

God's People in the Wilderness: Studies in the Book of Numbers

Session 9: Numbers 11

INCESSANT KVETCHING, CONTINUING PROVISION AND PROTECTION, NECESSARY CHASTISEMENT

Closure on the Sinai Experience [Exodus 20-40; Leviticus; Numbers 1:1-10:10]

- In the year of “residency” at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Horeb), God’s people were further prepared to be a “kingdom of priests” and “a holy nation” (Exod 19:5-6). In what ways?
- They heard the “ten words” of the covenant, and those words were inscribed on tablets
- The covenant relationship was ratified

- Worship was instituted (Tabernacle, priesthood, sacrifices)

- Organization was established

Reminder: The Time Frame

- On the fourteenth day of the first month of the second year (9:1-3), they celebrated Passover – the first of the three annual celebrations
- The Lord had commanded the census on the first day of the second month of the second year (1:1)
- Second year, second month, 20th day (10:11-13) – Israel set out for the first time
- The events in the rest of the book follow a full year of God’s faithful provision for the people at Sinai

The Perennial Problem in **Any** Wilderness: Complaining and Grumbling

- *Complaining* about hardships and misfortunes
- *Complaining* about lack of water and food
- *Complaining* about Moses and other leaders
- Paul’s admonition: 1 Corinthians 10:10 (and note the context)
- The complaints came from every quarter
 - Israelites and mixed multitude (“rabble”)
 - Aaron and Miriam; tribal leaders
- What lies behind constant dissatisfaction?

One More Aspect of the Backstory: Contrasts Between the First and Second Year Experience

First

Lack of water (Exod 15 and 17) - God purified an existing water source; commanded Moses to strike the rock [1 Cor 10:4]

Lack of food (Exod 16) – God brought manna and quail; emphasis on the former; lessons in Sabbath keeping

Leadership stress (Exod 18) – judges appointed

Provision w/o punishment

Second

General grumbling (Num 11: 1-3) – **fire** among them

Lack of food /leadership stress (Num 11:4-35) – elders appointed; quail but with **severe consequences**

Lack of water (Num 20) – God commanded Moses to speak; disobedience → **punishment**

Dissatisfied with “worthless” food and lack of water (Num 21) – **fiery serpent**

The Presence of God [this is important for what follows]

What Do Geography and Related Disciplines Contribute to Our Study?

“... complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes” (11:1)

- God’s anger was “**kindled**”
- **Fire** from the Lord burned among them
- They cried out to Moses who interceded for them

Longing for the food of Egypt; despising the food from God (“bread of heaven”) (11:4-35)

- Who were “the rabble”? What is the significance of “strong craving”?
- The memories of Egypt were strikingly rosy
- Why such a detailed description of manna? [Exod 16:13-15; 31]
- Rabbinic interpretations of manna

Moses at the Breaking Point

- Everyone was at the tent entrances weeping
- The Lord was blazingly angry and Moses was displeased
- Moses’ lament prayer

God’s Multi-Faceted Responses: Relief for Moses First

- 70 elders (re)commissioned; already a recognized group at the ratification ceremony (Exod 24)
- They were to stand around the Tent of Meeting; God would meet with them – transfer of Spirit
- Human and divine interface (elders and Spirit)
- They would “prophesy” – what did that involve and what significance would it have?
- Eldad and Medad – remained in camp
- Joshua’s role (assistant of Moses from his youth)

And then the people! What does discipline look like in response to insatiable craving?

- Preparation of people for the **judgment** started with consecration (vs 18)!
- God prepared Moses ahead of time for what was going to happen. The people would have meat – in disastrous quantities – until it would be loathsome to them
- This would happen because they had rejected the Lord – and it would look at first as if He had answered their desires!

Moses’s Incredulity

- The number of the people (600 “troops”?) defied reasonable possibility of feeding them meat.
- Moses’s questions

God’s Word to Moses and the Consequences

- Just watch Me! [the “Lord’s hand is not shortened”]
- Wind (*ru’ah*) from the Lord brought quail from the sea to surround the camp
- People were uncontrollably greedy – gathered for two days and a night
- The Lord struck with a plague; burials so extensive, the place was named “graves of the craving”
- No one interceded on their behalf at this point!

What do the various aspects of this incident say to the Church?