Introduction

It’s truthful but not a happy thing to report that the behavior of the Israelites between Egypt and Canaan is often duplicated in the congregations of today’s churches. It doesn’t matter what the pastor says or does, “something” is always “wrong” or “not quite right” with the music, the order of service, too much time on one thing and not enough on another, the color of the fabric on the chairs, and so on and so forth. When such complaints are boiled down one discovers that what is really being said is, “I want it MY way.” Not content to be in the presence of God or to participate as a member of a larger group, the complainant is upset with anything that does not focus entirely on them according to their personal preference and desire. For some it’s not enough that God provides the leadership and means because it isn’t presented in the way that they’d like. They’re obsessed with the form at the expense of the content.

1Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. 2The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out. 3So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

[Read v.1-3]

Q: What exactly does it mean when someone is “like those who complain of adversity”?
A: They have no legitimate grounds for complaint; they’re just emotionally unhappy, moody if you will. They’re the worst type of whiner and complainer: one without a justifiable cause.

Q: To get perspective on this, how far have they traveled from Sinai to arrive at Taberah?
A: About 8 miles. In other words, they haven’t even hardly BEGUN the journey. There can’t possibly be an actual hardship to this point.

Point: They’re just plain unhappy about participating, about doing anything at all. Nothing significant has been required of them yet.

Q: What is revealed by the fact that the fire of the Lord occurred at the outskirts of the camp?
A: It reveals that God hears everything. Since the Tabernacle containing God’s presence was at the center of the camp, there was a false belief that one could whisper far away out of God’s hearing.

Application: Is it “OK” to be critical as long as you’re not in the pastor’s presence or physically in a church building? How can you determine if something is deserving of complaint or not?

4The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? 5We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.” 7Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. 8The people would go about and gather it and grind it between two millstones or beat it in the mortar, and boil it in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it.

[Read v.4-9]

Q: Who exactly were “the rabble...among them”?
A: These were those who came out of Egypt with the Israelites, Egyptians and other peoples who joined with Israel in the Exodus.

Q: What does it mean that they “had greedy desires”? What was their issue?
A: Their problem was rooted in wanting to satisfy their personal lusts for food, which were not just related to their physical appetite but spiritual. Banquets of food were an integral part of the false religious practices of Egypt that betrays their falseness by satisfying the desires of man rather than God.

Q: What is the phrase in v.6 that betrays the condition of their greed? How is it further expanded on by the description of manna in v.7-9?
A: “There is nothing at all to look at except this manna”. The first step towards pleasing the self is by seeking something that delights the eye. The ensuing description of the manna and the cakes made from it
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Q: How would you describe the root problem here?
A: They're more interested in satisfying their own will and desire than God's.

Q: Why is this surprising in light of what occurred in v.1-3?
A: Whereas the previous group suffered judgment for unfounded complaining, this group believes its complaints are justified, even though the issue is completely self-centered rather than God-centered. They're not learning the right application of the lessons of God.

Application: Is it “OK” to be critical if we feel it concerns a personal need? Do we ever consider God’s desires to be greater and therefore superseding our own? 

Q: What was the affect of the other people’s complaints on the main body of Israelites?
A: They became unhappy with their own choice of food, focusing on their own appetite and desires.

Q: How does this result in a change in Moses’ own behavior?
A: Moses begins to complain as well.

Q: But what’s the difference between them?
A: Moses' complaints are founded on legitimate circumstances and issues:
1. He cannot bear the whole burden of government upon himself alone.
2. The people are taking no responsibility for themselves; they're like an infant that can't survive without a parent.
3. Personally providing meat for 2-3 million people is a seemingly impossible task.

Point: The main difference between Moses' complaint and the complaints of those before him is that Moses is concerned for the carrying out of God's will, whereas the others are only concerned for their own will.

Application: List all the major concerns and issues in your life right now and place them under one of two column headings: “My Wishes” and “His Will”. What will you do regarding the things that are really only about having it your own way? Are your concerns more for the kingdom of God or the comfort of your own personal kingdom?
will give you meat and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two
days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor
twenty days, 20 but a whole month, until it
comes out of your nostrils and becomes
loathsome to you; because you have
rejected the LORD who is among you and
have wept before Him, saying, “Why did
we ever leave Egypt?”

