

Numbers Chapter 11

Verses 11:1 – 25:18

In contrast to (Num. 1-10), a major change takes place at (11:1).

Obedient Israel started complaining (11:1; 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:1-3, 41; 17:5), and rebellious (14:9; 17:10), Israel.

Ultimately, Moses and Aaron rebelled against the LORD as well (20:10, 24).

In response to Israel's disobedience, the LORD's anger was aroused (11:1; 10, 33; 12:9; 14:18; 25:3-4), and He plagued His people (14:37; 16:46, 47, 48, 49, 50; 25:8-9, 18), as He had Pharaoh and the Egyptians (Exodus 9:14; 12:13; 30:12).

Nevertheless, even though God judged that generation of Israel, He will still fulfill His promises to Abraham in the future (23:5 – 24:24).

Verses 11:1 – 12:16:

The complaining of the people and leaders began on the journey from Sinai to Kadesh.

Verses 1-3

These verses contain the first of three complaints in this section.

“Taberah:”

The “fire of the LORD” left an impression upon the people, so much so that Moses named the site “Place of Burning”.

They start to grumble and complain (Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; and Numbers 11:4; 14:2; 16:3; 20:3; 21:5).

Verse 1 literally says, “The people are as those who complain about evil”.

It is difficult to imagine words more startling than “And when the people complained”, given the extent of the LORD's protection, guidance and care as celebrated in their departure from Mount Sinai (10:33-36).

Until now, the people had been obedient to all the LORD's commands, but in a turning-point moment, they resumed their former ingratitude and lack of faith (Exodus 15:22 – 17:7).

God's grace is revealed in the His "fire" only "consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp" rather than all the people (Psalm 78:21).

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."

"The LORD heard it":

Their complaining was outward and loud.

"The uttermost parts of the camp":

God in His Grace consumed only those who were on the very edges of the encampment of Israel.

This is the beginning of a long journey.

The journey was long, because of their lack of faith.

They started complaining the very first thing.

Instead of putting their faith in God, they started murmuring against God.

The fire of the LORD had come from the altar and killed two of Aaron's sons.

This fire came from the outer areas.

It could have been lightning, or it could have been a brush fire.

Whatever it was, God sent it in punishment for their complaining.

Numbers 11:2 "And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched."

And entreated him to pray for them, being frightened at the fire which consumed many of them.

Lest it should spread and become general among them.

"And when Moses prayed unto the LORD":

As he did, in which he was a type of Christ, the mediator between God and man.

The advocate of his people, an intercessor for transgressors.

"The fire was quenched":

It stopped and proceeded no further.

As through Christ's mediation God is pacified with His people for all that they have done.

And His wrath, and all the effects of it, are turned away from them, and entirely cease with respect to them.

Or it "sunk down" into its place, as the Targum of Jonathan says.

As if it rose out of the earth.

This may serve to confirm the notion of its being a burning wind, to which the idea of sinking down and subsiding well agrees.

Suddenly, they realize they have sinned, and come to Moses to speak to God on their behalf.

Moses does pray for them, and the fire is stopped.

Numbers 11:3 "And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them."

That is, "burning".

Moses called it so; or it may be rendered impersonally.

It was called so in later times by the people.

"Because the fire of the LORD burnt among them":

To perpetuate the memory of this kind of punishment for their sins, that it might be a terror and warning to others.

And this history is indeed recorded for our caution in these last days.

That we murmur not as these Israelites did, and were destroyed of the destroyer (1 Cor. 10:10).

"Taberah":

Means burning.

God's wrath had come, because of their complaining.

God is quick to forgive, when Moses prays.

He names the place burning, as a memory of what happened here.

The unfaithfulness of these people had gotten them in terrible trouble.

We must take a lesson from this.

God will not permit us to be unfaithful.

Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

Verses 4-6

The “mixed multitude” (Exodus 12:38), were people of various ethnicities, perhaps including some Egyptians.

Some were, or would become, people of faith because of their contacts with believing Hebrews.

One woman from Kush became the second wife of Moses; (see 12:1).

Their “fell a lusting” for the abundance and varieties of foods in Egypt caused the Israelites to forget God’s goodness and faithfulness to them, including His wonderful provision of manna (Psalm 78:18).

Numbers 11:4 "And the mixed 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?"

“Mixed multitude” is translated “rabble” by some commentators.

It must refer to the non-Israelites who joined the Exodus (Exodus 12:38; Lev. 24:10).

