

# Old Testament Lessons

OT Stories That Teach Us About God and Faith

May 03, 2020

- I. Preparation for today's study
  - A. Today, we are going to look at two stories in **Numbers 11**. The **first** story is about Israel's complaint that they had to endure difficult hardships as a result of following God. The **second** story is about Israel's complaints that they had to eat the same bland food, everyday. Within these two stories we see God's disciplinary response to their complaining, Moses interceding with God on Israel's behalf, and the grace and kindness of God that accompanied His discipline.
  - B. Pray
  
- II. A story of grumbling, complaining, anger, and the end of God's patience
  - A. **FIRST STORY:** If you wish, you can follow along in your Bible or the outline I sent. **Numbers 11:1 . . .** Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD (*That is, they were openly expressing their unhappiness and discontent at the hardships and suffering they had to endure as a result of following God's leading and doing His will. In other words, their complaining was equal to saying God was not good, or at least, not all that good.*);
    1. and when the LORD heard it, His anger was kindled (*that is, aroused. In other words, God's anger didn't begin as a roaring fire, but rather as the kindling used to get a roaring fire going.*), and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.
    2. *This is an important point. God was angry, yet He did not attack the entire camp, but rather He began with the fringes. It is my opinion that He did it this way as a warning to the rest of the camp. And in a similar way, He doesn't start His chastisement of us in a whole person, whole life way, but rather picks away at some of the fringe parts of our lives in hopes we will get the message and change. And of course, it is always wiser to learn the lesson God is teaching at a lesser cost to ourselves than at a greater one.*
    3. [2] The people therefore cried out to Moses (*Just prior to this, they were turning against Moses as if he was a defective or an unqualified leader. But now that they need someone to intervene with God on their behalf, they turn to Moses as if he is the only one qualified to help them.*), and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire died out (I

*believe it is important for us to see that being rejected or falsely accused or mistreated (as Moses was) is never a reason to withhold or neglect compassion and mercy. As God said in **Romans 12:20**, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him." Therefore, in spite of how the Israelites had treated him, Moses still talked to God on their behalf).*

[3] So the name of that place was called Taberah (*TAB uh ruh – burning*), because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

**B. SECOND STORY:** [4] **The rabble** who were among them had greedy desires (*We learn from **Exodus 12:38** that a mixed multitude, that is a number of non-Jews who themselves were foreigners in Egypt and possibly discriminated against by the Egyptians, left Egypt with the Israelites. It is also possible that among the rabble there were half-Jews. NOW for the sake of better seeing ourselves in this story, I suggest we think of the rabble as our old, fleshly, sinful nature and the unbelieving world around us.*); **and also the sons of Israel** wept again (*so not just the rabble, but the Jews were grumbling and complaining again*) and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? [5] We 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, [6] but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

1. *When the Israelites thought they were about to starve to death, they grumbled and complained, and God gave them manna. Now, somewhere between 16-18 days and five camp sites later, they are complaining about the lack of variety in their food and comparing it to their time in Egypt where they enjoyed a vast variety of foods.*
2. *However, their problem was not the food, but the rabble – that is, their old nature and the influences of the world around them.*
3. *And are we not susceptible to the same two influences? Our old nature and the world around us naturally distrust God, and so they encourage us to find fault with God when life isn't going the way we want.*
4. *However, because of the way our old nature and the world think, and because of the beliefs and values they hold, they not only can't, they don't want to be content with what God is doing or allowing.*
5. *Paul affirms this in **Romans 8:5-8**, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. [6] For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, [7] because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does*

*not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, [8] and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.*

- C. [7] Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium (*DEHL-yoom*). [8] The 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. [9] When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it.
- D. [10] Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their [tribes], each man at the doorway of his tent; and **the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly** (*This time God's anger was not just aroused, it was greatly aroused. We might compare His previous anger to a match that starts a campfire and His present anger to a lightning strike that starts a forest fire,*), **and Moses was displeased** (*for reasons different than God's as we shall see. For example, God's anger was over being thought ill of after proving His love and care in very convincing ways. Moses displeasure was over having to deal with so many cantankerous, contentious, ungrateful, and hard to please people.*).
- E. [11] So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You been so hard on Your servant (*or why are you expecting so much from me when You know how hard this job is*)? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the **burden of all this people** on me? (*In other words, Moses thinks he's done enough already to have sufficient favor with God to be free of this burden!*) [12] Was 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'? (*Moses is asking God, Why have You made ME responsible for them? They act like spoiled brats, and they're not even my children, they're Yours.*) [13] Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' [14] I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. [15] **So if You are going to deal this way with me, please kill me at once**, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness (*or do not make me endure such misery*)."
1. *Though God describes Moses as the most humble man on the face of the earth (Num. 12:3), and as a man of great faith (Heb. 11:24-29),*

*the Israelites childish, unbelieving, complaining, fault-finding, God-condemning attitudes and behaviors had become more than Moses believed he could endure.*

2. *We might say, Israel's repeated unbelief and bad attitudes were Moses' rabble, and sadly, he took on the self-pitying attitudes and overwhelmed feelings of his rabble and told God exactly how he felt about what God had done.*
3. *However, we ought to show Moses patience, compassion, and mercy just as God did, for though Moses was wrong to complain and infer God had let him down, he was in a very difficult situation. Imagine yourself having to bear more demands than one person should have to handle, and having to bear more unhappy, complaining people than any one person should have to deal with.*
4. *But there is another reason to show compassion and mercy to Moses. He rarely gave in to his fleshly passions and desires. It is true, he sinned more than once, but there is no mention of his repeating the same sin over and over – as was the case with the Israelites and too many of us.*
5. *So what can we learn from this part of the story? We can learn that our bad attitudes, self-pity, and complaining behaviors wear on those who have to repeated hear it from us. In other words, after a while, they become painful burdens to those – including God – who have to endure this from us.*

F. [16] The 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. [17] Then 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.

