

SESSION 2

Provision

NUMBERS 11:4-17

GOD HEARS HIS LEADERS AND SUSTAINS THEM FOR HIS PURPOSES.



Many of us know what it's like to have a job and find out we don't have the tools we need. We start to wash clothes and discover the washing machine isn't working. Maybe we are supposed to drive for the carpool, and the car won't start. We need to turn in an assignment in the morning and realize at midnight that the printer is out of ink. We discover that the bolt we're trying to remove requires a metric socket wrench that we don't have.

WHEN HAS SOME DIFFICULTY KEPT YOU FROM DOING WHAT YOU NEEDED TO DO?
HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN SOMEONE CAME THROUGH WITH A SOLUTION?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

The Israelites had been camped at the base of Mount Sinai for ten months and nineteen days (Num. 10:11-13). This was not a time of idle inactivity. Moses received the Ten Commandments and the law, built and consecrated the tabernacle, established the priestly orders, organized the Israelites by tribes for travel and conquest, conducted a military census, and celebrated Passover for the second time. The Israelites remained at Mount Sinai for about a month after celebrating the Passover.

The first ten chapters of Numbers have been free of complaints and conflicts. That was about to change. Chapter 11 begins a cycle of rebellions. The first complaint or rebellion was due to the general hardship of the travel (11:1-3).

This first rebellion established a pattern. The cycle of behavior had four stages. First, the people rebelled or sinned against God. Second, God punished His people. Third, the people cried out to God. Fourth, God forgave and restored His people. We see

this progression of behavior not only in the book of Numbers but also in the Israelites' ongoing relationship with God.

Before reaching Sinai, the Israelites complained because they needed food and water (Ex. 16; 17:1-7). God responded by providing what the people needed. The complaint in Numbers 11 is a lack of food. The Israelites would later rebel because they needed water (Num. 20:2-13). In both instances, God responded with judgment.

Why did God bring judgment rather than simply supply the need? Mount Sinai had changed everything. There, God had revealed Himself and His power to the Israelites. He had established a covenantal relationship with them. He wanted them to trust Him. God's people had some lessons to learn. In today's story, class was about to begin.

4 The **riffraff**^A among them had a strong craving for other food. The Israelites wept again and said, “Who will feed us meat?” **5** We remember the free fish we ate in Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. **6** But now **our appetite is gone**; **B** there’s nothing to look at but this manna!” **7** The manna resembled coriander seed, and its appearance was like that of **bdellium**. **C** **8** The people walked around and gathered it. They ground it on a pair of grinding stones or crushed it in a mortar, then boiled it in a cooking pot and shaped it into cakes. It tasted like a pastry cooked with the finest oil. **9** When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it. **10** Moses heard the people, family after family, **weeping**^D at the entrance of their tents. The LORD was **very angry**; **E** Moses was also provoked. **11** So Moses asked the LORD, “Why have you brought such trouble on your servant? Why are you angry with me, and why do you burden me with all these people?” **12** Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth so you should tell me, ‘Carry them at your breast, as a nursing mother carries a baby,’ to the land that you swore to give their ancestors? **13** Where can I get meat to give all these people? For they are weeping to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ **14** I can’t carry all these people by myself. They are too much for me. **15** If you are going to treat me like this, **please kill me right now**^F if I have found favor with you, and don’t let me see my misery anymore.” **16** The LORD answered Moses, “Bring me seventy men from Israel known to you as **elders and officers**^G of the people. Take them to the tent of meeting and have them stand there with you. **17** Then I will come down and speak with you there. I will take some of **the Spirit**^H who is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you bear the burden of the people, so that you do not have to bear it by yourself.

Key Words

A. A “collection” or “rabble,” likely the “mixed multitude” mentioned in Exodus 12:38. These likely were not native Israelites.

B. A skewed view of life in Egypt had led the people to ignore what God was currently doing and providing in their midst.

C. “Resin” (NIV). The meaning is uncertain. A similar term in other ancient languages describes it as a gum-resin from plants used in medicines and perfumes, such as myrrh.

D. The attitude of the disgruntled rabble spread, so the entire community wept over and complained about what they did not have.

E. “Kindled greatly” (KJV); “blazed hotly” (ESV). The Hebrew wording suggests a burning anger.

F. At his wits’ end, Moses desired death rather than life. Later, Elijah had a similar experience and request of God (1 Kings 19:1-5).

G. Israel was somewhat organized with respected community leaders. “Elder” refers more to leadership capacity than age.

H. God’s Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, empowered Moses to lead Israel. Moses would not lose his empowerment, but God would empower others with the same Spirit.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Dissatisfied Followers

(Num. 11:4-9)

Believers should be careful not to take God’s provision for granted.