They are the ones who began to complain and stir up Israel.

They longed for the fresh vegetables, fish and meat they had eaten in Egypt.

Actually, they were expressing their opposition to God’s purpose that they should settle in Canaan (verses 18, 20, 14:2; 20:5; Exodus 14:11; 16:3; 17:3).

And they were certainly displeased with God’s provision of “manna” for food.

“Flesh”:

After over a year of eating manna in the wilderness, the mixed multitude wanted the spicy food of Egypt once again.

The mixed multitude are not of the twelve tribes.

These are people who came along for the blessings, but wanted no part of the hardships of the journey to the Promised Land.

Some of them were, possibly, half Egyptian and half Hebrew.

They immediately start complaining about the food.

The manna was falling from heaven to feed all of them, but they were not satisfied with the manna.

They wanted meat to eat.

They complained, until the children of Israel joined in with them in complaining about the food.

They had just gotten over their last problem, and immediately started complaining again.

This time they are wishing for the food of Egypt.

"Egypt" symbolizes the world.

They are really lusting for things to satisfy their flesh, instead of seeking more of a spiritual walk.

Numbers 11:5 "We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic:"

The natural dainties of Egypt are set forth in this passage with the fullness and relish which bespeak personal experience.

They have forgotten the hardships of Egypt, and are just thinking of the food they left behind.

Sometimes, the good old days are better looking back on them, then when they were actually happening.

Numbers 11:6 "But now our soul [is] dried away: [there is] nothing at all, beside this manna, [before] our eyes."

Meaning their bodies, which, for want of flesh food, they pretended had no moisture in them.

Or they were half starved, and in wasting and consuming circumstances.

"There is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes":

Which in itself was a truth and matter of fact.

They had nothing to look to, and live upon but the manna.

And that was enough, and with which, no doubt, many of them were contented, and satisfied and thankful for, though the greater part were not.

And therefore this, though a truth, was foolishly and wickedly spoken, being said in disdain and contempt of the manna.

So Christ, the heavenly manna, the antitype of this, of which (see notes on Exodus 16:14; 16:15; 16:16; 16:17; 16:18).

Is indeed the only food that is set before us in the Gospel to feed and live upon.

Nor is there anything at all besides Him, nor do true believers in Him desire any other.

But pray that evermore this bread may be given them.

But carnal men and carnal professors slight the Gospel feast, of which Christ is the sum and substance.

And at least would have something besides Him, something along with Him, something of their own in justification for Him.

Or to give them a right unto Him, or to trust in along with Him.

They cannot bear to have nothing at all but Christ.

Or that He, and He alone, should be exalted, and be all in all, as He is justification and salvation.

And in the Gospel provision, in which nothing is set before us but Him.

Souls is used very loosely here.

The soul has to do with the will of man.

It appears from this, their will to go on has been dampened greatly, because they do not have meat, melons, garlic, and other things of Egypt to eat.

They have become tired of Manna.

Numbers 11:7 "And the manna [was] as coriander seed, and the color thereof as the color of bdellium."

“Manna”:

See Exodus 16:14.

“Bdellium”:

This refers more to appearance than color, i.e., it had the appearance of a pale resin.

It appears, the manna did not have much color, or much flavor.

"Manna" means whatness, or what is it.

It was like bread made with honey.

The way it fell and sustained the nearly 3,000,000 people was a miracle.

Exodus 16:14-15 "And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness [there lay] a small round thing, [as] small as the hoar frost on the ground." "And when the children of Israel saw [it], they said one to another, It [is] manna: for they wist not what it [was]. And Moses said unto them, This [is] the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat."

The following Scriptures tells what it was in the spiritual sense.

John 6:50-51 "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die." "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Numbers 11:8 "[And] the people went about, and gathered [it], and ground [it] in mills, or beat [it] in a mortar, and baked [it] in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil."

Went about the camp on all sides, where it fell in plenty.

This they did every morning, and this was all the trouble they were at.

They had it for gathering, without any expense to them.

"And ground it in mills":

In hand mills, as Aben Ezra states.

For though it melted through the heat of the sun, and became a liquid, yet, when gathered in the morning, it was hard like grains of corn.

Or other seeds, and required to be ground in mills.

"Or beat it in a mortar":

With a pestle, as spices are beaten and bruised.

"And baked it in pans":

Or rather boiled it in a pot, as the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem say, since it follows.

