

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

NUM. 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?

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:

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

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.

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?

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?

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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?

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.

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?

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.

NOTES

Complaints About Manna

Lesson Text: Numbers 11:4-6, 10-23

Related Scriptures: Exodus 16:1-8; I Corinthians 10:1-6; Mark 8:1-9

TIME: about 1444 B.C.

PLACE: Desert of Paran

GOLDEN TEXT—“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” (Numbers 11:23).

Lesson Exposition

COMPLAINING AGAINST GOD— Num. 11:4-6

Distorting the facts (Num. 11:4-5). So far in Israel’s brief history following the Exodus from Egypt, God had supernaturally delivered them from the Egyptian army at the Red Sea (Ex. 14) and provided water (15:22-27; 17:1-7) and food (chap. 16) for them. All this was done before they reached Mount Sinai. Over and over again, God showed Himself to be faithful and loving to the children of Israel. Yet time and again, they complained against Him.

We now reach a point in the wilderness narrative where Israel had left Sinai on their journey to the Promised Land (Num. 10:11-12). Soon after leaving, however, they began to complain once again.

The people who comprised the mixed multitude (the same community the blaspheming man in last week’s lesson was from) began to grumble against the Lord that they had no meat to eat. Their grumbling spread like wildfire throughout the Israelite community until it infested the entire camp.

As the people griped about how bad life was for them now, they lost all perspective and began to reflect on the

lives they left behind in Egypt. Their long period of cruel bondage (Ex. 3:7; 6:9) was suddenly remembered as a time of feasting. They longed for the food in Egypt—the fish they ate, as well as the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic.

Exaggerating the hardships (Num. 11:6). A problem with chronic complaining is that while it glamorizes what may have been a traumatic past, it exaggerates the troubles of the present and gives no hope for the future. It is never good to allow ourselves to settle into an attitude of constant griping because it does not allow us to see the goodness of God.

The children of Israel greatly exaggerated their condition, stating that they were so hungry that their bodies were about to waste away to nothing. They did not remember their cruel working and living conditions in Egypt. Instead, they had a memory mirage of a smorgasbord of wonderful delicacies that had been available to them seemingly at all times. Now all they saw was the manna God provided for them that they were never truly grateful for.

The complaint that manna was all

they had to eat was a gross understatement of what God had provided for them. They had their own livestock with them, as well as the goods God had allowed them to bring with them out of Egypt. They were far from destitute, but their incessant whining prevented them from realizing that.

COMPLAINING TO GOD— Num. 11:10-15

Moses' displeasure (Num. 11:10-11). The negativity that resulted from the constant complaining had now permeated the entire camp, as everyone was grumbling about how bad things had become and how much they had lost when they left Egypt. The people were now weeping openly, causing the Lord to be angry with them.

Moses was also very displeased with what he was witnessing. As the leader of Israel, he often interceded on behalf of the people. In this case, however, he had grown very frustrated with both the people and the Lord. Unable to control the people, He took His frustrations to God.

Under an extreme amount of stress, Moses questioned God's motives or wisdom in giving him this assignment. It is a bit reminiscent of his objection to being sent to Egypt in the first place, when God originally commissioned him (cf. Ex. 3:13—4:17). Now he was out in the desert with a large group of ungrateful, whining people who never seemed to be satisfied with anything Moses or God did for them.

Moses' confusion (Num. 11:12-13). Moses continued his complaint by pointing out that he did not give birth to these people. In effect, he was distancing himself from them.

Moses was at a point now where he threw up his hands in disgust and blamed God for his predicament. After all, it was God who gave birth to this nation of thankless rebels, not Moses.

He even questioned God's right to ask him to lead this multitude. God was the one who had promised to bring them to their ancestors' homeland, but it was Moses who was bearing all the burden—at least in his estimation.

Moses asked God where he was supposed to get food to feed all these people. It was not to God the people complained; it was to Moses. He did not know what to do.

Stressful situations have a way of preventing us from seeing clearly and causing us to take our eyes off of God. It is in these times that we must stay devoted to prayer and remember in the darkness what we once learned in the light.

Moses' despair (Num. 11:14-15). As Moses continued his diatribe against God and his grievance about the assignment he had been given, he said something that was quite true, even if it came out in the form of a complaint. He stated that he was unable to carry these people by himself. The only problem with what Moses said was that it came out of a distorted view of reality. God never expected or asked him to lead the people by himself.

What Moses forgot in all of this was that God was with him and was actually leading and providing for the people. God never left him, although Moses *felt* completely abandoned by God. Perception is not always reality, however.

Moses, desperate for relief and seeing none, finally asked God to kill him. The only way for God to be merciful to him (according to Moses, at least) was to put him out of his misery.

