
NUMBERS 11:1 The people were complaining in the ears of the LORD. When the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled; and the LORD's fire burnt among them, and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.

The people complain, the Lord is displeased, and many of them are consumed by fire, Num 11:1. Moses intercedes for them, and the fire is quenched, Num 11:2. The place is called Taberah, Num 11:3. The mixed multitude long for flesh, and murmur, Num 11:4-6. The manna described, Num 11:7-9. The people weep in their tents, and the Lord is displeased, Num 11:10. Moses deplores his lot in being obliged to hear and bear with all their murmurings, Num 11:11-15. He is commanded to bring seventy of the elders to God that he may endue them with the same spirit, and cause them to divide the burden with him, Num 11:16, Num 11:17. He is also commanded to inform the people that they shall have flesh for a whole month, Num 11:18-20. Moses expresses his doubt of the possibility of this, Num 11:21, Num 11:22. The Lord confirms his promise, Num 11:23. The seventy men are brought to the tabernacle, Num 11:24; and the spirit of prophecy rests upon them, Num 11:25. Eldad and Medad stay in the camp and prophesy, Num 11:26, Num 11:27. Joshua beseeches Moses to forbid them, Num 11:28. Moses refuses, Num 11:29, Num 11:30. A wind from the Lord brings quails to the camp, Num 11:31, Num 11:32. While feeding on the flesh, a plague from the Lord falls upon them, and many of them die, Num 11:33. The place is called Kibroth-hattaavah, or the graves of lust, Num 11:34. They journey to Hazeroth, Num 11:35.

Verse 1

And when the people complained - What the cause of this complaining was, we know not. The conjecture of St. Jerome is probable; they complained because of the length of the way. But surely no people had ever less cause for murmuring; they had God among them, and miracles of goodness were continually wrought in their behalf.

It displeased the Lord - For his extraordinary kindness was lost on such an ungrateful and rebellious people. And his anger was kindled - Divine justice was necessarily incensed against such inexcusable conduct.

And the fire of the Lord burnt among them - Either a supernatural fire was sent for this occasion, or the lightning was commissioned against them, or God smote them with one of those hot suffocating winds which are very common in those countries.

And consumed - in the uttermost parts of the camp - It pervaded the whole camp, from the center to the circumference, carrying death with it to all the murmurers; for we are not to suppose that it was confined to the uttermost parts of the camp, unless we could imagine that there were none culpable any where else. If this were the same with the case mentioned Num 11:4, then, as it is possible that the mixed multitude occupied the outermost parts of the camp, consequently the burning might have been confined to them.

NUMBERS 11:2 The people cried to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire abated.

Verse 2

The fire was quenched - Was sunk, or swallowed up, as in the margin. The plague, of whatever sort, ceased to act, and the people had respite.

NUMBERS 11:3 The name of that place was called Taberah, because the LORD's fire burnt among them.

NUMBERS 11:4 The mixed multitude that was among them lusted exceedingly: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, "Who will give us flesh to eat?"

Verse 4

The mixed multitude - $\eta\sigma\phi\sigma\alpha\eta$ hasaphsaph, the collected or gathered people. Such as came out of Egypt with the Israelites; and are mentioned Exo 12:38. This mongrel people, who had comparatively little of the knowledge of God, feeling the difficulties and fatigues of the journey, were the first to complain; and then we find the children of Israel joined them in their complainings, and made a common cause with these demi-infidels.

NUMBERS 11:5 We remember the fish, which we ate in Egypt for nothing; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic;

Verse 5

We remember, etc. - The choice aliments which those murmurers complained of having lost by their leaving Egypt, were the following: fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. A European may smile at such delicacies; but delicacies they were in that country. Their fish is excellent; their cucumbers and water melons highly salubrious and refreshing; and their onions, garlic, etc., exquisitely flavoured, differing as much from vegetables of the same species in these northern climes as a bad turnip does from a good apple. In short, this enumeration takes in almost all the commonly attainable delicacies in those countries.

NUMBERS 11:6 but now we have lost our appetite. There is nothing at all except this manna to look at."

NUMBERS 11:7 The manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like the appearance of bdellium.

Verse 7

The manna was as coriander seed - Probably this short description is added to show the iniquity of the people in murmuring, while they had so adequate a provision. But the baseness of their minds appears in every part of their conduct. About the bdellium of the ancients the learned are not agreed; and I shall not trouble the reader with conjectures. See the note on Gen 2:12. Concerning the manna, see the notes on Exodus 16 (note). Num 11:11-15. The complaint and remonstrance of

Moses in these verses serve at once to show the deeply distressed state of his mind, and the degradation of the minds of the people. We have already seen that the slavery they had so long endured had served to debase their minds, and to render them incapable of every high and dignified sentiment, and of every generous act.

NUMBERS 11:8 The people went around, gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in mortars, and boiled it in pots, and made cakes of it. Its taste was like the taste of fresh oil.