"And made cakes of it":

Which were baked on the hearth.

All which may denote the sufferings of Christ, who was beaten, and bruised, and broken.

That he might become fit food for faith (Isa. 53:4).

"And the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil":

Which is very grateful and pleasant, as well as very fattening and nourishing.

So that the Israelites had no reason to complain of their being dried away by continual eating of it (see notes on Exodus 16:31).

In other Scriptures, it speaks of it tasting like a wafer with honey.

In this, it says it tasted like oil.

All of these things could be true.

It appeared there were several ways to fix it for eating.

Numbers 11:9 "And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it."

As it usually, and even constantly did.

"The manna fell upon it":

As constantly, and had thereby a clean place to fall on.

And then another dew fell upon that, which kept it the cleaner still.

And from any vermin creeping upon it (see Exodus 16:14).

So careful was the LORD of this their provision, and so constantly every morning were they supplied with it.

And which fell in the night when they were asleep, and at rest, and without any labor of theirs.

And was ready to their hands when they arose, and had nothing to do but gather it.

And yet were so ungrateful as to make light of it, and despise it.

There was just enough on the ground to feed everyone.

They were not to hoard it up, but to gather each day, except the day before Sabbath, and then they were to gather enough for two days.

It was miracle bread from heaven to take care of the needs of the people, not their greed.

Verses 10-20

Moses reacted to the people that “weep” with displeasure at the people and pity for himself.

God responded to the people’s complaint and Moses’ cry for help in two ways:

He told Moses to appoint 70 men who would also share or would “layest the burden”, and God gave the people what they wanted, only He gave them so much “flesh” that it became “loathsome” to them (Psalms 78:29; 106:15).

Numbers 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."

So general was their lusting after flesh, and their discontent for want of it.

And so great their distress and uneasiness about it, that they wept and cried for it.

And so loud and clamorous, that Moses heard the noise and outcry they made.

"Every man in the door of his tent":

Openly and publicly.

They were not ashamed of their evil and unbecoming behavior.

And in order to excite and encourage the like temper and disposition in others.

Though it may have respect, as some have observed, to the door of the tent of Moses, about which they gathered and mutinied.

And which better accounts for his hearing the general cry they made.

And so in an ancient writing of the Jews it is said, they were waiting for Moses until he came out at the door of the school.

And they were sitting and murmuring.

"And the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly":

Because of their ingratitude to Him, their contempt of the manna He had provided for them, and their hankering after their poor fare in Egypt.

And for which they had endured so much hardship and ill usage, and for the noise and clamor they now made.

"Moses also was displeased":

With the people on the same account, and with the LORD also for laying and continuing so great a burden upon him.

As the care of this people, which appears by what follows.

The evil of the complaining has spread to all of the people.

They are feeling sorry for themselves, because they cannot have exactly what they want to eat.

They are not thankful for the manna miraculously falling from heaven to feed them.

Their weeping was showing their displeasure with the way God was handling things.

Even Moses was upset with the people.

They soon forgot the hardships, they had been freed from.

God does not like murmuring.

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

The complaint and remonstrance of Moses may be compared with that in (1 Kings 19:4; Jonah 4:1-3), and contrasted with the language of Abraham (Gen. 18:23).

The meekness of Moses (compare Num. 12:3), sank under vexation into despair.

His language shows us how imperfect and prone to degeneracy are the best saints on earth.

Moses is tired of these ungrateful people.

He asks God why He thought so little of him to put him in charge of so ungrateful a people?

Of course, he was not responsible for feeding them, or actually, for any of their care.

God had done all of that.

He was just the mediator between them and God.

All Moses needed to do, was exactly what God told him to.

That is what he was responsible for.

He was just disappointed in the people.

That is why he made such a remark.

His responsibility was to God, not to these people.

He felt responsible for them, because God had him leading them.

Ministers could learn a lesson from this.

It is not the minister's responsibility to get people saved.

It is their responsibility to bring the gospel message.

What they do with that message, is between them and God.

Numbers 11:12 "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?"

Have I begotten them?

Are they my children, that I should be obliged to provide food and all things for their necessity and desire?

"Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child":

Which expression shows the tender care and affection that governors by the command of God ought to have towards their people.

Moses is so ashamed of their actions, that he tells God, they are not his children.

He did not birth any of them.

God is the Father of all of us.

Moses is insinuating that since God is their Father, it is His responsibility to nurse them through.
God uses individuals to carry out His purposes on the earth.