GOD IS THE SOLUTION— Num. 11:16-23

Calling of seventy elders (Num. 11:16-17). After listening to Moses' complaint, God told him to gather seventy elders among the leaders of

Israel and to bring them to the tabernacle.

God told Moses that He would meet with these seventy elders and give them the same Spirit that was in Moses. This is a reference to the Holy Spirit, who up to this point had endowed only Moses with power. They would assist Moses in leading the people and would be empowered by the same Spirit who empowered him.

A call to accountability (Num. 11:18-20a). The Lord then told Moses to tell the people to “sanctify,” or consecrate themselves. They were to prepare themselves spiritually to see what the Lord would do the next day.

The people had asked where they could get meat to eat, and God made it clear it would come from Him. They had longed for Egypt, where they claimed they had plenty to eat. They would soon regret their words.

Be careful what you ask for (Num. 11:20b-21). God told Moses in very vivid language that the people would be eating meat until it came out of their nostrils and they loathed it. It is a terrible mistake to turn the goodness of God into something bad and to think that returning to wickedness will bring relief and pleasure. God would take the thing the people wanted the most and turn it into something they detested.

Moses retorted that the population numbered “six hundred thousand footmen” (vs. 21), and God was saying that He would give them meat for a month? This reflected Moses’ own unbelief: he was thinking that this was an incredible promise, even for God. The number he cited referred to men twenty years old and older who were able to go to war (cf. Ex. 12:37; Num. 1:45-46). The total number of Israelites may have been well in excess of two million.

God’s hand is not too small to provide (Num. 11:22-23). Moses argued that even if they were to slaughter all their livestock, it still would not be sufficient to feed the people for a month. Even all the fish in the sea would not be enough to cover such a great task.

God responded to Moses by asking him if the Lord’s arm was too short to provide what He promised.

We can rest assured that God can and will do what He has promised. The Apostle Paul understood that God would provide all his needs, which is quite a statement considering he wrote those words from prison (Phil. 4:19). The source of God’s provision for us is Christ.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

QUESTIONS

1. What was the specific complaint of the people at the start of this passage?
2. In what way was the people’s memory of life in Egypt distorted?
3. Why is constant griping a dangerous thing for us?
4. What did Moses’ distress cause him to question?
5. In what way did Moses blame God for his predicament?
6. Why did Moses ask the Lord to take his life?
7. How did God respond to Moses’ complaint?
8. How did God assure Moses that he would have help?
9. What hard lesson would God teach in meeting the people’s desire for meat?
10. What did Moses’ reply to the Lord reflect?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. We must protect our hearts against worldly influences, lest we fall into ungratefulness (Num. 11:4).
2. Satan will try to get us to look back fondly on our bondage to sin, but we must learn to love God and His righteous ways (vss. 5-6).
3. When we feel overwhelmed with responsibility, we must seek the Lord for strength (vss. 10-15).
4. The Lord has compassion on our weakness and will always provide what we need to do His will (vss. 16-17).
5. Persistent rebellion toward the Lord may cause Him to give you over to your sinful desires (vss. 18-20).
6. God can supply all our needs without our help (vss. 21-23).

—Megan Hickman.

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. What can you do to defend yourself against falling into sins that are common among unbelievers (Num. 11:4)?
2. Why do you think we sometimes look back in fondness to our lives of sin (vss. 5-6)?
3. Why is a thankful heart so essential to worship?
4. Have you ever gotten frustrated with a task that God has put before you? How should you react when this happens (vss. 11-15)?
5. How is the Lord's sovereignty at play when He gives rebellious people up to their sins (vss. 18-20)? How is His wrath different from human anger?

—Megan Hickman.

Golden Text Illuminated

“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” (Numbers 11:23).

This week’s golden text occurs at an extreme low point in Israel’s faithfulness.

The people longed for meat and vegetables such as leeks, onions, and garlic to provide the rich, delectable flavors that they longingly reminisced about having enjoyed back in Egypt. Imagine being inconsolably depressed about the taste of your food despite being led miraculously by the one true living God.

Moses seems to have become completely fed up with the people at this point.

Yahweh promised to give the people more than enough meat. In fact, He would give them meat for an entire month.

But Moses was still in a bad place emotionally, expressing doubt about how Yahweh could provide so much meat.

It is at this point that the Lord in effect says to Moses, “Have I suddenly become less powerful than I have shown all along? Hold your tongue, and you will see, I assure you!”

As absurd as the Israelites’ self-pity was, we also often fall into feeling sorry for ourselves and lose sight of all the grace that the Lord has provided for us throughout our walk with Him.

The rightful solution for self-pity is remembering the grace that has brought us this far.

—John Lody.