

Additional points to add to Introduction by Brother Ken.

Many thanks to Brother Ken.

The chapter begins highlighting a recurring problem with Israel – complaining. This became a characteristic of the nation – see below for chart showing the repetitive nature of their grumbling. We may have missed some incidents out, so please let me know if so.

Interestingly enough the word for complain here is not used very often in the Old Testament, just once or twice – for example see Lamentations 3:39 *Wherefore doth a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?* And actually refers to a continual complaining. This negative attitude became the root cause of their undoing.

God sent a fire and destroyed those in uttermost part of camp, or some of the outermost parts of the camp, as the NET Bible has it. It does not come as a surprise that the wrath fell on the area of camp furthest away from it's beating heart – the Dwelling place of God, the tabernacle. The discontent looms largest in the hearts of those who are falling away backwards, backsliding, drifting off, who keep their distance, who do not enjoy the company of the believers anymore – the outermost part of the camp, and soon they fall away to the nations. In relation to this the Apostle warns: Hebrews 3:12 *Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.* See also Hebrews 2:1: *Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* Slip should read drift away. It can happen to anyone of us, if we allow that discontentment to build up, and complaining become characteristic.

The fire caused alarm and panic, and the people cried out to God

Reference	Complaint	Sin	Result
Exodus 14:11-15	Frightened of the Egyptian Army	Lack of Faith	God parted the Red Sea and saved the people
Exodus 15:24-26	About lack of drinking water	lack of patience	God made bitter water sweet
Exodus 16:2,4,9, 20	About lack of food	Wished they were back in Egypt	God sent bread from heaven
Exodus 16:27-29	Manna had maggots in	disobedient	God warned them not to continue breaking His law
Exodus 17:2-4	About lack of drinking water	Tempted the Lord and wanted to stone Moses	God sent water from Rock when it was smitten
Exodus 31:1-3	Golden Calf	Impatience led to Lies which led to Idolatry	3000 slain & people plagued
Leviticus 10:1	Strange fire	Self - importance & pride	Fire devoured
Numbers 11:1	About their hardships	Complained again, instead of prayer	1000s destroyed when God sent a plague of fire
Numbers 11:4	About lack of meat	Lusted through envy for things they did not have	God sent quail, but as they began to eat, God sent another plague
Numbers 14:1-4	About being stuck in wilderness facing giants in Promised Land and wanting to return to Egypt	Open rebellion against leaders, and failed to trust in God's promises	Whole generation not allowed to enter land, but would die in wilderness
Numbers 16:3	About Moses and Aarons authority and leadership	Some who were proud were greedy for more power	Earth swallowed up rebels, fire consumed 250 followers
Numbers 16:41	That Moses caused the deaths of these men	Blamed others for their own failures	14700 killed by plague, Moses and Aaron mediated
Numbers 20:2-3	About lack of water	Refused to believe the Word of God	Moses affected by the complaint also barred from entering the land
Numbers 21:5	That God & Moses had deliberately brought them to die in the wilderness	Failure to accept their problems were caused by own lack of faith	Fiery serpents sent which killed many people

God took away the punishment of fire, but sadly the corruption had not been extinguished in some quarters, as we can read that the mixed multitude among them *fell a lusting*, craved a craving [NET] for different foods. The mixed multitude refers to many Egyptians, and other slave nationalities who saw the salvation of the Lord operating through the plagues, and the Passover, and decided that Pharaoh was no god at all, and the Truth seemed so obvious to them.

However, though they were out of Egypt, the Egypt was not out of them. The delicious cucumbers, the variety of the vegetables, and spices that were once so readily available, the fish. Six items are listed, though of course they probably comparing notes of dozens their favourite foods and recipes that they could no longer have. But six, a number often associated with man in his apostasy reminds us here of the apostate attitude which had already grown in the camp. Far from being just in the outermost parts of the camp. The new complaining was being muttered in open rebellion – verse 10: *every man in the door of his tent*: and people weeping throughout their families. Caused by the mixed multitude. The multitude should not have been mixed. Those Gentiles who were tagging along, should have fully assimilated themselves, and been heart soul and mind together as one with Israel, so there should have been no difference, but quite evidently, this leaven had not been purged.