Verses 13-14

Moses confessed to God that he was not able to provide meat for the people as they demanded.

Their complaining was discouraging him so that because of this great burden, Moses desired death from the Hand of the LORD.

Numbers 11:13 "Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat."

This seems to countenance the Israelites in their lusting after flesh, as if it was no evil in them.

And as if it was but right they should have what they desired.

Though it was out of his power to give it them.

"For they weep unto me, saying, give us flesh, that we may eat":

He seems to pity them, whereas he ought to have reproved them for their murmurings and ingratitude.

And put them in mind of the manna which was provided for them every day.

And with which they ought to have been content.

They knew that Moses did not have flesh.

They came to Moses, because they knew he was in better standing with God than they were.

Numbers 11:14 "I am not able to bear all this people alone, because [it is] too heavy for me."

The burden of government of them.

To take care of them and provide sustenance for them.

But he was not alone, for, not to take notice of the rulers and officers in the several divisions of the people that assisted and eased him in lighter matters, advised to by Jethro (Exodus 18:21).

The LORD himself was with him in all matters of moment and difficulty.

To whom he could apply at any time for advice.

And who had promised to supply and did supply the people with suitable and proper provisions every day.

"Because it is too heavy for me":

To answer the requests, redress the grievances, and supply the necessities of this people.

The pressure of leading such a rebellious people is almost too much for Moses.

Close to 3,000,000 people were coming directly to Moses to complain.

It is a tremendous heavy load to bare alone.

Numbers 11:15 "And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favor in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness."

Let the whole weight of government lie upon me, and leave me alone to bear it.

"Kill me, I pray thee, out of hand":

Take me out of the world at once, or "kill me now.

In killing"; dispatch me immediately, and make a thorough end of me directly.

"If I have found favor in thy sight":

If thou hast any love for me, or art willing to show me a kindness.

To remove me by death, I shall take as one.

"And let me not see my wretchedness":

Or live to be the unhappy man I shall be.

Pressed with such a weight of government.

Affected and afflicted with the wants of a people I cannot relieve.

Or seeing them bore down with judgments and punishments inflicted on them for their sins and transgressions I am not able to prevail upon them to abstain from.

So the Targum of Jerusalem states, "that I may not see their evil, who are thy people."

Moses feels like a failure. He wishes for death, so someone else can take on this tremendous task of leading this ungrateful group of people.

Verses 16-30

In response to Moses' despair in leading the people, the LORD gave him 70 men to help.

Numbers 11:16 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee."

"Seventy men":

These aides to Moses might be the same 70 referred to (in Exodus 18:21-26).

The LORD has heard Moses' cry for help.

These 70 men will take care of the minor problems, and refer the major problems to Moses.

This will take the pressure of the day to day complaining away from Moses, and give him some rest.

Seventy is an interesting number.

"Seven" means spiritually complete, and "ten" has to do with world government.

Then, this could be God spiritually completing the dealings with the people.

This number was chosen as a number to deal with the worldly problems of the people.

God completed it with the seventy.

These seventy men would deal with day to day problems.

The weightier spiritual problems would still be settled by Moses.

This group of seventy is subordinate to Moses.

Numbers 11:17 "And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which [is] upon thee, and will put [it] upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear [it] not thyself alone."

"The Spirit":

This refers to the Spirit of God.

It was by means of the Holy Spirit that Moses was able to lead Israel.

In (verse 25), the LORD gave the Spirit to the 70 men in fulfillment of the Word He gave to Moses.

God Himself, will empower them with the knowledge and understanding for the job.

These will take some of the pressure off of Moses.

Numbers 11:18 "And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for [it was] well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat."

For what follows respects them, as what goes before spoke of Himself.

"Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow":

Or prepare yourselves, as the Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan states.

Either to receive mercies, or to meet the LORD in the way of His judgments.

So Jarchi interprets it, "prepare for punishments," for what is said should be, and what they had, was not as a blessing, but in a way of punishment.

"And ye shall eat flesh":

Which they lusted after, wept for, and could not be easy without.

"For ye have wept in the ears of the LORD":

Complaining of Him, and which He has taken notice of.

"Saying, who shall give us flesh to eat?"

For though they so earnestly desired it, they despaired of it, and even called in question the power of God to give it.

"For it was well with us in Egypt":

Where they had their fleshpots, as well as their cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic (Exodus 16:3).