1. *Once again, we see the mercy and lovingkindness of God toward His children. In fact, we see the practical reality of **Psalm 103:10-14** in God's dealings with Moses.*
2. *However, mercy and lovingkindness are not the sum of God. He is also holy, a just Judge, and a loving Father who disciplines His children – for their good. And so we read in –*

G. [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." (*What the Israelites were saying is that life was good before God saved us! But since He saved us, life has gotten harder, far less fun, and definitely unexciting!*) Therefore the LORD will give you meat and you shall eat. [19] You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, [20] but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; (*and here is why*) because **you have rejected the LORD who is among you** and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" (In other words, they had rejected God as their Savior and Lord, and treated Him as if He had harmed them rather than rescued them from harm.)

H. [21] But Moses said, [How Lord, how are you going to give them meat for a whole month out here in the wilderness? After all] 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.' [22] Should 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?" [23] The LORD said to Moses, "**Is the LORD'S power limited?** Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not." (*Once again God patiently affirms what He can and will do. And once again, He gives Moses and all His people the opportunity to watch Him fulfill His word – and then use this experience to strengthen their faith.*)

I. [24] So 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. [25] Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and [God] took of the Spirit who was upon [Moses] and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied (*this was a humanly observable confirmation that God had given the Holy Spirit to the seventy elders*). **But they did not [prophesy] again.** (*The momentary gift of prophecy was to prove a point, and nothing more.*)

1. [26] But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad (*EL dad – God loved*) and the name of the other Medad (*MEE dad – beloved*). And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among [the seventy], but [they] had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp.
2. [27] So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." [28] Then Joshua the son of

Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them."

3. [29] But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? (*Are you concerned that this is a threat to me and my position as God's appointed leader?*) Would that all the LORD'S people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!"
  - a. *Why? Because that would bring about the kind of changes in the whole nation that would bring an end to their flagrant distrust of God, their childish grumbling and complaining, and their foolish thinking and behavior.*
  - b. *I want to point out that this was a commendable response on Moses' part, because it shows he cared more about the spiritual health of the people than the exaltation and security of his leadership position.*
  
- J. [30] Then Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel. [31] Now 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 (*somewhere between 10 and 20 miles outside the perimeter of the camp*), all around the camp and about two cubits deep (*36 inches*) on the surface of the ground (*It is probable this means the birds were flying about 36 inches above the ground so they could be easily captured and killed rather than meaning they were dead and piled up on top of each other 36 inches deep.*).
  
- K. [32] The people spent all day and all night and all the next day (*36 hours*), and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers – *approximately 55 bushels*) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. [33] While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed (*they were just starting to eat*), the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague.
  1. *It is possible that you see this action on God's part as punishment, but I see it as the chastisement side of discipline. God was teaching the Israelites to trust Him, to be content with what He gave them, to be grateful for what they had, and to despise rather than treasure what they were saved from.*
  2. *However, given their persistent bad attitude and behavior, God resorted to the infliction of pain in hopes they would finally get the message and take seriously their need to change.*

3. *At this point I think it wise to remind you of these words from **Hebrews 12:5-6**, “My son, do not despise (look down on, get angry about) the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; [6] for whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges (inflicts some form of pain on) every son whom He receives.”*
- L. [34] So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah (*kib rahth-hat TAY uh vuh – the graves of greediness*), because there they buried the people who had been greedy.
  1. *Greed, by its very nature, pulls us away from faith in God and directs us toward trusting in self, the world, and even the devil as we pursue whatever it is we think will gratify what it is we long for.*

### III. Conclusion

- A. I want to conclude today's stories a Bible passage and two general truths.
- B. **First**, we read in **Deuteronomy 8:3**, that God humbled the Israelites by letting them run out of food in order to show them they needed Him as their provider. And God fed them manna to reinforce the truth that food from the earth is not the only thing we need to sustain life. We also need all that God does to hold our world together and what He does or gives in particular situations for our good.
  1. In other words, no matter how good we are at providing for ourselves, it would not be enough without God's involvement. For example, it is God who makes the sun shine, the rain fall, the seeds die and bring forth life so that we can gather sufficient food to sustain our lives.
  2. The point being, though food is necessary to keep us alive, your life and my life is sustained by God in both a general sense, and in a specific sense when He speaks into our moment of need.
- C. **Second**, though God is patient and merciful, though He is long-suffering and His love is everlasting, no one, and this includes His children, no one can continue sinning without sooner or later facing God's chastisement, and if His chastisement doesn't bring about a change of behavior, then we will face His punishment.
- D. **Finally**, though God chastises and punishes, He also forgives and restores, and He continues to be our loving Father who provides for us and protects us. We read about this in **Psalm 103:8-10**; **Psalm 30:4-5**; **Isaiah 57:15-16**; and **Micah 7:18-19**.