21 But Moses said, “The people, among
whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet You
have said, ‘I will give them meat, so that
they may eat for a whole month.’
22 Should flocks and herds be slaughtered
for them, to be sufficient for them? Or
should all the fish of the sea be gathered
together for them, to be sufficient for
them?”

23 The LORD said to Moses, “Is the
LORD’S power limited? Now you shall
see whether My word will come true for
you or not.”

24 So Moses went out and told the people
the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered
seventy men of the elders of the people,
and stationed them around the tent.
25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud
and spoke to him; and He took of the
Spirit who was upon him and placed Him
upon the seventy elders. And when the
Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.
But they did not do it again.

26 But two men had remained in the
camp; the name of one was Eldad and the
name of the other Medad. And the Spirit
rested upon them (now they were among
those who had been registered, but had
not gone out to the tent), and they
prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young
man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad
and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the
attendant of Moses from his youth, said,
“Moses, my lord, restrain them.”

29 But Moses said to him, “Are you
jealous for my sake? Would that all the
LORD’S people were prophets, that the
LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”
30 Then Moses returned to the camp, both
he and the elders of Israel.

Q: What is the purpose of only having them prophesy for a short time? Why
weren’t they continually prophesying all the time from this day forward?
A: It goes to the core issue explained in the previous section, that of
taking God at His Word. God’s Spirit provides a short, visible
confirmation that He is with them, but from this point on they need to
operate from the Word of God already given to them. God means to
reaffirm His Word already given, not replace it with a new form of
communication.

Q: How is Moses’ complaint—his prayer, if you will—answered by God in
this event?
A: Whereas Moses was personally overwhelmed at the prospect of
shouldering the burden of government and leadership alone, he is now
provided Spirit-filled assistance.

Q: What is the primary role of leaders within the church both in respect to
their obligation to the congregation as well as to the pastor/overall leader?
A: To teach and uphold the Word of God.

Point: The role of prophets in the Bible only marginally involve conveying
predictions of future events foretold by God; their primary and overwhelming role
is to hold God’s people accountable for the degree of their obedience to His
Word.
Now there went forth a wind from the LORD and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits deep on the surface of the ground. The people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague. So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy. From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.

Jesus answered them and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal.” Therefore they said to Him, “What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.’” Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Q: Why did God strike them with a plague at the very moment they began to eat the meat?
A: Their eagerness to consume the meat without so much as a passing acknowledgement of God condemns their desire to satisfy themselves rather than please God. They have learned nothing from any of the previous events or Word of God.

Q: What do the names “Taberah” and “Kibroth-hattaavah” mean?
A: “Burning” and “the graves of greediness”. They’re pictures of what it means to forsake God’s Word for one’s own desires.

Point: How we absorb and apply God’s answers to our requests is just as important as why and how we originally make them.

Q: Jesus has just fed the 5,000 and they have pursued Him across the lake. Are they seeking to satisfy God’s desire or their own?
A: They are seeking to satisfy their earthly appetite and are missing out on meeting the greater need of their spiritual appetite.

Q: How does Jesus characterize the net result of their efforts?
A: According to v.27 they are working for temporary, perishable things at the expense of the eternal. Their personal desires have a very narrow, limited scope that may bring temporary satisfaction but long-term problems.

Q: How does the question and answer in v.28-29 compare with the lesson from Numbers 11?
A: It’s not a test of knowledge, but faith. It’s not an issue of self, but selflessness.

Q: How do the people in v.30-31 show that they neither understand the true meaning of the Messiah before them nor the example of Moses and their forefathers before them?
A: They see the manna as satisfying only physical hunger; they completely overlook its greater spiritual meanings.

Q: How does Jesus explain both situations?
A: Neither bread—either by way of Moses or Christ—came except by way of the Father. It’s the “bread” of His Word, first the Law given through Moses, now through Christ the Word Himself.

Q: How are all of our desires and needs to be fulfilled?
A: (v.35) “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst”. Faith and obedience.
Overall Application

All our desires are fulfilled when we subordinate them to HIS desires and will instead of our own; when we do it HIS way, not ours.