NUMBERS 11:9 When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it.

NUMBERS 11:10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man at the door of his tent; and the LORD's anger was kindled greatly; and Moses was displeased.

NUMBERS 11:11 Moses said to the LORD, "Why have you treated with your servant so badly? Why haven't I found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?"

NUMBERS 11:12 Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them out, that you should tell me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which you swore to their fathers?'

NUMBERS 11:13 Where could I get meat to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.'

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

NUMBERS 11:15 If you treat me this way, please kill me right now, if I have found favour in your sight; and don't let me see my wretchedness."

NUMBERS 11:16 The LORD said to Moses, "Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you.

NUMBERS 11:17 I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit which is on you, and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you not bear it yourself alone.

Verse 17

I will take of the spirit which is upon thee - From this place Origen and Theodoret take occasion to compare Moses to a lamp, at which seventy others were lighted, without losing any of its brightness. To convince Moses that God had sufficiently qualified him for the work which he had given him to do, he tells him that of the gifts and graces which he has given him he will qualify seventy persons to bear the charge with him. This was probably intended as a gracious reproof. Query. Did not Moses lose a measure of his gifts in this business? And is it not right that he whom God has called to and qualified for some particular office, should lose those gifts which he either undervalues or refuses to employ for God in the way appointed? Is there not much reason to believe that many cases have occurred where the spiritual endowments of particular persons have been taken away and given to others who made a better use of them? Hence the propriety of that exhortation, Rev 3:11 : Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. The gracious God never called a man to perform a work without furnishing him with adequate strength; and to refuse to do it on the pretense of

inability is little short of rebellion against God. This institution of the seventy persons to help Moses the rabbins consider as the origin of their grand council called the Sanhedrin. But we find that a council of seventy men, elders of Israel, had existed among the people a year before this time. See Exo 24:9 (note); see the advice given to Jethro to Moses, Exo 18:17 (note), etc., and the notes there.

NUMBERS 11:18 "Say to the people, 'Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and you will eat flesh; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Who will give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt."' Therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and you will eat.

NUMBERS 11:19 You will not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days,

NUMBERS 11:20 but a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it is loathsome to you; because that you have rejected the LORD who is among you, and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?"

NUMBERS 11:21 Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand men on foot; and you have said, 'I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month.'

NUMBERS 11:22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?"

Verse 22

Shall the flocks and the herds be slain - There is certainly a considerable measure of weakness and unbelief manifested in the complaints and questions of Moses on this occasion; but his conduct appears at the same time so very simple, honest, and affectionate, that we cannot but admire it, while we wonder that he had not stronger confidence in that God whose miracles he had so often witnessed in Egypt.

NUMBERS 11:23 The LORD said to Moses, "Has the LORD's hand grown short? Now you will see whether my word will happen to you or not."

Verse 23

Is the Lord's hand waxed short? - Hast thou forgotten the miracles which I have already performed? or thinkest thou that my power is decreased? The power that is unlimited can never be diminished.

NUMBERS 11:24 Moses went out, and told the people the LORD's words; and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them around the Tent.

NUMBERS 11:25 The LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was on him, and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did so no more.

Verse 25

When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied - By prophesying here we are to understand their performing those civil and sacred functions for which they were qualified; exhorting the people to quiet and peaceable submission, to trust and confidence in the goodness and providence of God, would make no small part of the duties of their new office. The ideal meaning of the word נבא naba is to pray, entreat, etc. The prophet is called נביא nabi, because he prays, supplicates, in reference to God; exhorts, entreats, in reference to man. See on Gen 20:7 (note).

NUMBERS 11:26 But two men remained in the camp. The name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the Spirit rested on them; and they were of those who were written, but had not gone out to the Tent; and they prophesied in the camp.

NUMBERS 11:27 A young man ran, and told Moses, and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!"

Verse 27

Eldad and Medad do prophesy, etc. -

Eldad, they said, and Medad there,

Irregularly bold,

By Moses uncommission'd, dare

A separate meeting hold!

And still whom none but heaven will own.

Men whom the world decry,

Men authorized by God alone,

Presume to prophesy!

NUMBERS 11:28 Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his chosen men, answered, "My lord Moses, forbid them!"

Verse 28

My lord Moses, forbid them -

How often have I blindly done

What zealous Joshua did,

Impatient to the rulers run,

And cried, "My lords, forbid!

Silence the schismatics, constrain
Their thoughts with ours t' agree,
And sacrifice the souls of men
To idol unity!"

NUMBERS 11:29 Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Verse 29

Enviest thou for my sake? -
Moses, the minister of God,
Rebukes our partial love,
Who envy at the gifts bestow'd
On those we disapprove.
We do not our own spirit know,
Who wish to see suppress'd
The men that Jesu's spirit show,
The men whom God hath bless'd.
Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets -
Shall we the Spirit's course restrain,
Or quench the heavenly fire?
Let God his messengers ordain,
And whom he will inspire.
Blow as he list, the Spirit's choice
Of instruments we bless;
We will, if Christ be preached, rejoice,
And wish the word success.
Can all be prophets then? are all
Commission'd from above?
No; but whome'er the Lord shall call
We joyfully approve.

