

A DISSATISFIED NATION

Moses - Part 16

Numbers 11

Intro: I want to give you a couple of dates regarding the journey of the children of Israel from Egypt in the direction of their promised land, the land of Canaan. In Exodus 19:1 that three months after they left Egypt they came to “the wilderness of Sinai.” Or we could say that they came to Mt. Sinai. They remained there all through the rest of the book of Exodus, and all through the book of Leviticus, and up to chapter 10 in Numbers. Then in chapter 10, verse 11, we read these words:

11 And it came to pass on the twentieth day of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony.

12 And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran (Num. 10:11-12).

This means that they had been at Mt. Sinai just a few days short of one whole year.

So from Exodus 19, on to the end of Exodus, all through the twenty-seven chapters of Leviticus, and on through the first 10 verses of Numbers 10 – all of that time they were at Mt. Sinai.

During that time Moses had received the ten commandments twice, and God had revealed all of the judgments, statutes, and more, which we find in the last part of Exodus, all of Leviticus, and in the first ten chapters of Numbers. In addition the Lord had told Moses how He wanted the Tabernacle to be built, and it was built, and how to make the garments of Aaron, the high priest, and the garments of his sons who were to serve as priests with him. And those garments were made. An offering was taken for the materials to build the Tabernacle and for the garments of the priests, and the response from the people was so great that Moses had to stop the people from giving any more because they responded with more material than was needed. See Exodus 36:5-7.

So a lot was done during that year. *In fact, we can say that it was during that year that Israel became a nation.* We could even say that all of the details given by the Lord through Moses during that time amounted to the constitution of the nation. With a few exceptions, as when Nadab and Abihu, Aaron’s two sons who were serving as priests with their father,

offered strange fire before the Lord (see Leviticus 10), it was a high time spiritually for the people of Israel. Although the Tabernacle was more like a tent than a permanent building, the place where the people were to bring their offerings to the Lord, *the Lord told Moses that the main purpose of the Tabernacle was that the Lord might have a place to dwell among His people.* See Exodus 25:8. And the particular place in the Tabernacle where the Lord dwelt each time it was set up, was over the mercy seat which was the cover on the ark of the covenant which was always located in the most holy place in the Tabernacle.

It would have been wonderful if things had continued with the children of Israel as it had been at Sinai, but unfortunately it did not! And that brings us to our text for today: Numbers 11.

Now if you were to pick up your Bible, and start reading at Numbers 11, it would sound bad enough that the people complained, but if you started at the first chapter of Exodus, and then read all the way to Numbers 11, I am sure that you would be astounded with the behavior of the people as they set out from Mt. Sinai. So let us look first at:

I. THE COMPLAINING OF THE PEOPLE (Num. 11:1-10).

The verb *complain* means that they were unhappy, and they expressed their unhappiness to each other, and undoubtedly their complaints came to Moses' ears as well. Think of all that the Lord had done for His people while they were in Egypt. Then think of all that the Lord had done for them as they moved from Egypt to Mt. Sinai – how He had led them, how He had provided for them, how He had delivered them from the Egyptian army after He had led His people through the Red Sea. And then think of the year they had just had at Mt. Sinai - all that the Lord had revealed through Moses to His people, the building of the Tabernacle and the establishment of the priesthood through whom the people could approach their living and holy God. *They had absolutely no reason to complain against the Lord nor to express verbally how unhappy they were!*

Keil and Delitzsch expressed in their commentary that the Israelites probably did not relate their complaining to the Lord's judgment by fire. It was not predicted by Moses. It was not called a judgment by God. And so the people had no hesitation in going to Moses, pleading with him to pray to the Lord to put the fire out.

But that is the way we are. As a nation we sin against the Lord. We have uncontrolled crime in our country. We have a drug problem that is out of hand. Nationally we are faced with financial problems. We are involved in a war in Iraq that continues to cost many lives each week. We face ominous threats from nations like Iran and North Korea. Where are the voices that connect all of this and many other things with our rejection of God and our rejection of His Word? Are we under judgment? God was merciful to His people, but that did not put an end to their complaining.

And what does this have to do with our complaining because we can be as guilty as anyone else because we don't like what the Lord is doing, or not doing, in our lives.

As we go on reading in verse 4 we learn about "the mixed multitude." They were first mentioned in Exodus 12:38. In verses 37 and 38 we read this:

37 And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children.

38 And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle (Ex. 12:37-38).

This was written about the Israelites soon after they left Egypt, but the mixed multitude had been with them in Egypt. They probably were people who were not Jews, definitely people who did not know the Lord, and maybe just Egyptians who wanted to get out of Egypt. Obviously the people of the world are never going to be satisfied with the ways of the Lord. If you get just a few of them mixed in with the people of God, they are always going to be troublemakers.

