



FRESH FOOD AND A POWER PLAY

Numbers 10-12

The people Moses led are a warning to us that complaining about difficult circumstances is not just counterproductive; it's also an affront to God. Rather than complain about what He allows in our lives, we should be grateful He is always present to help and encourage us.

There's a part of all of us that finds it easy to see something we're missing in life and ignore so many of God's blessings. That's a pretty good description of the nation Israel. They are quick to complain. In fact, their complaining spirit shows up almost as soon as they leave Mount Sinai and head into the wilderness.

God commands Moses here in Numbers chapter 10 and verse 2:

“Make two silver trumpets. Of hammered work you shall make them, and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for breaking camp.”



Trumpet from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen

So, here we have the sound of the trumpet signaling the Israelites to pack up their gear and get ready to move out.

The next few verses inform us that the priests also will blow on these trumpets to call the people to assemble at the tabernacle, to announce some festival or feast, or to prepare for battle. So, the trumpets relate to various aspects of life and, according to verse 10, serve as “a reminder of you before your God.” In other words, the measure of Israel's faith is going to be seen in the way they respond to the sound of these trumpets.

You and I have the completed, written Word of God. We might be listening for the sound of the trumpet that calls us to assemble in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17), but in the meantime, the measure of our faith is how we respond to God's Word.

Now at this point, the people begin their journey through the wilderness. We read:

They set out from the mount of the LORD [Mount Sinai] three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the LORD went



before them . . . and the [pillar of] cloud of the LORD was over them. (Numbers 10:33-34)

What an exciting day this is. And let me tell you, from all appearances here, the people are starting out really well. But then in chapter 11 we are told in verse 1, “The people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes.”

Now we’re not told what those misfortunes were. Perhaps some cattle had died or the weather was hot, or life was just generally difficult, but they aren’t happy and they complain. Keep in mind they are actually complaining about God, who is leading them.

The Lord deals with the complaint severely. Verse 1 tells us, “His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.”

Unfortunately, this discipline from the Lord doesn’t eliminate their complaining, resentful attitude. Frankly, it’s going to travel with them throughout their entire journey. It’s even going to set a pattern for much of what follows here in the book of Numbers. I wonder about your journey today, beloved—is complaining the pattern for your life?

Well, this attitude shows up again here in verse 4, where we read, “Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving.” And who is this “rabble”? They are non-Israelites who left Egypt along with Israel (Exodus 12:37-38); they had appeared interested in following the God of Abraham, but most of them really weren’t interested in Him at all.

Evidently, the rabble gets everybody else craving the same things they crave, so we read the words of “all the people of Israel” in verses 4-5:

“Oh that we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt . . . the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. But now our strength

is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

Instead of being thankful for God’s presence and His miraculous manna, the people think only about what they don’t have: “Oh, we don’t have any more fish and sauteed onions and cucumber salad to eat. All we have is this manna.” It’s no wonder we read here in verse 10, “The anger of the LORD blazed hotly.”

And the Lord isn’t the only one hot with anger. Moses lets loose here with his own complaints to God about his job. In verse 11, he asks, “Why have you dealt ill with your servant?” In other words, “Why did You put me in charge?” Then he asks, “Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?” (verse 13). In verse 14, he breaks down and says, “The burden is too heavy for me.” And finally, in verse 15, he says in despair, “If you will treat me like this, kill me at once.” In essence, he saying, “Lord, I would rather die than go one more day listening to two million people complain.”

How about you? Perhaps you’re leading a ministry—maybe even pastoring a church—and you’ve just about had it. Your service seems unnoticed and unappreciated, and the burden is blinding you to the benefits. It’s more than you can handle.

I love the way the Lord responds so graciously to Moses, telling him to appoint seventy men from the elders of Israel (verse 16), and then saying, “And they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone” (verse 17). So, the Lord gives him people, not just to serve with, but to talk to—people who will understand the unique burden of leadership.

With that, the Lord responds graciously to the nation, giving them the meat they crave. Verse 31 reads, “Then a wind from the LORD sprang up, and it brought quail from the sea and let them fall beside the camp.”

Not a shot is fired, but there are quail falling from the sky in this miraculous provision. So, do the people thank the Lord and confess their rebellious hearts? Not at all.



Verse 33 tells us:

While the meat was yet between their teeth . . . the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck down the people with a very great plague.

The Lord disciplines His people for their rebellion.

With that, chapter 12 opens with another kind of complaint. This time it comes from Miriam and Aaron, the brother and sister of Moses. We read in verses 1-2:

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married. . . And they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?”

Moses’ wife Zipporah evidently had died, and Moses married another woman, from the region of modern-day Ethiopia.¹ Miriam and Aaron aren’t too happy about the marriage, and they use it as an excuse to complain about Moses having the leadership role in Israel. They don’t like the fact that he’s sitting in the driver’s seat.

This is a power struggle, but it sounds so spiritual. “Hey Moses, aren’t we just as special to God as you are?” Let me tell you, this is nothing less than a jealous grab for power.

The Lord appears in the cloud, and in verses 6-8 He vindicates the leadership role of Moses. Aaron is hu-

¹ Herbert Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible* (Zondervan, 1967), 114, 181.

miliated publicly for his pride. Miriam is covered with leprosy, evidently because she was behind this attempted coup d’etat—this grab for power.

It’s only after Moses prays for her in verse 13, that Miriam is healed. And, unsurprisingly, there is no record of Miriam or Aaron ever again attempting to take the reins of leadership away from Moses.

Here’s the lesson: In your church, in your place of work, in your heart, leave no room for jealousy but always plenty of room for humility.

What heart-attitudes typically set the stage for your complaining against God? Why is complaining about your hardships so offensive to the Lord? Considering God’s response to Israel, what should your attitude toward hardships be, and why?

How do these verses (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:6) inform your thinking and motivation to ask the LORD to provide others to serve along with you whatever your leadership role may be?

What does complaining about circumstances in your life reveal about: your relationship with the Lord? Your devotion to living out God’s word? How much Satan is influencing your heart? Your priority to share the gospel with your family, friends and neighbors?

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