- **What does God’s providing manna to His people reveal about Him?**
- **What blessings from God might we tend to overlook?**

2. Frustrated Leader

(Num. 11:10-15)

We can always take our concerns to God, telling Him what we need.

- **Why do you think God was angry at His people?**
- **We often applaud Moses for his great faith and obedience. What does verse 15 say about Moses?**
- **How do you handle frustrations? What can you change based on these verses?**

3. Gracious Provision

(Num. 11:16-17)

We can trust God to provide what we need to carry out the tasks He gives us.

- **What did God reveal about His character by supplying Moses’s specific and stated needs?**

Apply the Text

- **What actions can your Bible study group take to help each other feel free to share their burdens and concerns openly—with God and with one another? What can you do to help foster honest dialogue?**

KEY DOCTRINE:
God the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. (See Genesis 1:3; Exodus 31:2-3.)

BIBLE SKILL:
Look for the prayer prompts in a passage of Scripture.

Numbers 11 describes how God sustained Moses by bringing alongside him seventy of Israel’s elders (vv. 16-30). He also provided quail for the people (vv. 31-34). What does this reveal about God? How does it prompt you to pray? Give thanks for the ways God has provided for you in the past. Express your willingness to allow God to meet your needs in the way He chooses, rather than merely asking Him to work in the ways you desire.

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Numbers 11:23. Talk about a time when you become discouraged because you took on more than you could handle.

As the Israelites journeyed toward the promised land, they complained to Moses about food. They had grown discontented. Instead of the manna God was providing each morning, they wanted meat, fish, and vegetables. They even convinced themselves that their lives had been better as slaves in Egypt. Moses felt overwhelmed and frustrated. He questioned why he had been burdened with these people, and where he could get meat for them.

What is God asking you to do that requires you to trust Him?

God never asks us to do more than He enables us to do. He was still in control of the situation, and He did two things to prove it. First, He brought alongside Moses seventy of Israel’s elders to help bear the burden of leading the people (vv. 16-17). Second, God promised to provide quail for the people (vv. 18-20). Moses questioned how God could possibly provide meat for so many people (vv. 21-22). He needed to learn how to trust God.

Talk about ways you can help bear one another’s burdens. Commit to pray for each other’s faith to be strong.

Agree to text “Is the LORD’s arm weak?” to each other this week as a reminder that we can trust Him.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Numbers 11:4-6

Pay attention to why the people were complaining. Note the word “again.”

Seldom does such a colorful word appear only once in Scripture. Some translations render the noun as “rabble,” others as “mixed multitude,” and still, others as “riffraff.” These were non-Jews who had left Egypt with Moses and the Israelites (Ex. 12:37-38; Josh. 8:35). They had a strong craving. The Hebrew underscores the intensity of their yearning; it reads, “they were craving a craving.”

The riffraff’s complaints stirred the Israelites. They again began to weep, or as some translations have it, began to wail or complain. The earlier complaining likely refers to Exodus 16:1-3. There, the Israelites grumbled to Moses and Aaron: “you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger” (v. 3). Now, they wanted meat.

The Hebrews stayed in Egypt for over 400 years—until the exodus. There, crops were bountiful and fish were abundant. Calling them “free,” though, indicates the people were minimizing or forgetting the strain of their slave labor back in Egypt. The phrase “but now” showed they were romanticizing their lives back in Egypt as if it had been blissful; but now, this was unbearable.

Why is it easy to romanticize “the good old days” but forget about the difficulties experienced during that time?



Day 2: Numbers 11:7-9

Reflect on John 6:51.

God began providing manna for His people as they traveled between the Red Sea and Mount Sinai—about a month after they left Egypt. They already were coming to loathe this food. They were turning up their noses at what God was supplying.

Verses 8-9 state how the people gathered and prepared the manna. It came with the evening dew. “When the layer of dew evaporated, there were fine flakes on the desert surface, as fine as frost on the ground” (Ex. 16:14). After picking up the flakes in the morning, people would grind them. They might use a pair of disk-shaped stones, each with a hole in the middle. The person would lay the bottom disk flat, cover it with seeds, and then put the other disk on top. A dowel in the center holes would keep the stones aligned as the person rotated the upper disk. Another option was to use a mortar and pestle, which was more common than stones. The manna softened as it boiled in water. While still moist, the cook would roll it into a ball, flatten it, and cook it in an oven.

Moses described the manna as “the bread the LORD has given you to eat” (Ex. 16:15). Jesus compared Himself to manna. He said He is “the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever” (John 6:51).

What does God’s providing manna to His people reveal about Him?



Day 3: Numbers 11:10-13

Consider what Moses's questions reveal about his emotional state.

