

Exegetical Notes, Numbers 11:4-35
“Is the Arm of YHWH too Short?”
“The Holy Spirit Enables” and
“The Opposition Forms”

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Numbers 11:4-35

Verses 4- 6

⁴ The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

- The word "rabble" stands in opposition to the phrase "the people" (see verse 1). It refers to those people in the camp who had left Egypt with the Hebrews but who were not Hebrews. The people in the camp who do not know God begin to stir up those who know him against him.
- These non-Hebrews remember the wonderful food they had enjoyed in Egypt...fresh meat, fresh vegetables, fresh fruit, and spices. Now all they have day in and day out is that which YHWH supplies, Manna.

Verses 7-9

⁷ The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. ⁸ The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. ⁹ When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

- The word "Manna" means, "What is this?" (See Exodus 16) When the people complained because they lacked food, God had given them Manna. Now the rabble began to create unrest around the very gift of God.

Verse 10-15

¹⁰ Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. ¹¹ He

asked the LORD, “Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?”¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?¹³ Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin.”

- Grumbling is contagious! Soon, all of the Hebrews have joined the rabble. Everyone is complaining because all they have to eat is Manna. They want meat.
- Because they are grumbling about the gift he gave them, God was angered.
- Moses was troubled/burdened by the complaining of the people. He asked God why God had cast the burden of leadership on him. He could not see a solution to the problem. Where was he to find enough meat to feed 3 million people? Moses begged God to remove the responsibility of leading by killing him if necessary.

Verse 16-17

¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses: “Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you.¹⁷ I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.

- God addresses Moses complaint first. He will give Moses 70 assistant leaders to make his burden lighter. He will give them a portion of the authority vested in Moses to enable them to assist Moses.

Verse 18-20

¹⁸“Tell the people: ‘Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, “If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!” Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. ¹⁹ You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, ²⁰ but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it—because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?””

- Then YHWH addresses the people's problem. He will give them meat to eat until they can no longer stand to eat meat. The blessing will become a curse. They will experience too much of a good thing because they did not trust God's provision. They rejected God's way, so while they receive blessing, the blessing becomes the curse.

Verses 21-23

²¹ But Moses said, “Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, ‘I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!’ ²² Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them? ²³ The LORD answered Moses, “Is the LORD’s arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you.”

- Moses throws his hands up before God in despair. God is promising to supply bread to the Hebrews, 600,000 men plus women and children, at every meal for a whole month. Moses realizes that there is not enough meat to accomplish this task even if all of the herds and flocks of the Hebrews were slaughtered. He tells God that the assignment is impossible! He, Moses, cannot do what God is promising.
- God tells Moses that he will see that God can provide with or without Moses.

Verses 24-25

²⁴ *So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the tent.* ²⁵ *Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied—but did not do so again.*

- So Moses told the people what God said he would do.
- He also gathered the 70 men God would designate as his helpers. The Holy Spirit of God fell on these men causing them to prophesy on this occasion, but the gift of prophecy was removed from them afterward. Moses remained God's chosen prophet.

Verse 26-30

²⁶ *However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp.* ²⁷ *A young man ran and told Moses, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”* ²⁸ *Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ aide since youth, spoke up and said, “Moses, my lord, stop them!”* ²⁹ *But Moses replied, “Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”* ³⁰ *Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.*

- Two of the chosen 70, Eldad and Medad, did not come to the gathering at the Tent of Meeting as God required them to do through Moses. None-the-less, the Holy Spirit fell on them where they were and like the other 68, they also prophesied.
- When news of this reached Moses and the other helpers at the Tent of Meeting, Joshua, Moses’ supporter, saw this act as an act of defiance and wanted the two executed because they disobeyed Moses’ orders and challenged his authority.
- Moses commended Joshua for his support but did not order the execution of these two renegade leaders. He was not threatened by their opposition.

Verses 31-35

³¹ *Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day’s walk in any direction.* ³² *All that day and night and all the next day the*

people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp.³³ But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague.³⁴ Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.³⁵ From Kibroth Hattaavah the people traveled to Hazeroth and stayed there.

- God sent meat in the form of quail. The quail fell on the camp for two days and nights until there were about three feet of quail covering the ground. Each person was able to gather over 100 bushels of quail each.
- Remember that there was no way to preserve so much meat. So while the people were eating it, before they had finished eating what they had gathered, they became sick from the spoiled meat. The blessing became the curse. Many of them died as a result and understood this as God's curse. They named the place, "Kibroth Hattaavah," "the graves of the cravers."

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Is the Arm of YHWH Too Short?; The Holy Spirit Enables; and The Opposition Forms*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)