

# People Grumble

Printed Text • Numbers 11:1-6, 10-15

## Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE the Israelites' grumbling about life in the wilderness; RECOGNIZE that grumbling reflects an ungrateful heart; and GIVE THANKS for the blessings in our lives.

## In Focus

After seven years on the job, Regina took a chance and interviewed for a management position. The International Finance Department position paid several thousand dollars more per year than her current position. If offered the position, she would be making enough money to pay off her credit cards, student loan, and buy the new house she and her husband were believing for. Regina prayed she would get the position.

One afternoon, the vice president of finance called Regina into his office. He told Regina that she had the most impressive interview of all the candidates who applied, for the position. Overjoyed, Regina thanked Mr. Warren and left his office with a huge smile on her face—her prayers were answered. After several months in her new position, Regina sat in her office talking to Michelle, a colleague from the Marketing Department, where she formerly worked.

"Girl, this job is working my last nerve! My boss is overbearing and the people in this department work you like a slave. They expect you to make bricks with no straw! All I do is go to work and come home. My social life is totally dead."

Tired of hearing her complain, Michelle said, "What about the beautiful weather we're having?"

"What?" Regina responded. "What does the weather have to do with work?"

"Nothing!" Michelle said, "That's the point; I can't wrap my mind around the fact that you're complaining about your new position, not to mention the hefty increase in pay that came with it. You asked God to give you a way out of debt, and He did," Michelle said. "My prayer is that you stop complaining and realize that God has blessed you. You'd better be careful, girl. God is not pleased."

Today's lesson teaches us to choose thanksgiving over complaining and grumbling.

## Keep In Mind

"And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Numbers 11:4–6, KJV).

## Words You Should Know

**A. Mixt (Mixed) Multitude** (Numbers 11:4) 'acpecuph (Heb.) — A collection or collected multitude—a mass or crowd.

**B. Manna** (v. 6) man (Heb.) — The bread from the sky that fed the Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

## Say It Correctly

**Taberah.** tab-ERA

### KJV

**Numbers 11:1** And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

2 And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the Lord, the fire was quenched.

3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the Lord burnt among them.

4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

11 And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

15 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

### NLT

**Numbers 11:1** Soon the people began to complain about their hardship, and the Lord heard everything they said. Then the Lord's anger blazed against them, and he sent a fire to rage among them, and he destroyed some of the people in the outskirts of the camp.

2 Then the people screamed to Moses for help, and when he prayed to the Lord, the fire stopped.

3 After that, the area was known as Taberah (which means "the place of burning"), because fire from the Lord had burned among them there.

4 Then the foreign rabble who were traveling with the Israelites began to crave the good things of Egypt. And the people of Israel also began to complain. "Oh, for some meat!" they exclaimed.

5 "We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted.

6 But now our appetites are gone. All we ever see is this manna!"

10 Moses heard all the families standing in the doorways of their tents whining, and the Lord became extremely angry. Moses was also very aggravated.

11 And Moses said to the Lord, "Why are you treating me, your servant, so harshly? Have mercy on me! What did I do to deserve the burden of all these people?"

12 Did I give birth to them? Did I bring them into the world? Why did you tell me to carry them in my arms like a mother carries a nursing baby? How can I carry them to the land you swore to give their ancestors?

13 Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people? They keep whining to me, saying, 'Give us meat to eat!'

14 I can't carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy!

15 If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!"

## The People, Places, and Times

**Moses.** His name means "drawn out of the water." He was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, where they were enslaved and oppressed.

**Taberah.** A place near the wilderness of Paran, whose name means "burning." It is the place where God punished the Israelites for murmuring and complaining about only having manna to eat.

**Cloud By Day and Pillar of Fire By Night.** The cloud by day and pillar of fire by night were the manifestations of God's direction and His will. When the cloud by day lifted, the people were to follow it. When the cloud settled, it was God's will that the people stop and set up camp. The pillar of fire by night was a sign of God's protection during the darkness of night.