The people were “weeping” in their tents. The complaints rang from everyone—“family after family.” Moses could not escape it. The people’s complaints made God “very angry.” The same word occurs in verse 1 of this chapter, describing the Lord’s reaction to the people’s complaints: “his anger burned.”

Moses previously interceded for the Israelites and served as their advocate when God became angry (Num. 11:1-3). Not this time. Moses was angry with the people. Three times Moses asked *why*. This wasn’t a request for information but an accusation—“why have you . . . why are you . . . why do you?” The questions reveal his frustration and despair.

Moses reminded God that he had not brought this on himself. In the Hebrew of verse 12, the “I” comes first, which places it in the emphatic position. In English, we might say, “I, did I conceive all these people?” It was a sarcastic yet rhetorical question, and the implied answer was a resounding NO! God previously told Moses “Israel is my firstborn son” (Ex. 4:22).

In verse 13, Moses moved to the pragmatic question. Where would he get meat to feed the people? He later questioned whether slaughtering flocks and herds or catching all the fish in the sea would be enough food (Num. 11:22).

When you’re going through difficult times, why is it easy to believe that God must be mad at you?



Day 4: Numbers 11:14-15

Highlight verse 14.

Moses declared in effect, “I can’t do it; it’s too much!” For a fourth time, he referred to the Israelites as “all these people.” The phrase drips with irritation and resentment. Moses’s words reveal he was emotionally and physically worn out. The responsibility and burden were too great for him to bear by himself.

Moses had expressed feelings of inadequacy when he first encountered God at the burning bush (Ex. 3:11; 4:1,10). There, he pleaded, “Please, Lord, send someone else” (Ex. 4:13). Now, having reached his breaking point, Moses uttered a more desperate plea: “please kill me right now.” His current frustration and feelings of helplessness eclipsed all the blessings God had previously supplied. His words reveal he blamed God for his plight. In the throes of a crisis of faith, he essentially prayed, “God if you have any regard for me at all, please put me out of my misery.”

Moses was not alone in bemoaning his life. Job cursed the day of his birth, as did Jeremiah (Job 3:1-13; Jer. 20:14-18). After a great victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled the threats of Jezebel, ran about 100 miles south, and prayed for God to take his life (1 Kings 19:1-4). It’s a reminder that even those with the strongest faith can still become frustrated and feel defeated. God, though, was not finished with any of these men.

How do you handle frustration and the feeling of defeat?



Day 5: Numbers 11:16-17

Consider how God responded to Moses’s need.

God responded to Moses’s anger with grace. He knew what was at the core of Moses’s diatribe—Moses felt inadequate for the task. God declared He would meet Moses at his point of need.

Earlier, seventy elders had joined Moses plus Aaron and two of his sons for a covenant ratification ceremony at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1-11). These “seventy” were not necessarily the same men as those at Mount Sinai. In the New Testament era, the Sanhedrin was comprised of seventy men. The number was likely based on the seventy elders and officers Moses chose here. The seventy were to approach “the tent of meeting.” God would speak with Moses there and reveal His will to him. The seventy would hear God speak to Moses.

God’s response in verse 17 echoes Moses’s earlier complaints. In verse 11, Moses had asked “why do you burden me with all these people?” Here, God promised him that the seventy would help bear the “burden.” In verse 14, Moses complained, “I can’t carry all these people.” Verse 17 uses the same Hebrew verb when God said, “you do not have to bear it by yourself.” God never rebuked Moses for his tirade. Instead, He graciously provided what Moses needed.

When have you had to bear a burden by yourself?

How might God use you to help bear someone’s else’s burden?

APPLY THE TEXT

Even when we can see how God met our needs in the past, what causes us to panic when we face a new crisis? What can you do to help you remember God’s past blessings?

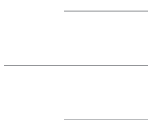
JOURNAL





Provision

Session 2 • Numbers 11:4-17



ENGAGE

PREPARE: Display **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Numbers, Deuteronomy*). Make copies of **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*) and **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Complaints in the Wilderness*).

READ: Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 10.

ASK: When has some difficulty kept you from being able to do what you needed to do? How did you feel when someone came through with a solution? (p. 10)

DISCUSS: Encourage the group to talk about a recent project they completed and the obstacles they had to overcome to get the job done. Emphasize the importance of perseverance in life.

IDENTIFY: Share that this session continues the study of the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Direct attention to **Pack Item 2** (Poster: *Outline of Numbers, Deuteronomy*) and show where today's passage can be found on the outline. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 7** (Handout: *Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*). Allow adults to scan the handout to gain more insight into Israel's travels in the wilderness and the context of this session.

