

BE CONTENT!

(Scripture: Numbers 11:18-20)

Numbers 11:18-20

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Introduction: After a yearlong rest, now the Israelites were ready to move from Sinai Mountain. But before we can talk about their journey, I would like to bring an interesting verse to your attention.

Numbers 10:29,30. 29Then Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses father-in-law, We are setting out to the place of which the LORD said, I will give it to you. Come with us and we will do you good, for the LORD has [g]promised good concerning Israel.” 30But he said to him, I will not come, but rather will go to my own land and relatives.”

Who is this Hobab? Is it the same father-in-law Jethro that was mentioned in Exodus 18? Some scholars think that this person may be one of the sons in laws of Jethro.

In any case, this person was a special person with special skills, and Moses needed him desperately, but Hobab turned that offer off, and he wanted to return to his own land! This person was self-centered in his own interests. He failed to look at the bigger picture of helping God’s kingdom. Likewise, we do it with our church needs also. We say yes, or no to church needs based upon our own convenience. We do not care if the church suffers or not. Before you say yes or no, always look at the bigger picture of God’s kingdom. Focus your eyes on ministry and try to edify it. Don’t abandon your work in God’s Church because of your personal problems at work or in your house or for any other reason.

In the following passage Moses literally begs!

Num. 10:31,32. 31Then he said, Please do not leave us, since you know [h]where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be as eyes for us. 32So it will be, if you go with us, that [i]whatever good the LORD [j]does for us, we will [k]do for you.”

Moses wanted him desperately because Hobab knew exactly where the Israelites should camp in the wilderness, and he would be eyes for the Israelites? Did Moses forget about the pillar of cloud? When the pillar of cloud arises, Israelites must pack up and move, and when they reach the place where God wants them to stay, the pillar of cloud will stay above the ground at a particular place, and the tabernacle must be first erected right under where it stands, then rest of the camps go right around it in the shape of the cross. So, God lead every step of the way, He showed them where to stay, and when to move. Moses did not need this person for this job. But he felt that he really needed Hobab for this purpose. Sometimes we forget God's leading and tend to beg people for their service. Beware of this common mistake.

The People Complain!

Num. 11:1 Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the ears of the LORD; and the LORD heard them and His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some at the outskirts of the camp.

The simple translation is that the people complained, and the Lord heard them. But it is more than that. The NASB and NIV try to capture that nuance of Hebrew language. The people started bringing their criticism boldly toward God. The murmuring and displeasure start first in the heart, then it spreads among the people who feel the same way, then it circles among the Levites, and the children of Aaron. Then they start speaking to the Lord in prayers directly and try to get His attention. Murmurings of few people can destroy the whole congregation. This happens in the churches also.

The Lord was very angry! why?

The Lord was always seeking to bless them, and not tear them down. They were miserable as slaves in Egypt and brought them out of Egypt. The Lord saved them, and preserved them in the wilderness through manna, and water. He also gave quails in the evenings for some time. But He stopped the meat for some mysterious reason! He took care of them well. He gave the law also so that they may live righteously. He stayed close to them and lead them through Moses. Yet there was discontentment! Instead of showing gratitude toward God, they showed hatred, and hostility, and they contended with God.

God's anger was kindled, and He brought fire from somewhere, consumed some of them who were in the outskirts. Where did this fire come from? From heaven, or from pillar of cloud as lightning, or from underneath? The next verse has the answer.

Numbers 11:2,3 people then cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died out. 3 So that place was named Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

People cried out to Moses, and Moses cried out to the Lord, and the fire died out. The Hebrew word literally means that the fire sank down. Yes the fire could have come very well from beneath the ground. They were treading petroleum rich land, and it is easy to set those gaseous wells on fire, but it is not easy to shut it down. The Lord started out the fire, and He put out the fire also. The Lord

loved Moses so much, he granted his prayer request. God will always hear the prayers of the humble ones. That place was called Taberah which means “burning”.

Numbers 11: Now the rabble (“mixed multitude” of non-Israelites) who were among them [c]had greedy cravings; and the sons of Israel also wept again and said, Who will give us [d]meat to eat?