But they forgot how ill it went with them by reason of their hard bondage, when their lives were made bitter by it.

Notwithstanding their fleshpots, and of which there is not much reason to believe any great share came to them.

Like to them were their posterity in later times (Jer. 44:17).

"Therefore the LORD will give you flesh":

To show His power.

And ye shall eat to your shame and confusion, not for pleasure or profit.

They were to cleanse themselves in preparation for eating the meat the LORD would send.

They were to prepare themselves, not only for the food, but for a revelation of the power and holiness of God.

It would be no problem for God to rain down meat.

Numbers 11:19 "Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days;"

Only, as in (Exodus 16:12).

“Nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days”.

But even thirty days, a whole month (as in Num. 11:20).

Numbers 11:20 "[But] even a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome unto you: because that ye have despised the LORD which [is] among you, and have wept before him, saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?"

So long as the Israelites continued at Taberah or Kibroth-hattaavah, as the Jews conclude from this clause.

"Until it come out at your nostrils":

Being vomited up, through a nausea of it, the stomach being overfilled and glutted with it.

In which case, it will make its way through the nostrils, as well as out of the mouth.

"And it be loathsome unto you":

Being surfeited with it; or it shall be for "dispersion", scattered about from the mouth and nostrils.

"Because that ye have despised the LORD which is among you":

Who dwelt in the tabernacle that was in the midst of them.

Whom they despised by treating the manna with contempt He so plentifully spread about their camp.

And by distrusting His power to give them flesh, and by murmuring and complaining against Him on the account of their having none.

The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan are, "because ye have loathed the Word of the LORD, whose Shekinah (or the glory of whose Shekinah, as Jonathan), dwelleth among you."

The essential Word, and who was figured by the manna they tasted and despised.

"And have wept before him":

Complaining of Him, and murmuring against Him.

"Saying, Why came we forth out of Egypt?":

Suggesting it would have been better for them if they had stayed there.

Thus reflecting on the wisdom, power, and goodness of God, displayed in the deliverance of them, and for which they had the utmost reason to be thankful.

They would eat so much meat in that month, that they would be sick of meat.

They were extremely ungrateful.

God will teach them a lesson in this.

They will be so stuffed of meat, that it will come out their nostrils.

This speaks of sickness.

Their constant comparison of Holy God with Egypt is showing they despise the LORD.

"Egypt" symbolizes the world.

They are not willing to give up the world for God.

It was easy for God to get them out of Egypt, but it is near impossible it seems, to get Egypt out of them.

Worldliness and God's ways will not mix.

We must be careful in our churches to keep the worldliness out of them.

Verses 21-23

Every answer to prayer should be cherished, remembered, and “banked” in one’s memory so that it may be drawn on in future times of trial.

“Is the LORD’s Hand waxed short?”

Is a figure of speech, with God’s arm referring to His power.

Because God had miraculously provided manna for the people, Moses should never have doubted that He could supply meat for more than 600,000 for a “whole month”.

Numbers 11:21 "And Moses said, The people, among whom I [am, are] six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month."

“Six hundred thousand”:

Moses rounded off the 603,550 of (1:46; 2:32).

Now Moses has started to question.

Moses could not have doubted the power of God after all the miracles.

He just knew this would take a giant miracle.

Numbers 11:22 "Shall the flocks and the herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to suffice them?"

Suggesting that if all their cattle, their sheep, and oxen were killed.

Which they and the mixed multitude brought out of Egypt, they would not be sufficient for them to live upon a whole month.

And intimating also, that it would be an unwise thing, and very improper, to slay them all, were they sufficient.

Since then they would have none for sacrifice, or to breed when they came into the land of Canaan.

The Targum of Jonathan says, "shall the sheep that are in Arabia and the oxen that are in the land of the Nabateans be slain for them, and be sufficient for them?"

"Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them?"

Of the great sea, as Jonathan; which, to gather together, is, humanly speaking, impossible.

Indeed, if it could be done, they would not suffice such a number of people a month together.

Moses takes notice only of the flesh of beasts and of fishes, and seems not to have thought of the flesh of fowls with which, and not the other, the LORD afterwards fed them a whole month.

To feed 3,000,000 people a month would take a tremendous amount of meat.

It would take all the animals they possessed.

Moses got a little carried away, when he spoke of all the fish of the sea.

Moses is asking God, "Where will all this meat come from"?

Numbers 11:23 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Is the LORD'S hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not."

“Is the LORD’s hand waxed short?”

