

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 6: Complaining at Taberah and Kibroth-hattaavah -- Numbers

11:1-35

Three days. That is how long it took. Israel had just marched out from Sinai with the cloud above them and the ark before them, with Moses praying, Rise up, Lord. The journey toward the promised land had finally begun. And three days down the road, the complaining started. Not over some great crisis, but over the ordinary hardship of the trail. You can feel the mood souring in the camp, the muttering passing from tent to tent, the sour edge creeping into conversations. It is a sobering picture, because most of us know how quickly gratitude can curdle into grumbling when the road gets long and dusty.

Then comes the strangest complaint of all. They cried, who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, the garlic. Egypt. The place of whips and bondage and infant graves in the Nile, and now they are romanticizing its menu. Sitting under the daily miracle of manna, bread from heaven that they only had to stoop and gather, they wept for the seasonings of slavery. There is a warning in that for every one of us, for the human heart can grow tired of grace and hungry for the very thing God rescued us from.

And there is Moses, crumpling under the weight. He hears the whole congregation weeping, family after family at their tent doors, and something in him breaks. Why have You laid the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive them? Where am I to get meat for all these people? I am not able to bear it alone. It is one of the most honest prayers in Scripture, a leader at the end of himself. And notice what God does. He does not scold Moses; He helps him, spreading the load across seventy elders and putting His Spirit upon them. God meets the weary leader with provision, not contempt.

But the craving for meat gets a darker answer. God sends quail, mounds of it, and while the meat is still between their teeth the plague strikes. They bury that whole greedy generation at a place they named Kibroth-hattaavah, the graves of craving. The New Testament will not let us read this as a quaint old tragedy. It says plainly, these things happened as examples for us, do not crave evil things as they craved (1 Corinthians 10:6). So this lesson holds a mirror up to our own discontent. It asks us, with great tenderness and great seriousness, whether we will learn contentment and gratitude here, in the classroom of God's Word, or carry our cravings all the way to the graves of our own making.

Group Discussion: Why is it so easy for God's people to slide from gratitude into grumbling, and what does our complaining usually reveal about how we are seeing God in that moment?

Personal Reflection: Where in your own life are you tempted to romanticize a past you were rescued from, or to crave something other than what God has graciously provided right now?

Read Numbers 11:1–35

Study Questions

1. In Numbers 11:1–3 the people complained and the Lord's anger was kindled, sending fire among them at Taberah. What does this opening scene teach us about how God regards the grumbling of His redeemed people, and why is complaining against our circumstances ultimately complaining against God Himself (compare Philippians 2:14–15)?
2. Israel's complaint at Taberah came only three days after they set out with God leading them (Numbers 10:33; 11:1). How quickly does your own gratitude turn to grumbling when the road gets hard, and what does that pattern reveal about your heart?
3. In Numbers 11:4–6 the mixed multitude craved meat and the people wept, longing for the fish, cucumbers, and melons of Egypt while despising the manna. How does this craving expose the deeper sin of discontent, and how can a heart grow so tired of God's daily provision that it idealizes the very bondage He delivered it from?
4. The people remembered Egypt's food but conveniently forgot Egypt's slavery. What past, person, or season are you tempted to remember with a rosy glow that erases the bondage or pain God actually rescued you from, and why does memory play these tricks?
5. Numbers 11:7–9 pauses to describe the manna, which the people had come to despise, given fresh every morning as a gift from God. What does the despising of the manna teach us about the danger of growing familiar with and ungrateful for God's steady, ordinary

mercies, and how does this connect to the contentment the New Testament commands (1 Timothy 6:6–8; Hebrews 13:5)?

6. Manna fell every single morning, faithful and unremarkable. What steady, ordinary mercies in your life have you stopped noticing because they have become familiar, and how might you recover gratitude for them this week?
7. In Numbers 11:10–15 Moses pours out his exhaustion to God, saying he is not able to bear this people alone, and in 11:16–17 and 11:24–30 God responds by placing His Spirit on seventy elders to share the load. What does this teach us about God's care for weary leaders, the proper sharing of burdens among God's people, and the difference between Moses' faithful honesty before God and the people's faithless complaining against God?
8. Moses was honest with God about being overwhelmed, even to the point of despair, yet he brought it to God rather than abandoning his calling. When you are at the end of your strength, do you bring your weariness honestly to God or do you either bottle it up or walk away, and what would faithful honesty look like for you?
9. In Numbers 11:18–23 and 11:31–34 God grants the people's craving by sending quail in abundance, yet while the meat was still between their teeth He struck them with a plague, and they buried the greedy at Kibroth-hattaavah, the graves of craving. Drawing this together with Psalm 106:14–15 and 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, what does it mean that God sometimes gives people the very thing they sinfully crave to their own ruin, and how is this written as a warning for us who must not crave evil things as they did?

10. Looking back across the whole chapter, the fire at Taberah, the craving for meat, the weary prayer of Moses, the Spirit on the elders, and the graves of craving, name one specific way the Lord Jesus is calling you to trade discontent for contentment and gratitude, and how He is forming that contentment in you through this passage.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 10:1–13, Israel's craving and grumbling written as examples and warnings so we do not fall as they did.; Psalm 106:13–15, they soon forgot His works, lusted in the wilderness, and He gave them their request but sent leanness into their soul.; Philippians 2:14–15, do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may be blameless children of God.; 1 Timothy 6:6–10, godliness with contentment is great gain, and the love of more is a root of many sorrows.; Hebrews 13:5, be content with such things as you have, for He has said, I will never leave you nor forsake you.

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