We come across this rabble or mixed multitude in Exodus 12:38! When Israelites left Egypt, a “mixed multitude also went up with them”. But after a year, they may have been converted through circumcision. They showed their true color and they never changed. As Paul says, their god was their belly! Can we remove the spots of a leopard? No. When unbelievers creep into the church, they bring the worldliness into the church, and they are never transformed in the power of Christ. These rabble had strong craving for certain food, and they showed disdain for heavenly manna! Negative spirit is contagious, and that spirit went into Israelite’s mind also. Now they started weeping for meat also! Who will give us meat to eat? You talk about crybabies!

Numbers 11:5,6. 5 We remember the fish which we used to eat for free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6but now our [e]appetite is gone. There is nothing at all [f]to look at except this manna!”

Now the Israelites remembered the fish they used to eat for free because the river Nile had abundance of fish. They missed their cucumbers, melons, onions, garlic, and leeks? Leeks is more like clover, and Egyptian’s cucumbers were very big and delicious. Their melons and onions were sweet also.

Numbers 11:7-9. 7Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of [g]bdellium. 8The people would roam about and gather it and grind it [h]between two millstones, or pound it in the mortar, and boil it in the pot and make loaves with it; and its taste was like the taste of [i]cake baked with oil. 9When the dew came down on the camp at night, the manna would come down [j]with it.

In this passage, manna tasted like cake baked with oil, but in Exodus 16:31, It tasted like wafers made with honey! Both oil and honey add nice flavor to any food. I can safely assume, it tasted very delicious as though it was made with both oil and honey. In any case, the Israelites belittled something that was indeed delicious, and they started craving for other types of food!

To some extent, we can sympathize with the Israelites! Can you eat plain rice or bread or chapati one whole year? I bet, we would all complain! But we must remember, they were in a desert where there is no source of food at all! They were miraculously sustained with this heavenly manna. They should have been thankful about the sustenance of their life rather than their concern about variety!

On the other hand, something must be said about the variety of life, which we often take it for granted! We as children of God, must be extremely joyful about seeing variety in almost everything in life. There is so much variety among flowers, plants, birds, animals, among cats and dogs, fish, even among our skin colors, and features. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. God loves variety. We should be playing music with so much variety. Why churches glue to one kind of music? Why can’t there be variety of some black music, some white music, Indian music, some Jamaican, some Chinese or Japanese style? Why every song in Christian contemporary to have a bridge? Why

every song must be sung in two different octaves? When the variety is available, try to enjoy variety. But if it is not there, learn to be content with it.

The Complaint of Moses

Numbers 11:10 Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each one at the entrance of his tent; and the anger of the LORD became very hot, and [k]Moses was displeased.

This cry was spreading like wildfire. It must have been like the cicadas' sound taking over their camp! Don't we all experience that in a day care? One child cry, and another one starts, then another one, then the whole day care starts crying for no apparent reasons! If we ask those babies why they are crying, they will have no answer to give! They cry because other babies cried.

Another important point we must remember! This kind of bitter weeping is a warning signal of upcoming riot. It shows that people are in the edge of snapping. Anytime, they could drag Moses and stone him. Food is an important part of our life. This is the reason, the prisoners are fed well. We may say, cut the budget for prison, give them only bread and water, nothing else. But the wardens will quickly disagree. The prisoners need to be kept pacified, and the way they do it is through good food, lots of free TV channels, and recreation time in the morning and evening! Moses' life was hanging on a cliff now. He was extremely unhappy. He had to do something to pacify the people. He chose to take out his frustration on God. But God was already very angry! I am sure, the pillar of cloud would have turned bright red to show the anger of God!

Numbers 11:11, 12. 11So Moses said to the LORD, Why have You [i]been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have put the burden of all this people on me? 12Was it I who conceived all this people? Or did I give birth to them, that You should say to me, Carry them [m]in your arms, as a [n]nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers ?

