: We are often easily influenced by those with whom we associate, so it is important that we choose our friends carefully. This is also a warning to moms and dads; your children will be influenced for good or evil by what you say as well as what you do. The tongue is powerful.

James 3:5–6 “Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.”

I liked this comment from J. Vernon McGee quoted in Coffman’s Commentary: “The real troublemakers in any church are the mixed multitude. They are fellow-travelers with the world and with the church. They like a church banquet, but they don’t want the Bible school. They do not want to go forward with the ark of God; they want to stay in the back, for they might want to turn and go back some time.”

I just noticed the phrase, “Who shall give us flesh to eat?” in verse 4. In light of the fact that they were eating miraculous food at the hand of Almighty God, this is a stark statement of unbelief. Psalm 78 addresses this very thing.

*Psalms 78:20–22 “Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people? Therefore the LORD heard this, and was wroth: so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel; **Because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation:**”*

Numbers 11:7 And the manna *was* as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium.

Numbers 11:8 And the people went about, and gathered *it*, and ground *it* in mills, or beat *it* in a mortar, and baked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil.

Numbers 11:9 And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.

Moses now records a description of the manna. It was as coriander seed (Webster defines it as a spicy seed.) that was amber or yellowish in color. (Some commentators compare the bdellium to a white pearl.) Every morning the people would gather the manna that fell upon the dew each night. (I think this is the first time I have noticed this detail. The dew would separate it from the dirt below it.) They were able to use it in different ways—grinding it in mills (like a grain) or beating it in a mortar (to make a paste) to bake in pans and make cakes. It tasted like a sweet cake (from the Hebrew) as earlier described in the book of Exodus.

Exodus 16:31 “And the house of Israel called the name thereof Manna: and it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.”

Numbers 11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

Numbers 11:11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

Numbers 11:12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

Numbers 11:13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

Numbers 11:14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because *it is* too heavy for me.

Numbers 11:15 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

It didn't take long for the ungrateful attitude to permeate the camp to the point that Moses could hear the people moaning and complaining to one another. This greatly angered the LORD and really bothered Moses. So Moses began to complain to the LORD. My paraphrase—What have I done to deserve being given the responsibility of leading this people. They aren't my children—implied, they're yours. How can I possibly shut them up by giving them meat to eat that we don't have. This is too great a responsibility for one man. In fact, just kill me if you care anything at all about me. I can't live like this anymore.

It actually seems like Moses was feeling a bit of pity for the people when he should have been angry like the LORD. I think parents often make the same mistake. We have a tendency to want to excuse the sin of those we love, I think in large part because of our own sin.

David Guzik provided some wise insight regarding Moses' question, "Why me?" that applies directly to us "God allowed this for the same reason God allows any affliction in our lives - to compel us to trust in Him all the more, to partner with Him in overcoming obstacles, and to love and praise Him all the more through our increased dependence on Him and the greater deliverance He brings."

Numbers 11:16 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.

Numbers 11:17 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which *is* upon thee, and will put *it* upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear *it* not thyself alone.

The LORD showed grace to Moses' cry for help. He told Moses to gather together 70 men of the elders and leaders of Israel that were respected by the people. He was then to bring them to the tabernacle to stand before the LORD with Moses. The LORD promised to meet with Moses there and take some of the same spirit empowering Moses and put it on them so that they could help him

govern the people.

I believe that the Spirit empowering Moses was the same Holy Spirit that empowers believers today. I am reminded that until the Holy Spirit came to indwell the believer after the resurrection of Jesus, the people of God only experienced His presence in their lives according to God's discretion. King David recognized this truth and prayed that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him.

Psalms 51:10–12 “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.”

Numbers 11:18 And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for *it was* well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.

Numbers 11:19 Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days;

Numbers 11:20 *But* even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?

Webster: “sanctify” = make free from sin

The LORD then instructed Moses to tell the people to sanctify themselves (repent of your sin) in preparation for the next day because the LORD is going to give them meat to eat. In fact, they are going to eat meat for not “one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; *But* even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils....” In other words, you are going to get sick of it because you have angered the LORD with your griping and complaining and intimating they had been better off back in Egypt.

I'm reminded of the saying—Be careful what you wish for.

Numbers 11:21 And Moses said, The people, among whom I *am*, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month.

Numbers 11:22 Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?

Numbers 11:23 And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not.