The LORD indicated He was able to do as He had said and provide meat for the 600,000 men of Israel and their families for one month.

The Hand that opened the Red sea, the Hand that sent the manna, was it so short it could not send the meat?

God will prove Himself one more time to this people.

Verses 24-25

The LORD signaled both His pleasure and His purpose when He “came down in a cloud” and divinely empowered the 70 elders by His “Spirit”.

This is an extraordinary example of Spirit endowment in the Old Testament.

Numbers 11:24 "And Moses went out, and told the people the words of the LORD, and gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them round about the tabernacle."

Either out of his own tent, about which the people assembled, complaining and weeping (see Numbers 11:10).

Or rather, as Aben Ezra, out of the tabernacle of the congregation, and the sanctuary where he had been conversing with God, about the affairs complained of both by the people and by himself.

So the Targum of Jonathan says, he went out of the tabernacle, the house of the Shekinah or divine Majesty.

"And told the people the words of the LORD":

What He had ordered Him to do for his ease in the government of them, and how He had promised to give them flesh on the morrow.

"And gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people":

Sent for them by name, and ordered them to assemble at such a time and place.

And though two of them came not, after mentioned (Num. 11:26).

Yet the full number of seventy is given.

"And set them round about the tabernacle":

They seem to be set not promiscuously in a body together, but distinctly, one by another, in a circular form.

That they might be seen, observed, and taken notice of by the people that came about the tabernacle.

Who they were, what were done to them, and what befell them.

Moses is still the messenger to bring God's message to the people.

He tells them God's answer.

He also gathers the seventy men in the tabernacle, for God to put His Spirit upon them.

Numbers 11:25 "And the LORD came down in a cloud, and spake unto him, and took of the spirit that [was] upon him, and gave [it] unto the seventy elders: and it came to pass, [that], when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease."

“Prophesied”:

Here the prophesying refers to the giving of praise and similar expressions of worship to the LORD without prior training.

The text is clear that this was a one-time event as far as these men were concerned.

God took of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, which He had placed on Moses, and gave the power of the Spirit to the seventy to minister.

In the Old Testament and in the New Testament, God empowers His people to do the tasks He has called them to do.

It is the filling with the Spirit that empowers a person to minister.

One of the gifts of the Spirit is prophecy.

Luke 1:67 "And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,"

Luke 1:41-42 "And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost:" "And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed [art] thou among women, and blessed [is] the fruit of thy womb."

We see from all of this, that when the Spirit comes upon a person he begins to prophecy.

Verses 26-29

“Joshua”:

Deferred to Moses’ leadership, making Moses wish that everyone in the nation was spirit-empowered like his leaders were.

What a privilege that since Jesus’ return to heaven, all God’s people have the Holy Spirit!

Numbers 11:26 "But there remained two [of the] men in the camp, the name of the one [was] Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the spirit rested upon them; and they [were] of them that were written, but went not out unto the tabernacle: and they prophesied in the camp."

Of the seventy who were summoned, that came not out of the camp of Israel to the tabernacle when the rest did.

"The name of the one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad.

Who, according to the Targum of Jonathan, were brethren of Moses by his mother's side.

For it says, they were the sons of Elizaphan the son of Parnac, whom Jochebed the daughter of Levi brought forth at the time that Amram her husband dismissed her.

And she was married to him before she brought forth Moses.

But it is elsewhere said, that Elizaphan married her after the death of Amram; and Eldad and Medad were born unto them.

"And the Spirit rested upon them":

As it did upon the rest of the seventy that came to the tabernacle.

These two had the same gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon them as they had.

"And they were of them that were written":

Among the seventy whose names were put down in the summons Moses gave them to attend the tabernacle.

As for the notion of the Jews about schedules and pieces of paper put into an urn to draw lots with, there is no foundation in the text.

"But went not out unto the tabernacle":

Out of the camp to it, when they were summoned to come together; which they declined.

There were two that did not come to the tabernacle for the anointing.

This did not stop the Holy Spirit of God from anointing them.

They were filled with the Spirit of God, and began to speak under that anointing.

They were written down as part of the seventy, but something kept them from meeting with Moses in the tabernacle.

This is a type and shadow of the fact that the Gentiles would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, even though they were not Jews.

The tabernacle is not what makes a person Spirit Filled.

This is an anointing of God on whomever He desires to have it.

Numbers 11:27 "And there ran a young man, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp."