Instead of showing his anger toward his congregation, Moses showed it toward God Himself. This is called distorted anger. Our boss at work may have made us angry by shouting at us for no apparent reason, but we may take that out on our children or our wife. The mother may be going through a frustrated time of her day, and she may take that out on her child! Don't fall into the trap of showing your anger to the wrong person. God was very angry, but He showed valid anger, and He showed it toward the right target. It is an important lesson to learn. Do not burst out toward the wrong person! Try not to lose your temper, try not to lose control of your emotions! If you do, try to regroup immediately.

Moses still showed his resentment about God pushing him to take the leadership over Israel. He wanted to retire quietly in his later period of life, but God pushed him to take charge of bringing Israelites out of Egypt. Now he had to pastor them until they reached the promised land. In church environment also, planting a church may be easy, but watering the church consistently every week is a daunting task. We can't walk out of our responsibility while we are in the journey. Moses vented out his frustration here because he was forced to carry these people like a nurse carrying a baby, to make them go to their destination. But what Moses failed to realize was that God was there to help him, a huge help! God does everything for us, but we forget that and start talking always I, and me,

and try to impress people with our own self conceited conversation. Note the I and Me in the following passage.

Num. 11:13-15. 13Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, Give us meat so that we may eat! 14I am not able to carry all this people by myself, because it is too [o]burdensome for me. 15So if You are going to deal with me this way, please kill me now, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my misery.”

You can see lot of “I” and “Me” here as I said before.
Where am I to get meat?
I am not able to carry.

Now Moses wants God to kill him so that he does not have to face these angry Israelites anymore!

First, God addressed Moses’ complaint about his burden of carrying these Israelites all by himself. I will talk about it next week how God took care of that problem by appointing 70 elders. Today, I want to just focus on the meat issue with Israel! God heard Moses’ petition, and He approved the meat petition quickly.

We already read the following passage as our Scripture text.

Numbers 11:18-20. 18Then you shall say to the people, [f] Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.” Therefore, the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat. 19You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?” ’ ’

God promises them that they would receive meat the next day! The next day air Fed Ex delivery for them! God told them that 19You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you!

Too much of anything is bad! But too much of meat can make you puke. Sometimes, we go through that experience, especially the same old chicken repeatedly. I am the kind of person who do not like to waste any food at all. When my wife tries to throw away in the trash, I will stop her, and I’ll make sure that I eat that old food. The only food I have tough time eating is the old chicken. But I pinch my nose and eat them too, because they tend to come out of nostrils! (But I tell you, pepper chicken stays much longer! Pepper and salt are great preservatives.) The Israelites regretted for coming out of Egypt! They would rather stay as slaves, and enjoy their free fish, cucumber, onion, garlic, and melon than this heavenly food Manna, liberty, and their close personal relationship with God!

Numbers 11:31,32 31Now a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day s journey on this side and about a day s journey on the

other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground. 32And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

A wind brought all the quails from the seashores. They gathered them all day, all that night, and all next day. It only shows how greedy they were. Two cubit is about three feet high! Some rabbis think that it could fly only three feet high, and so they could easily net it and kill it. Some scholars think that it may be locusts and not quail. They caught it, killed it, dried it, and kept that meat for the whole month. In any case, it was in so much abundance, it could easily nauseate them in the long run.

Numbers 11:33-35 33But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. 34So he called the name of that place [jj]Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving. 35From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped at Hazeroth.

While the meat was in their mouth, before they could enjoy the first juicy chew, God smote them with a plague? A pandemic? Bird flu from quail? We are not sure, but it must have hit those ring leaders who instigated this craving very hard, and they all died. After burying them, they called that place “kibroth Hattaavah” which means, graves of lust or greediness!

What can we learn from this portion of sacred Scripture?

Conclusion:

Be content with what you have. Greed is not at all good! Do not listen to the Wall Street advice. They teach that Greed is good!

We have everything if the presence of God is within us. Rejoice in Him always.

Few discontented people can ruin the whole congregation. A little leaven can ruin the whole lump.

God loves variety and provides variety most of the time. Be thankful to Him for that.

When we near death, variety disappears, taste and smell disappear, all we have is the Holy Spirit and His Word within us. Hold onto Him and follow Him until He takes us to the eternal celestial city.

Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God!

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