

Numbers 11 • I Want It My Way

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?

[Read v.4-9]

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.

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

indicate it would never have the appeal of the food presented at the feasts and banquets of the false religious practices of Egypt they were so missing now.

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 it's 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?*

[Read v.10-15]

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.*

[Read v.16-23]

Q: In this exchange between God and Moses it gets down to the real issue at the bottom of everything that's been going on. What is it?

A: "Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not". (v.23) The real problem is faith in believing God's Word and following through that faith with personal obedience through the circumstances to prove that His desires are more important than their own.

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?*

¹⁰Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? ¹²Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'?" ¹³Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' ¹⁴I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. ¹⁵So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

¹⁶The LORD therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone.

¹⁸"Say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt." Therefore the LORD

will give you meat and you shall eat.
¹⁹You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, ²⁰but 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?””

²¹But 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.’

²²Should 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?”

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

²⁴So 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.

²⁵Then 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.

²⁶But 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. ²⁷So a young man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

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

²⁹But 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!”

³⁰Then Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.

[Read v.24-30]

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.*

³¹Now 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. ³²The 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. ³³While 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. ³⁴So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy.

³⁵From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazereth, and they remained at Hazereth.

²⁶Jesus 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. ²⁷Do 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."

²⁸Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

³⁰So 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? ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"

³²Jesus 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. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

³⁴Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

³⁵Jesus 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."

[Read v.31-35]

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.

[Read John 6:26-35]

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.*