From the camp to the tabernacle, who had heard Eldad and Medad prophesy.

Which he thought was not right, being done without the knowledge and approbation of Moses.

And in a private tent in the tabernacle, not among the elders, but the common people.

Who this young man was is not material to know.

Some of the Rabbins, as Jarchi says, affirm he was Gershon the son of Moses.

Whoever he was, no doubt, it was with a good design, consulting the Glory of God and the honor of Moses, and therefore in great haste ran to him with the information.

"And told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp":

Who seem by this, to be persons well known, and of some note and figure.

Since not only the young man could call them by their names, but there needed no other description of them to Moses and those with him.

This person reported this to Moses, questioning whether they had the authority to prophesy.

Numbers 11:28 "And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, [one] of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them."

That waited upon him, and ministered to him, and executed his orders, especially in civil things, and was to be his successor.

"One of his young men":

Not that Joshua was a young man in age, for he must be now between fifty and sixty years of age (see notes on Exodus 33:11).

Nor does the word necessarily suppose that those men were young among whom Joshua was.

But choice excellent persons, the principal servants of Moses, at the head of whom Joshua was being his prime minister.

The Targum of Onkelos and the Syriac version render it, "from his youth".

Joining it with the word servant, as if he was the servant of Moses from his youth, or ever since he was a young man.

But Moses had not been out of Midian but about two years, where he had kept his father's sheep. However, he;

"Answered and said, my lord Moses, forbid them":

Prophesying, restrain them from it, suffer them not to go on in it.

He would have him exert his authority as the chief magistrate, which he thought was affected by their prophesying without his knowledge and consent.

And because a word from the root here used signifies a prison, some here interpret it, "put them in prison," which is a sense Jarchi mentions.

But it can hardly be thought that Joshua meant that such rigorous measures should be taken, only that they should be rebuked for what they had done, and be charged for the future to be silent.

The Jews were a very class conscious people.

Joshua wanted Moses to forbid them to prophesy, because they were not anointed in the tabernacle.

Numbers 11:29 "And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, [and] that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!"

"That the LORD would put his spirit upon them":

Moses desired and anticipated the day when all of God's people would have His Spirit within them.

By this, he looked forward to the New Covenant. See Ezek. 36:22-27; Jer. 31:31; Joel 2:28.

Moses was not jealous.

In fact, he was one of the humblest men that ever lived.

It would simplify the work of Moses, if all the people were guided by the Spirit of God, rather than being guided by the lust of their flesh.

Moses actually wished that God would pour out of His Spirit upon all flesh.

Numbers 11:30 "And Moses gat him into the camp, he and the elders of Israel."

From the door of the tabernacle, where he had been settling the elders in their office, and now betook himself to the camp of Israel.

Perhaps to look more particularly into the affair of Eldad and Medad, and settle that.

And put them among the elders; for they were of them that were written.

Whose names were put down for elders in the paper Moses had written for that purpose, and in the summons that were given.

Or more generally to do public business, to exercise rule and government, with this new assistance granted him, as follows.

"He and the elders of Israel":

He went in company with them, to impart to them the honor and glory they were to share with him in the government, as Aben Ezra observes.

Or they went together, to observe what would be done for the people, according to the promise of the LORD, to give them flesh.

Who had made good His word to Moses, by taking of His Spirit and putting it on seventy men for His assistance.

The other remained to be done, and was done as follows.

This is saying, they were part of the ministering body in the camp.

Verses 31-35

As promised, the LORD provided meat in the form of "quails".

In nearly plague liked amounts (Psalms 78:26-28; 105:40).

The narrative is so vivid: "while the flesh was yet between their teeth" when the LORD brought a "plague" of another sort (Psalm 78:29-31).

Place names like "Kibroth-hattaavah" were markers of disobedience and ingratitude; the name means "Graves of Craving".

Numbers 11:31 "And there went forth a wind from the LORD, and brought quails from the sea, and let [them] fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits [high] upon the face of the earth."

"A day's journey":

The LORD, using a wind, brought a great quantity of quail that surrounded the encampment within one day's journey.

“Two cubits high upon the face of the earth”:

The birds flew at a height of about 3 feet where they were able to be easily captured or clubbed to the ground by the people.

The quails may not have covered the ground to a depth of two cubits (three feet), but, as the Vulgate, the Targums and Rashi agree, they may have kept flying around the camp at a height of about three feet so the people could knock them down easily.