TRANSITION: *As we look into today's session, don't forget that God has a purpose for your life. He has called you to take the lead in some way, and He has given you the tools you need to get the job done. Consider how you can lean into Him to fulfill His plans, even when you face opposition or challenges.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 11:4-9 as the group listens for Israel's complaints in the verses.

ASK: What comes to mind when you hear the word "riffraff"? What did Moses mean when he talked about "riffraff" in verse 4?

SHARE: Share the following explanation of the word "riffraff."

- **(11:4)** The term *riffraff* is used only here in the Bible, but it is related to the word "gather." It describes a group that gathered to complain. Some interpreters suggest that they were part of the "mixed multitude" of non-Israelites who left Egypt with God's people (Ex. 12:38). Their disgruntled attitudes and words were contagious and quickly spread.

REVIEW: Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (Handout: *Complaints in the Wilderness*). Point out Numbers 11 and note this was not the first or last time Israel would complain about something.

EXAMINE: Direct adults to scan verses 4-6 and identify the dangers in their attitudes. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share their thoughts. Emphasize that redefining "the good old days" led the Israelites to question God's goodness and to take His provision for granted. Point out that God had been gracious to provide manna in abundance, but the Israelites were starting to despise His generous gift of grace.

- **(11:5-6)** The Israelites were guilty of "selective memory." They remembered the food in Egypt, but they had forgotten the difficult working conditions, oppressive taskmasters, the death of Hebrew baby boys, and more. The challenges they faced in the wilderness already had caused them to remember Egypt as a better place than it really was for them.

ASK: What does God's providing manna to His people reveal about Him? What blessings from God might we tend to overlook? (p. 12)

READ: Direct the group to read silently Numbers 11:10-15, noting evidence of Moses's frustration.

EXAMINE: Write *God's response* on the board. Direct adults to read verse 10 again and determine how God reacted to the people.

ASK: Why do you think God was so angry at His people? We often applaud Moses for his great faith and obedience. What does verse 15 say about Moses? (p. 12)

- **(11:10)** While God was "very angry," Moses was provoked. The expression literally reads, "In the eyes of Moses it was evil/bad." We may understand the words in one of two ways. First, they could mean Moses shared God's anger at the people's complaints. Perhaps he also believed the people deserved God's wrath for their rebellion! As a second option, the expression could communicate Moses's aggravation at the situation, not just at the people. Their grumbling exhausted him and fed his feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, he took his concern to God.

COMPARE: Encourage adults to compare and contrast God's anger and Moses's frustration. Highlight Moses's imagery about giving birth and talk about how that demonstrated his exasperation. Point out that it's easy for us to get frustrated, but such frustrations often lead us in the wrong direction. Share that during those times it's best to follow Moses's example and bring our feelings to God, no matter how confused or irrational they might seem in the moment.

ASK: How do you handle frustrations? What can you change based on these verses? (p. 12)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Numbers 11:16-17 as the group reflects on how God was ready to respond to Moses's dilemma.

SHARE: Point out that God had a plan for Moses to delegate responsibility to seventy leaders. These leaders may have included some of the men who had joined Moses and Aaron on Mount Sinai in Exodus 24.

DISCUSS: Highlight that God placed some of His Spirit on each man, giving him the kind of wisdom and discernment the Lord had shared with Moses. Lead a brief discussion on why the Spirit's guidance would be important for this assignment.

- **(11:17)** God said that He would instill some of the Spirit who guided Moses on the elders. Most interpreters believe God was referring to the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. God told Moses that He would take from the Spirit He had given Moses and place the Spirit on the seventy leaders so they could assist him in God's power. This did not imply Moses lost anything or that each leader would have only a portion of the Spirit's power. Rather, each leader assisted Moses as the Spirit empowered him. The leaders would need discernment to make good choices, and the Spirit would be the One who directed them and provided solid counsel.

ASK: What did God reveal about His character by supplying Moses's specific and stated needs? (p. 12)

CHALLENGE

SUMMARIZE: Review these points from this week's Bible passage:

- Believers should be careful not to take God's provisions for granted.

- We can always take our concerns to God, telling Him what we need.
- We can trust God to provide what we need to carry out the tasks He gives us.

DISCUSS: Direct the group to read the **Apply the Text** questions on page 12. Allow adults to suggest ways the group can work together to share burdens and concerns.

CHALLENGE: Encourage adults to use the **Daily Exploration** on pages 14-16 to dig deeper into God's Word during the week.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help adults avoid complaints, avoid frustration, and embrace help when He provides it.

AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group. Remind the group that God is at work in their lives and challenge them to remain grateful for the way He provides each day. Suggest that they consider journaling what God shares with them about His work and to use those journal entries as prayer prompts in their lives. Encourage them to share any needs they might have so you can pray for them more effectively as individuals and as a group.