## Background

After their long enslavement, as they followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the Children of Israel left Egypt and traveled from place to place. The book of Numbers chronicles the story of the 40 years during which the Children of Israel wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. After two years camped in the Sinai desert, God lifted the cloud and the Israelites left the wilderness of Sinai. They followed the cloud until it rested in the wilderness of Paran. Today's text finds the Israelites, only three days into their journey, mumbling and complaining about the hardships they have to endure while traveling in the desert.

### At-A-Glance

1. The People Complain (Numbers 11:1–6)
2. Moses Complains (11:10–15)

## In Depth

### 1. The People Complain (Numbers 11:1–6)

The Children of Israel began to complain only three days into their journey (10:32ff). Angered by their ungrateful attitude, God began to consume the Israelites' camp with fire, and many people were killed. The people looked to Moses and began to cry out for help. Moses prayed for the people, and when God heard his prayers, the fire stopped. Moses then named the place Taberah, which means "burning." The place served as a reminder of God's burning anger against the Israelites for their ungratefulness.

After the fire of judgment was quenched, the spirit of complaining returned, as the "mixed multitude" that followed the Israelites out of Egypt grew tired of eating manna. The Israelites quickly joined in and began complaining that they, too, were tired of eating manna every day. They longed for the days back in Egypt when they freely ate fish, cucumbers, melons, etc. (v. 5).

Even though the smell of fire was still in their nostrils, the Israelites complained about their situation. How quickly they had forgotten their enslavement! They reminisced as though they had lived as princes and princesses in Egypt. When faced with hardships, they quickly forgot about God's provisions and began to grumble and complain yet again.

God is able to provide more than we can imagine. The daily provision (manna) from heaven simply exemplified the provisions and the compassion that God had for His people. If the Israelites had prayed to God instead of murmuring, what might the result have been?

When we complain, it's an indication that we do not trust God. Reflect on your personal experiences. During times of trials, do you forget God's blessings? Do you complain? Are you unhappy because God has not blessed you with more? Consider all that God has done for you. God gives you life, health, strength, family, employment, and many other blessings – too numerous to count. Because we are busy focusing on things we don't have, we appear ungrateful for God's blessings. After just two short years in the wilderness, the Israelites had forgotten that they were enslaved for more than four hundred years when God delivered and saved them for a purpose.

Turn your complaints into praise. Consider praying instead of murmuring. Know that your wilderness experiences are moments to praise and thank God for everything He has provided in your life. By faith, ask God to provide for your needs and quietly wait for God's answer. When we take our concerns to God, He hears us and does something about it. Do not lose sight of God's hand in your life by focusing your attention on things that are not important. Allow God's blessings to lead your life, as you live each moment with a grateful heart.

## **2. Moses Complains (11:10–15)**

God's servant, Moses, did his best for the good of the people. But when Moses heard the people complaining, he could not help but become agitated by their behavior. After all, God had blessed the nation by delivering them from slavery, directing them through the wilderness with a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, and providing them with daily food from heaven. How could the people be so ungrateful? What more could they want?

Moses did the only thing he knew how to do; he took his concerns to God. Moses knew he was God's man and his divine commission obligated him to intercede on behalf of the Israelites. But he was so overwhelmed by the people's complaints that he, himself, began to grumble and complain—so much so that he said he would rather God kill him than make him continue to deal with the ungrateful ramblings of the people (v. 15).

It's amazing how easy it is for someone else to make our life a living hell and cause us to forget God's divine providence. Moses was God's hand-picked servant and yet he would rather die than continue to intercede on behalf of an ungrateful people. During their time in desert the Children of Israel witnessed numerous miracles firsthand. Yet they readily joined the "mixt multitude" in complaining when things got a little rough. How about you? Rebellion against God is a serious offense. Because of their ungratefulness, the generation of Israelites that rebelled against God never got to see the Promised Land; they died in the wilderness. The Bible tells us that when we are saved, we are granted full access to all the valuable resources God has to offer. God lavishes His resources on us "according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians. 1:7). As believers, it is our job to appreciate the good things God has provided and continually give Him praise for our many blessings.