O that the Church might all receive

The spirit of prophecy,

And all in Christ accepted live,

And all in Jesus die!

Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures, by Charles Wesley, M. A., and Presbyter of the Church of England. Bristol, 1762. 2 vols. 12mo.

These sentiments are the more particularly remarkable as they come from one who was sufficiently bigoted to what was called ecclesiastical orders and regularity.

NUMBERS 11:30 Moses went into the camp, he and the elders of Israel.

NUMBERS 11:31 A wind from the LORD went out and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, about a day's journey on this side, and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the earth.

Verse 31

A wind from the Lord - An extraordinary one, not the effect of a natural cause. And brought quails, a bird which in great companies visits Egypt about the time of the year, March or April, at which the circumstance marked here took place. Mr. Hasselquist, the friend and pupil of the famous Linnaeus, saw many of them about this time of the year, when he was in Egypt. See his Travels, p. 209.

Two cubits high upon the face of the earth - We may consider the quails as flying within two cubits of the ground; so that the Israelites could easily take as many of them as they wished, while flying within the reach of their hands or their clubs. The common notion is, that the quails were brought round about the camp, and fell there in such multitudes as to lie two feet thick upon the ground; but the Hebrew will not bear this version. The Vulgate has expressed the sense, *Volabantque in aere duobus cubitis altitudine super terram.* "And they flew in the air, two cubits high above the ground."

NUMBERS 11:32 The people rose up all that day, and all the night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails. He who gathered least gathered ten homers; and they spread them all abroad for themselves around the camp.

Verse 32

The people stood up, etc. - While these immense flocks were flying at this short distance from the ground, fatigued with the strong wind and the distance they had come, they were easily taken by the people; and as various flocks continued to succeed each other for two days and a night, enough for a month's provision might be collected in that time. If the quails had fallen about the tents, there was no need to have stood up two days and a night in gathering them; but if they were on the wing, as the text seems to suppose, it was necessary for them to use dispatch, and avail themselves of the passing of these birds whilst it continued. See Harmer, and see the note on Exo 16:13.

And they spread them all abroad - Maillet observes that birds of all kinds come to Egypt for refuge from the cold of a northern winter; and that the people catch them, pluck, and bury them in the burning sand for a few minutes, and thus prepare them for use. This is probably what is meant by spreading them all abroad round the camp. Some authors think that the word שלויים *salvim*, rendered quails in our translation, should be rendered locusts. There is no need of this conjecture; all difficulties are easily resolved without it. The reader is particularly referred to the note on Exo 16:13 (note).

NUMBERS 11:33 While the flesh was yet between their teeth, before it was chewed, the LORD's anger was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.

Verse 33

The wrath of the Lord was kindled - In what way, and with what effects, we cannot precisely determine. Some heavy judgment fell upon those murmurers and complainers, but of what kind the sacred writer says nothing.

NUMBERS 11:34 The name of that place was called Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who lusted.

Verse 34

Kibroth-hattaavah - The graves of lust; and thus their scandalous crime was perpetuated by the name of the place.

1. St. Jude speaks of persons who were murmurers and complainers, walking after their own lusts, Jde 1:16, and seems to have this people particularly in view, whom the sacred text calls *μειψιμοιοι*, complainers of their lot. They could never be satisfied; even God himself could not please them, because they were ever preferring their own wisdom to his. God will save us in his own way, or not at all; because that way, being the plan of infinite wisdom, it is impossible that we can be saved in any other. How often have we professed to pray, "Thy will be done!" And how seldom, very seldom, have our hearts and lips corresponded! How careful should we be in all our prayers to ask nothing but what is perfectly consistent with the will of God! Many times our prayers and desires are such that, were they answered, our ruin would be inevitable. "Thy will be done!" is the greatest of all prayers; and he who would pray safely and successfully, must at least have the spirit of these words in all his petitions. The Israelites asked flesh when they should not have asked for it; God yields to their murmuring, and the death of multitudes of these murmurers was the consequence! We hear of such punishments, and yet walk in the same way, presuming on God's mercy, while we continue to provoke his justice. Let us settle it in our minds as an indisputable truth, that God is better acquainted with our wants than we are ourselves; that he knows infinitely better what we need; and that he is ever more ready to hear than we are to pray, and is wont to give more than we can desire or deserve.

2. In no case has God at any time withheld from his meanest followers any of the spiritual or temporal mercies they needed. Were he to call us to travel through a wilderness, he would send us

bread from heaven, or cause the wilderness to smile and blossom as the rose. How strange is it that we will neither believe that God has worked, or will work, unless we see him working!

NUMBERS 11:35 From Kibroth Hattaavah the people travelled to Hazeroth; and they stayed at Hazeroth.