Moses couldn't believe what he had heard. He knew that he had numbered 600,000 men that were eligible to go to war, let alone everyone else. He also knew that the flocks and herds with them wouldn't begin to feed so many people meat for that long. It seems that Moses is having a bit of a problem remembering

God's miracles on their behalf as well. The LORD quickly reminds him with just a couple of questions. My paraphrase: Do you think my power is limited? Do you still not believe I will do what I say?

I am always amazed at how readily some of the great men of God question him as if he can't possibly mean what He is saying. I know that they (as do I) took great comfort in knowing that God looks on the heart and is well aware of our human weaknesses.

1 Samuel 16:7 "...for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

Psalms 103:13-14 "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."

Numbers 11:24 ¶ And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle.

Numbers 11:25 And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that *was* upon him, and gave *it* unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, *that*, when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease.

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD and gathered the 70 chosen elders before the tabernacle as he had been instructed. The LORD came down in a cloud and empowered the 70 elders with the gifts of the Spirit that had been gifted to Moses. That they had been so empowered was evidenced when they began to prophesy nonstop; in other words, continued to manifest the empowerment of the Spirit as Moses' helpers. (I think it makes more sense to understand that the spirit resting on them did not cease.)

Numbers 11:26 But there remained two *of the* men in the camp, the name of the one *was* Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they *were* of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp.

Numbers 11:27 And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp.

Numbers 11:28 And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, *one* of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them.

Numbers 11:29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!

Numbers 11:30 And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

It seems that two of the 70, Eldad and Medad, were not with the rest in front of the tabernacle for some reason; still, they received their portion of the Spirit and prophesied as well. A young man came running to Moses to tell him that the two men were prophesying in the camp. Joshua the son of Nun (Moses' eventual successor) urged Moses to forbid them. Moses quickly told Joshua that he

shouldn't look on that as a slight to Moses. In fact, Moses wished that all the LORD's people were prophets and empowered by His Spirit!

Moses probably reasoned that the empowerment of the Spirit would result in a much more easily managed multitude—and one that would not so readily complain about every little thing. If only he could see the church in operation today. Frankly, the indwelling Holy Spirit in every believer should result in unity of spirit and commitment to serving God in love and obedience. Sad to say, that as long as we live in this body of flesh, we will always contend with the lusts of the flesh and continually struggle to overcome those lusts—pride always being ready to rear its ugly head. Only by hiding God's word in our hearts and choosing daily to yield to the Spirit within us can we hope to gain the victory.

This is also an example of Moses' great humility. He was in no way threatened by the fact that the LORD might empower others as He had Moses. His example is one that is greatly needed in the church today.

Numbers 11:31 ¶ And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let *them* fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits *high* upon the face of the earth.

Numbers 11:32 And the people stood up all that day, and all *that* night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread *them* all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

I think the Complete Jewish Bible gives a clearer picture of these verses: "...and ADONAI sent out a wind which brought quails from across the sea and let them fall near the camp, about a day's trip away on each side of the camp and all around it, covering the ground to a depth of three feet. The people stayed up all that day, all night and all the next day gathering the quails — the person gathering the least collected ten heaps; then they spread them out for themselves all around the camp."

The NLT offers a bit different understanding: "Now the LORD sent a wind that brought quail from the sea and let them fall into the camp and all around it! For many miles in every direction from the camp there were quail flying about three feet above the ground. So the people went out and caught quail all that day and throughout the night and all the next day, too. No one gathered less than fifty bushels! They spread the quail out all over the camp."

Whatever—We know that the LORD miraculously supplied more quail than they could possibly eat!

JFB notes that spreading them about the camp speaks of salting and drying them for future use.

Science note from the IVP New Bible Commentary: "The provision of quail is an example of God's control over his creation. These birds belong to the family of pheasants and partridges. They winter in Africa and migrate northwards,

usually in March or April. In that year they were driven in great quantities to Israel by a wind.”

Numbers 11:33 And while the flesh *was* yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague.

Numbers 11:34 And he called the name of that place Kibrothhattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted.

Numbers 11:35 And the people journeyed from Kibrothhattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth.

As soon as the people began to eat the quail meat, the LORD struck them with a “very great plague” because He was so angry with them. They called that place “Kibrothhattaavah” (Hebrew = graves of the longing) because they ended up burying those guilty of lusting there. The people then journeyed to Hazeroth and made camp.