### **Search the Scriptures**

1. Why was God displeased with the Israelites (Numbers 11:1)?
2. How did God respond to the Israelites (v. 1)?
3. When God sent the fire, what did the people do (v. 2)?
4. Why did they name the place Taberah, and what does it mean (v. 3)?
5. Who was this "mixt multitude" that followed the Israelites out of Egypt (vv. 10–15)?
6. Why was Moses displeased (v. 10)?

## Discuss the Meaning

1. In the opening verses of Numbers 11, we read that the Israelites complained often. They forgot that God delivered them out of the hands of their oppressors. They had forgotten the numerous things God had done to provide for them and keep them during their wilderness journey. In many ways, we are no different from the Israelites. God blesses us each day, yet we complain about things we don't have or think we deserve to have. We become frustrated when life doesn't proceed as we have planned, and constantly grumble and complain. Discuss what it means to trust in God's provision, even when you feel like God has abandoned your cause.
2. The fact that the fire of God is sometimes harsh offers us insight into the severity with which God treats sin. Discuss a time in your life when you felt the fire of God. How did you react during this time of pressure? Did you gripe or complain or did you pray and wait on God's response?
3. The discontent of the "mixt multitude" (v. 4) greatly influenced the Israelites' attitude. Likewise, the Israelites' complaining affected Moses' attitude. What effect do other people's negative attitudes or their complaining have on your behavior? Do you join in and start to complain as well? Or do you offer words of encouragement and gratitude?

## Liberating Lesson

Ours is a society of complainers. With very little effort, just about everyone can find something to complain about every day: the traffic is bad, the schools are horrible, gas prices are high, or the crime rate is up. The list is endless. The Bible says that God is displeased when we grumble and complain. First, because it reflects ingratitude, we must recognize that complaining is a sin.

Second, adopt a positive attitude. Things happen: the train made you late for work; your husband forgot to pay the light bill and now the lights are cut off; your son got into a fight at school and is suspended for three days. While these are frustrating things, our frustration is not final.

Finally, pray for change. Begin to pray that grumbling and complaining among your family, your church, your community, your neighborhood, and your workplace be replaced with words of encouragement and thanksgiving.

## Application For Activation

The reality is that God does not change; He is faithful, omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable. Do you find yourself complaining about situations instead of focusing on God? Do you need to recommit to following God faithfully? Ask God to forgive your complaining and negativity. Make a decision to focus on God, stop complaining, and begin to pray to God, who is able to answer your cries for help, according to His plans for your life.

## Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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## Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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## More Light on the Text

### Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15

**1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.**

The Children of Israel were on the march. They left the Sinai and were moving steadily toward the Promised Land. There was a sense of unity and purpose as they progressed forward. Then after a short sojourn in the desert, they began to complain. The Hebrew word 'anan (aw-NAN) refers to murmuring and complaining. It helps us see a consistent attitude of ingratitude on display. People complain when they are uncomfortable, and nothing makes people more uncomfortable than not having the basic needs of food, clothing, or shelter met. Up to this point in their journey, God had been sufficient to meet the needs of His chosen people. Now, however, and for the first time, the people complained that God was insufficient to meet their needs. So because they were uncomfortable, instead of glorifying God, they grumbled.

In response to the complaints of the multitude, God became angry. His anger was displayed by fire that burned only at the outer edges of the encampment. This display of holy anger was sufficient. The people got the message and sought out Moses, whom they asked to intercede with God on their behalf. Perhaps a little discomfort was better than death.

**2 And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.**

**3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.**

What Moses said to God is not reported. Perhaps he simply reminded God that the Children of Israel had been in captivity for a long time and were only now learning how to trust and follow the living God. Certainly, he appealed to God to be merciful to the people, especially because they were now terrified and fearful for their lives. God listened to what Moses had to say and stayed His anger. The fires were quenched, (Heb. shaqa', shaw-KAH, which means "to sink down, subside") and the people were saved. As a result, the place was named Taberah in remembrance of God's fiery response to ingratitude. The episode helped the emerging nation understand that Moses truly was God's anointed. His voice was heard when he prayed. The people also learned for the first time, if He deemed it necessary, God would punish them. Complaining was not the way to retain God's favor and blessing. But God responded favorably to the prayer of a righteous man.