What were they unhappy about? Mainly it was because of what the Lord was feeding His people. It wasn't as good as it had been in Egypt where they had a great variety of food, and it had been well prepared and well seasoned. They spoke contemptuously about "this manna" (v. 6). And yet during the more-than-a-year that they had been "on the road," none of them had ever missed a single meal!

It ought to be a lesson that all of us need to learn. You can't mix the people of the world with the people of God and still have peace. The ways of God and the wisdom of God are foolishness to the world. So we need to make the church today as pure as it can be. People need to be drawn into the family of God by the preaching of the Gospel, and not by

worldly entertainment.

This situation was far more serious than these words indicate. And we realize this in Moses' prayer which begins in verse 11.

II. MOSES' PRAYER (Ex. 11:11-15).

Without any question, Moses felt that the people were hopeless. It seemed to him like he had not heard anything from them since even before they left Egypt but complaining, complaining, complaining! And he was tired of it, very tired of it. He felt that the call of God was an affliction. He wondered if God was judging him for the whole idea of leaving Egypt and going to Canaan. He knew he could not make them happy, or keep them happy. So he wanted the Lord to kill him. He wanted out! He had had enough!

How did the Lord react?

III. THE LORD'S MERCY (Ex. 11:16-23).

A. Toward Moses (vv. 16-17).

Sometimes the Lord's servant needs to be served. The Lord know our frame; He remembers that we are dust (Psa. 103:14). The people are dust, and so is their leader. We all have our breaking point, and the Lord knows that better than we do. The Lord often lets things get beyond us so that we will realize that we can't do without Him. So instead of killing Moses, He was kind to Moses and gave him help, good help. I believe that the word "spirit" in verse 17 should be capitalized, because it refers to the Holy Spirit.

Notice that the Lord did not want Moses to have just seventy men, but seventy elders who he knew to be elders. They would not have been the complainers, but they were those who were still trusting the Lord, men who were walking with the Lord, men who were spiritually qualified to lead the Lord's people. Any other kind would have made Moses' problem bigger than ever.

And now we see the mercy of the Lord:

B. Toward the people and Moses (vv. 18-23).

In Psalm 78 Asaph rehearsed this period in Israel's history when they were traveling across the desert toward Canaan. And even after the Lord gave them water out of a rock, Asaph said,

17 And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness.

18 And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust.

19 Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? (Psa. 78:17-19).

Feeding a nation on the move like the Israelites were, was no simple matter. Even one time would have been a major project totally impossible to men, but not with God. Notice what the Lord said that He would do as He expressed it in verses 18 through 20.

But even Moses needed help in believing such an undertaking was possible. Notice verse 23 – a question and a promise!

And then we see God's mercy:

C. Upon the seventy, and upon Moses again (vv. 24-30).

What is a prophet? A prophet is one who receives his message from the Lord, and delivers it to the people. All of the seventy became prophets. Eldad and Medad are cited in particular because they did not go out to the Tabernacle, but remained in the camp – but they prophesied also. Joshua, faithful to God and to Moses, believed that this was an infringement upon the ministry of Moses. And so he told Moses to tell Eldad and Medad to stop prophesying. In Moses' response we see evidence of the mercy of God upon Moses, this time in the attitude that Moses had about the seventy prophesying. (Read verse 29.)

And so this incident gives us a wonderful glimpse into the life of Moses. There is not a glimpse of jealousy in his heart toward the elders prophesying. Nothing would have made him happier than for all of the people to become prophets. Again notice that in verses 23, 24, and 29 the word "spirit" should be capitalized: Spirit, because it speaks of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, in the last five verses of the chapter we see both:

IV. THE POWER OF GOD AND THE JUDGMENT OF GOD (Ex. 11:31-35).

God did what He said, but then brought judgment upon the people. We have in this incident a perfect example of Proverbs 29:1. If you read a chapter in Proverbs each day in month, it hasn't been many days ago that you read this verse:

1 He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Prov. 29:1).

Concl: What was it that the Lord was seeking to teach His people that He would use such strong measure in dealing with them in judgment? The answer is found in another passage in Proverbs. Listen as I read Proverbs 1:24-33:

24 Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded;

25 But ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof:

26 I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh;

27 When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you.

28 Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me:

29 For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the LORD:

30 They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.

31 Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

32 For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.

33 But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

The Lord was seeking to teach the people who were in the camp of Israel that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

The people of Israel complained because they did not fear God. They needed to hold God in the highest esteem, to honor Him as God, to submit themselves to Him, and to delight in doing His will. This is usually involved in the difficult circumstances we face in our lives day after day.