

Numbers, Chapters 11-12 / Three Protests

Read Numbers 11:1-3 – *The First Complaint*

This general complaint “about their misfortunes” is answered by God’s immediate wrath, which manifests itself in fire. Grumbling and fault-finding shows a lack of faith in God. James 5:7-9. It is a sign by which we recognize ungodly men. Jude 1:16. As on earlier occasions, Moses intercedes with God on behalf of the people.

Read Numbers 11:4-6 – *The Second Complaint*

The second protest concerns the manna that had been Israel’s food ever since it was provided on the way to Sinai (Exodus 16). On the surface, the protest is merely about the monotony of the diet, but underlying that is a yearning for the pleasures of Egypt and a rebellion against God’s plan. God had said that the people’s reception of this heavenly food would be a significant test of their obedience. Read Exodus 16:4. They were to receive it as the gracious gift of a loving God and a promise of the good things to come. By rejecting it, they failed the test of faith.

Read Numbers 11:10-15 – *Moses’ Reaction*

Why do you think Moses reacts differently to this complaint than he had the first one? (Remember his intercession and anger in response to the Golden Calf episode in Exodus.)

Read Numbers 11:16-20 – *The Lord’s Response to Moses and the People*

God responds with mercy to Moses’ complaint of weariness by providing help in the form of Elders. God responds with wrath to the people’s complaint of weariness by cursing them with what they demanded: meat, and more meat until they became sick with it.

Read Numbers 11:24-30 – *Elders Appointed*

Notice the working of the Holy Spirit. A similar influence of the Holy Spirit was described in Exodus 31:2-4 when God said He had filled a man “with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts” in order to create the Tabernacle and its furnishings including the Ark of the Covenant.

Why does Joshua take alarm at the two men prophesying in the camp instead of the tent? What does Moses’ reaction say about him?

Read Numbers 11:31-35 – *The Quail and the Plague*

Quail (small partridges) migrate north across the Sinai Peninsula in the spring and return in the fall, so although the Israelites had eaten some in the previous year (Ex. 16:13), these were not a regular dish. The migration of the second year was such that the Israelites were able to catch enormous quantities of quail. Their gathering of the quail, despite the Lord’s statement that they would be eating meat for a month, is greed which sparks God’s wrath, and a severe plague kills many of the people.

Read Numbers 12:1-2 – *The Third Complaint*

After the protests of the people comes an even more painful challenge to Moses’ authority. His brother Aaron, the high priest, and his sister Miriam, a prophetess (Ex. 15:20), contest his unique position. Their criticism of his marriage to a Cushite woman was a mere pretext. Their real complaint was the special relationship between God and Moses, and may have been provoked by jealousy at the appointment of the 70 elders who had prophesied.

Read Numbers 12:3-15 – *God’s Rebuke*

God spoke to Moses directly. Numbers 7:89. At Mt. Sinai, Moses had beheld God’s form, although not His face. Although Israel would have other prophets, it is clear that the relationship Moses had with God was unique. After Moses spoke with the Lord, his face glowed. Deuteronomy 34:10.

Read Numbers 12:16 – *the Journey Continues*

The wilderness of Paran was in the southernmost region of the promised land. The Israelites were at the doorstep.