**4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? 5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:**

The sun scorched the desert by day and its absence chilled the desert by night. It was not a hospitable environment. Water was in short supply and the food God had provided was boring. Manna was no longer sweet, but rather a routine meal. Before long, some of the people, who were not descendants of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, but who had simply joined themselves to the Israelites as they left Egypt, began to want the pleasures and comforts of the life they had left behind. The "mixt

multitude that was among them” was not quiet about their “lusting” (Heb. ta’avah, TA-av-ah) for the good life in Egypt. They now had a strong desire and an intense longing for their old life. Their complaints soon infected the Children of Israel, who also began to want the more “pleasurable” conditions of Egypt. They wanted to eat meat or fish and anything other than manna. In their wanting, however, the Children of Israel distorted the memories of their reality in Egypt. Their description of their diet gives the impression that they were eating like those who were not slaves. In reality, in Egypt, they were a captive people in bondage. In Egypt, they were slaves.

**6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.**

For a year, God had been providing a miraculous substance for food for the multitude, but now they were tired of it. They refer to their souls (Heb. nephesh, NEH-fesh—in this context “soul” refers to life or to one’s self), their very lives as dried away, (Heb. yabesh, yaw-BASHE). Day after day, God had provided nothing but the same dull substance to eat. The Children of Israel didn’t even know what the substance was; they only knew they were sick of it. There is something about human nature that craves variety.

**11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.**

The joy that the crowd had known during their trek out of Egypt was gone. No longer were the people remembering the strong hand with which God had delivered them from slavery. They had turned their focus inward and away from God. As a result, they stood at the door of their tents and tearfully lamented (Heb. bakah, baw-kaw’—“to cry, bewail, shed tears”) their present state. Their ingratitude angered God once more and this time angered Moses as well. A crisis had arisen almost as quickly as the previous circumstance of ingratitude, and the tension was higher than before.

**11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? 12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?**

In his anger, Moses prayed. He wanted to know what he had done that would cause God to put the burden of millions of ungrateful, complaining people on him. Moses had learned to trust God to be sufficient to meet every need, but the people had gotten on his nerves and he had grown tired of them. Moses indicated that he felt afflicted (Heb. ra’a’, raw-AH). In this context, it connotes the idea of being injured by having to contend with an ungrateful group of people. It is important to remember here that Moses was dealing with a nation on the move; this was not merely the grumbling of a few hundred people. He was dealing with thousands of people grumbling against him and God. Moses did not ask God to give them more variety in their diet, something God probably would have done had He been asked. Rather, Moses began to follow the pattern of the people and complain about his situation. Moses’ complaint was not one of ingratitude. His complaint was one of frustration. He had grown to love some of the men that he had seen standing at the door of their tents crying, and there was absolutely nothing Moses could do to resolve their sadness. Moses’ sense of affliction was tied to his helplessness as much as his frustration with the constant grumbling of the people.

**13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. 14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. 15 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.**

Moses had been God's instrument for doing the miraculous to get Pharaoh to release the Children of Israel from their captivity. He had been used to the miraculous to deliver them across the Red Sea, but now he was frustrated with the people and there was no thought of miracles. He had not asked God for anything at this point; he just wanted to complain. The lack of support and gratitude from the masses had caused Moses, the leader, to lament his position. Rather than interceding on behalf of the people, Moses looked inward and complained. His complaint was one that reflected a sense of tremendous inadequacy. He knew he could provide nothing for the people, and the burden of their concerns made him focus more on venting his frustration than seeking God's tremendous ability to provide.

# Daily Bible Readings

## **Monday**

Numbers 6:1-27

## **Tuesday**

Numbers 9:15-23

## **Wednesday**

Numbers 12:1-16

## **Thursday**

Numbers 14:11-38

## **Friday**

Numbers 15:22-31

## **Saturday**

Numbers 17:12-13

## **Sunday**

Numbers 11:1-6, 10-15