



# Provision

GOD HEARS HIS LEADERS AND SUSTAINS THEM FOR HIS PURPOSES.

**Scripture Passage: Numbers 11:4-17    Memory Verse: Numbers 11:23**

God equips His people for whatever He calls them to do. On our own, we can't accomplish God's purposes, but He provides what we need to live out His design for us. Scripture records the testimonies of ordinary people whom God used in extraordinary ways when they yielded their lives to His purpose. They knew they couldn't face life alone, so they called on God, and He answered. They sometimes faced incredible challenges, but God sustained them.

God still provides for and equips His people. As you prepare to teach this week's passage, consider how He has equipped you to fulfill His purposes. Thank Him for that provision. Also, pray for the people in your group. Some are carrying heavy burdens. Ask God to speak to them through His Word and to provide what they need to bear the burdens He has entrusted to them.



### **Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training**

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at [goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training](https://goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training).



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. (PSG, p. 10)

**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 (Numbers 10:11-12:16)

In the second year of the people's journey after they left Egypt, God lifted the cloud above the tabernacle, and the people moved out (Num. 10:11-28). The military divisions from each tribe led the way, carrying their respective banners to keep the people organized. The people journeyed from the mountain for three days with the ark of the Lord's covenant in front of them and Moses pronouncing a blessing (10:33-36).

The Lord became angry when the people complained to Moses about the journey's difficulty, and He sent fire along the outskirts of the camp (11:1). Moses prayed, and the Lord ceased the judgment (11:2-3). But people soon began to complain again to Moses about the lack of food (11:4-6). God had provided manna for their journey (Ex. 16:4-36; Num. 11:7-9), but the people longed for more variety.

The Lord was angry about the people's persistent complaints, but Moses was exasperated (Num. 11:10). He confessed his frustration to the Lord, wondering openly why God had given him such an immense task. He had not given birth to these people, yet he was in charge of them. What's more, he had no idea how or where he might gather enough meat for all of them to eat (11:11-15).

God told Moses to select seventy men of integrity from Israel (11:16-17). God would put His Spirit on them as He had done with Moses, and they would help to bear Moses's burden.

Moses gathered the elders as God had directed, and God put His Spirit on them as He had said. The men prophesied before the people when they received God's Spirit.

Meanwhile, God told the people to prepare themselves to eat meat (11:18-20). He would provide abundantly, and they would eat the meat for a whole month, until they were sick of it. Thus, God's provision also had an aspect of judgment to it. God provided quail for the people, and the people gathered them quickly (11:31-32). However, He also struck many people with a plague (11:33-35).

Moses's siblings Miriam and Aaron then raised their voices to speak against Moses, insisting God also had spoken through them, as well (12:1-3). God gathered the three of them in front of the tent of meeting. He reminded them he had a special relationship with Moses, and He was angry with them for speaking against their brother (12:4-9). As God left their presence, Miriam's skin suddenly became diseased, and Aaron pleaded with Moses not to allow her to die (12:10-12). The Lord forgave Miriam's sin, though she had to remain outside the camp for seven days (12:13-16).

**As you read through Numbers 11:4-17, underscore each time Moses used the pronouns "I" or "me." When Moses made these statements, what was he revealing about his concern—and himself? (PSG, p. 11)**

## ENGAGE



**ASK:**

**PREPARE:** On a focal wall, 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*).

**When has some difficulty kept you from doing what you needed to do? How did you feel when someone came through with a solution?** (PSG, p. 10)

**READ:**

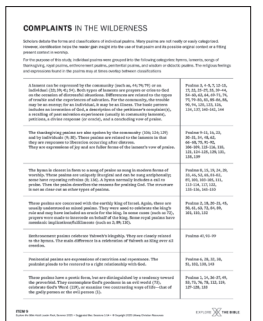
Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG. Emphasize the importance of perseverance in life.

**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.*



### Group Activity Option

#### Music

Provide hymnals and direct adults to turn to "All the Way My Savior Leads Me" (*Baptist Hymnal 2008*, No. 62). Share that this is one of numerous hymns composed by Fanny Crosby. Encourage adults to read the three verses silently and to identify why the writer was so content to follow God's leadership. After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share. Lead the group in singing the hymn and challenge them to see how God provided for His people as they study today's verses.

## Dissatisfied Followers (Num. 11:4-9)

**4** The riffraff 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; there’s nothing to look at but this manna!” **7** The manna resembled coriander seed, and its appearance was like that of bdellium. **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.

(v. 4) Moses used the term *riffraff* to describe some of the more troubling elements of the Israelite community. The term 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. They expressed dissatisfaction and discontent with what God had provided.

One way the “riffraff” demonstrated its discontent with God was through *a strong craving for other food*. Literally, they “craved a craving.” In this form, the verb denotes inappropriate desires. It occurs again later in verse 34, describing how those who showed such misplaced desires incurred God’s judgment. Psalm 106:14-15 uses the same expression (“seized with craving”) as it recalled this very incident.