The psalmist remarks concerning this episode: “And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psalm 106:15).

They had to eat them to get rid of them.

There was no place to get away from the quails.

This should be ample meat to satisfy these rebellious people.

This was not an ordinary wind.

It was a miraculous wind from God that brought the quails.

The wind God sent, threw the quails down on the camp.

Numbers 11:32 "And the people stood up all that day, and all [that] night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread [them] all abroad for themselves round about the camp."

“Ten homers”:

About 60 to 70 bushels.

They were so greedy, they stayed up all night and gathered these quails.

The least that anyone gathered was 320 pecks.

This was a tremendous amount of meat.

They dried the meat in the sun to keep it from ruining.

Numbers 11:33 "And while the flesh [was] yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD smote the people with a very great plague."

When they had just got it into their mouths, and were about to bite it.

"Ere it was chewed":

Or "cut off".

Or cut into pieces by the "incisors", or fore teeth, and then ground by the "molars", or grinders, and so became fit to be swallowed.

Both quails and locusts were eaten as food.

The former is a fat and delicious fowl, and the latter, some sorts of them at least, were allowed clean food for the Jews, and were fed on by many people.

"The wrath of the LORD was kindled against the people":

For their lusting after flesh, and despising the manna.

"And the LORD smote the people with a very great plague":

The pestilence, as Aben Ezra states.

Or with fire, as Bochart, who gives the following reasons why the people were so severely punished now, and not before, when they murmured on a like account.

Because their sins were greater, and more aggravated, they falling again into the same sin which had been forgiven them.

And besides, they were before pressed with famine, now they had a plenty of manna every day.

And also were better instructed, having received the law, which was not yet given when they were just come out of Egypt.

Sulpitius the historian says, 23,000 perished at this time.

God poured the abundance of the meat upon them in anger.

They were more concerned with pleasing their flesh, than they were in pleasing God.

While they were consuming the meat God had miraculously provided, God sent a plague to them in punishment.

Numbers 11:34 "And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted."

Verses 4-35

“Kibroth-hattaavah” means “Graves of Craving”.

Much of the discontent among the Israelites centered around the supply of food and water and their discontent with God’s provision (Exodus 16:2; Num. Chapter 20).

They ate to satisfy the lust of their flesh, and it killed them.

They were buried in the very place of their lust.

This should have been a tremendous lesson for these people.

Numbers 11:35 "[And] the people journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah unto Hazeroth; and abode at Hazeroth."

After having stayed there a month or more, as is gathered from (Num. 11:20).

"And abode at Hazeroth":

At least seven days, as appears from (Num. 12:15).

Which, according to Bunting, was eight miles from Kibroth-hattaavah, or Taberah, which were the same place.

The people that moved were those not killed in the plague.

We must learn in this lesson, that it is very dangerous to pray for things that satisfy our flesh.

We might get the answer to our prayer.

The flesh is an enemy of the spirit.

Numbers Chapter 11 Questions

1. What did God do, when the people complained?
2. Why would the journey through the wilderness be so long?
3. What are some of the possibilities of where the fire came from?
4. When was the fire quenched?
5. What was the name of the place called?
6. What does the name "Taberah" mean?

7. What lesson can we learn from this?
8. Who are the mixed multitude?
9. What do they complain about?
10. "Egypt" symbolizes the _____.
11. What are they really lusting for?
12. What foods from Egypt did they remember?
13. What does the soul have to do with?
14. "Manna" means _____, or _____.
15. What answer did Jesus give about what the manna was?
16. Where did they find the manna to eat?
17. What did the manna taste like?
18. What displeased Moses, and angered God?
19. What does their weeping show?
20. Moses is _____ of these ungrateful people.
21. What really was Moses' obligation?
22. What is a minister's responsibility?
23. Moses is so ashamed of them in verse 12, he tells God what?
24. What question does Moses ask God in verse 13?
25. Moses feels like a _____.
26. How many helpers does God give Moses?
27. What makes them capable of ministry?
28. How does God bring flesh to eat to the people?
29. How long are they to eat it?
30. What happens to those who are filled with God's Spirit?
31. Why did someone complain about the two prophesying in the camp?

- 32. Why did Moses wish everyone to be filled with the Spirit of God?
- 33. How deep were the quails?
- 34. How many pecks did each person gather?
- 35. What happened to them, as they ate the flesh?
- 36. What does "Kibroth-hattaavah" mean?
- 37. Where did they go to next?