The verb also parallels the word “covet” when Moses restated the Ten Commandments (Deut. 5:21, “desire”), and the prophet Amos used it to describe those who inappropriately longed for the day of the Lord (Amos 5:18-20). King Solomon used the expression to describe the slacker who craved things all day long without the willingness to work for them (Prov. 21:25-26).

The question about providing *meat* was more like a statement of the riffraff’s complaints. God had provided manna (vv. 7-9; also Ex. 16:4-36), but they were not satisfied with God’s provision and craved meat. Numbers 11:18-20 make it clear God was not pleased with the people’s attitude. They were not grateful that He had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. In fact, their question really implied that they had rejected God and His provision for them! Instead of embracing contentment in their freedom, they looked back with foggy memories on centuries of slavery.

(vv. 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.

Slavery had *not* afforded them comfortable lives by any means! God’s people erroneously claimed to *remember* their circumstances as much better in the land from which God had delivered them. They inflated Egypt’s positive aspects while ignoring centuries of suffering.

Their longings for Egypt led them to despise God’s provision in the moment. The term *manna* first appears in Exodus 16, the passage that provides the most complete description of it. The name means something like, “What is it?” God provided it for His people throughout their time in the wilderness; but when it first appeared, the Israelites didn’t know what it was. Moses had to explain it to them!

The people found manna on the ground each morning, six days a week. They were to gather a double portion in preparation for the Sabbath, when no manna would appear (Ex. 16:4-36). Thus, the manna forced God’s people to trust His provision each day of their 40-year journey.

(vv. 7-9) The people would prepare the manna by grinding it, boiling it, and shaping it into cakes. It was like coriander seed, an herb of the carrot family that could be used as a condiment, like poppy or caraway seeds today. However, the text does not specify whether the similarity was in taste or in appearance. Most interpreters believe the term *bdellium* describes a kind of resinous gum. When God’s people entered the promised land, the manna ceased (Josh. 5:12).

## EXPLORE Numbers 11:4-9



**READ:**

**ASK:**

**REVIEW:**

**SHARE:**

**EXAMINE:**

**ASK:**

**APPLICATION POINT: Believers should be careful not to take God’s provisions for granted.**

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

**What did Moses mean when he talked about “riffraff” in verse 4?**

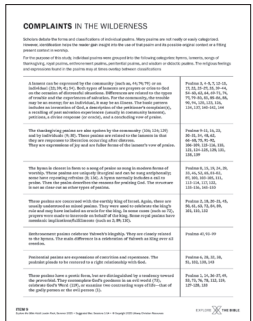
Distribute copies of **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: Complaints in the Wilderness*). Point out Numbers 11 and note this was not the first or last time Israel would complain about something.

Share the following sentences from page 12 of the PSG:

*Seldom does such a colorful word appear only once in Scripture. Some translations render the noun as “rabble” and others as “mixed multitude.” Still, others use riffraff. It refers to a mixed crowd. These were non-Jews who had left Egypt with Moses and the Israelites (Ex. 12:37-38; Josh. 8:35).*

Direct adults to read the information for verses 4-6 on page 12 of the PSG and identify the dangers of negative attitudes. Allow volunteers to share their thoughts. Emphasize that redefining “the good old days” led Israel 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.

**What blessings from God might we tend to overlook?** (PSG p. 13)



**10** Moses heard the people, family after family, weeping at the entrance of their tents. The LORD was very angry; 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 if I have found favor with you, and don’t let me see my misery anymore.”

**(v. 10)** God became *very angry* with His people. A similar expression also occurs at the end of the chapter to indicate God’s anger against those who complained about His provision (v. 33). It literally means “the face (or nose) of the LORD became hot” and commonly appears in the Old Testament to describe God’s anger. Of course, we should not take the expression literally. God is a spiritual being. The Bible is simply using what interpreters call “anthropomorphic language.”

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.

**(vv. 11-12)** Moses struggled to understand why God had *brought such trouble* into his life. In a sense, he felt like the people’s protests were God’s way of expressing displeasure. He saw himself as the target of God’s anger and the recipient of a heavy *burden*.

Moses showed his frustration in describing his predicament. He did not *conceive* or *give birth* to this great multitude. Yet, it seemed like God wanted him to personally care for all of them as *a nursing mother carries a baby*. The people had hardly left Egypt and had a long way to go before settling in the promised land. Moses knew that leading them was a difficult task, especially if he bore that burden alone.

**(vv. 13-14)** Moses’s words indicate he knew it was beyond his capability to *get meat* for the people. His later words (vv. 21-22) confirm that he struggled with the idea that even God could provide that much food! Moses had seen God do great things, but he wondered how God could do this.

Moses confessed that the people were *too much for me*. Literally, he was saying that “they are too heavy for me.” From his perspective, Moses could not *carry all these people*. The play on words depicts a parent loaded down by the weight of his children. Likewise, Moses could not carry God’s people to the promised land.

In a sense, Moses was focusing on his own strength, which would never be enough to complete the work God had given. But, by coming to God, he was able to share his concerns honestly and lean into the One who would give him the wisdom and power to fulfill his calling.

**(v. 15)** Moses did not want to lead a people he could not carry alone. He suggested the most gracious thing God could do was to *kill* him on the spot. If he had found *favor* with God, the Lord would not require him to bear the burden any longer!

At the same time, Moses knew that if anyone could meet his need, God could. So, this frustrated leader took his concern to God and spoke honestly to Him.



READ:

RECAP:

EXAMINE:

ASK:

COMPARE:

ASK:

**APPLICATION POINT: We can always take our concerns to God, telling Him what we need.**

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

Summarize the Israelites’ attitude using this content from page 14 of the PSG:

The people were **weeping** in their tents. This verse gives the impression that complaints rang from everyone—**family after family**. Moses could not escape it.

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

**Why do you think God was angry at His people?** (PSG, p. 14)

Point out that Moses was also provoked by the people. 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.

**How do you handle frustrations? What can you change based on these verses?**

**Group Activity Option**

**Object Lesson: Thermometer**

Show adults a thermometer and encourage them to share the basic uses for this item. Affirm that its primary purpose is to measure temperature. Ask: *If Moses had been given a thermometer in verses 10-15, what do you think his temperature would be like?* Note that his emotions were pretty high. Allow adults to suggest practical ways to calm emotions when things get “heated” in life.

**16** The LORD answered Moses, “Bring me seventy men from Israel known to you as elders and officers 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 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.”

(v. 16) The term *elders* literally refers to older people. In the Old Testament it commonly refers to leaders who had demonstrated the wisdom that came from many years of life and walking with God. Joshua summoned Israel’s elders to Shechem when the people confirmed God’s covenant with them (Josh. 8:33; 24:1). He wanted their support, and he wanted them to help him lead God’s people.

The New Testament records how Paul appointed elders in the churches he planted on his missionary journeys (Acts 14:23). Also in the New Testament, the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor/shepherd” appear together and seem to designate the office of pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).

In this case, God commanded Moses to select seventy qualified elders and *officers* from the congregation. The idea of “officers” occurs in lists of Israel’s leaders, and many interpreters believe the term may be related to an ancient word for “scribe” or “secretary.” If so, it probably denotes an administrative role. God’s people needed leaders who could handle the supervisory details for such a large group. Joshua also summoned these leaders to Shechem for covenant renewal. Exodus 5:14 also suggests the Egyptians had appointed officers with this title over the Hebrews. Here also, the administrative role may have been prominent.

Moses would gather the leaders at the *tent of meeting*, the tabernacle. This was designated as a place where God would meet with His people. Thus, the tent provided both a reminder of God’s presence and a place to worship God and hear from Him.

(v. 17) As noted, the tent of meeting was a place where God’s people could discover His plans and purposes. Here, God promised to *come down and speak* with Moses about the new leaders. He also 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.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit appears prominently. He regenerates hearts and enables believers to respond in faith to God’s offer of salvation (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). The Spirit also works in the hearts of believers to make them more Christlike, enabling them to live out God’s design for them (Rom. 8:3-4; 2 Cor. 3:18). This same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now indwells believers (Rom. 8:11)!

In this context, the Spirit primarily offered wisdom and direction. The leaders would need discernment to make good choices, and the Spirit would guide them and provide solid counsel.

The seventy elders would help Moses *bear the burden of the people*. The phrase also can mean “carry” and appears with this sense in verses 12 and 14. It is interesting to note that God did not deny leading Israel was a burden. Instead, He assured Moses that He would also empower the seventy elders with His Spirit so they could share the burden. These leaders would thus lighten Moses’s load and enable him to continue fulfilling God’s call on his life. Moses would go farther with the support of his leadership team.

**Key Doctrine**

**God the Holy Spirit**

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



**READ:**

**SHARE:**

**RECAP:**

**DISCUSS:**

**ASK:**

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

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

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

Review the following information about the duties of the seventy men from page 16 of the PSG:

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.

Use the commentary for verse 17 on page 18 of the Leader Guide to explain God’s plan for these men. 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.

**What did God reveal about His character by supplying Moses’s specific and stated needs?** (PSG, p. 17)

**Group Activity Option**

**Bible Skill**

Direct the group to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 17 of the PSG. Share that 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?** Consider the following suggestions: 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.

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *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 first set of questions on page 18 of the PSG. Allow adults to suggest ways the group can work together to share burdens and concerns. Encourage them to reflect on and respond to the second set of questions on page 18 of the PSG 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.

### ADULT COMMENTARY



Want to go deeper in your study?  
*Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* offers additional information and biblical insights related to the key passages.  
(Available for purchase at [Lifeway.com](https://www.lifeway.com).)

EXPLORE  THE BIBLE.