11:6 *But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.* A change of diet from the bread of heaven is often the reason for discontent. The Bible becomes dry and boring to those who do not appreciate it for what it is. In fact, no extra forms of nutrition was required, as this miraculous provision was designed to have all the nutrients and vitamins the population needed, with minimal farming and labour required on their part. Same with the Word. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. We do not need any other self-help books, or alternative spiritual diet. Instead of getting into a rut, greater chewing and enjoyment of what is provided will stop the craving of a worldly variety.

Often, we do not realise how much negativity, and complaining can affect others. Philippians 2:14 *Do all things without murmurings and disputings*: Whilst we are busy complaining there are others cheerfully carrying on with the work. But after a while, the continuous drip-drip-drip of discontent can cause even the most willing of hearts to be discouraged. Moses, even though he had been given elements of the Holy Spirit, was struggling under the burden.

He found himself also complaining bitterly. They had really got him down. *Why have you afflicted your servant? Why have I not found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of this entire people on me? Did I conceive this entire people? Did I give birth to them, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your arms, as a foster father bears a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to their fathers? From where shall I get meat to give to this entire people, for they cry to me, 'Give us meat, that we may eat!' I am not able to bear this entire people alone, because it is too heavy for me! But if you are going to deal with me like this, then kill me immediately. If I have found favour in your sight then do not let me see my trouble.*

The NET Bible puts this in everyday language, and on this level it is easier to feel the heartfelt pleading, the passion in his voice. The poor man, being put through so much by ungrateful, thoughtless and inconsiderate people. He was only human. He was breaking under the strain. He was approaching 140 years old. When we consider how the Lord Jesus has carried the burdens of every generation, the weight and expectation of race of people, characterized by ingratitude and stubbornness, he too, offered his body as a sacrifice, a willing offering to take away the sins of many. He too was human, but did not break and never complained. He is the supreme example, though we so much sympathise with poor Moses.

God heard his prayer, and ordered that seventy elders be chosen to support him in the work. This had been done before under the advice of Jethro Moses' father in law, in Exodus 18, but it seems that their duties were somewhat limited. The reason becomes apparent

in God's promise. He said he would give some of the spirit He had given to Moses, to them also. This meant that He would have given them spiritual discernment, wisdom, prophetic power, ability to rapidly understand situations in order to judge this great people. Moreover, this ability would be publicly obvious, and reveal the Dine endorsement of their appointment, and lessen the strain upon Moses. It was not Moses who led the people but God. It is a peculiar feature of human nature that they will easily seek to follow a leader they can see rather than righteous principles. It was necessary that Moses authority did not overshadow that of God in the minds of the people – in time we note they rejected God as their King, and demanded a leader like all the other nations. (1Samuel 8:7) By sharing the leadership with others, it was also providing training for continuity. Always in our Ecclesias we should follow this example and encourage younger brothers to assist, and not put them down, and say keep your place – I'm in charge, but all should work together.

The Divine authority and leadership was then once again demonstrated by God. The nation was grumbling and complaining about the inconvenience of travelling through a desert, and lack of variety on the menu. Even though just a few months before they had been labouring under the heat of the Egyptian sun, and the crack of the taskmaster's whips, - but fickle man soon forgets and always wants more. They wanted flesh to chew! *Give us flesh, that we may eat!*

God's response was – you want flesh, I will give you flesh until you are sick of it! They would be sick of their own flesh, and wish that they had stayed quiet! It is a true saying, we should be careful what we wish for! Israel evidently did not trust in their God. When we complain about our circumstance, we are saying that God does not know what is best for us.

So it was that God provided another miracle in the desert, and brought about a huge fall of quail, small game birds, which would have numbered in the millions. He had promised that this provision



would last for one month. There would be these little feathered feasts running around their feet for days! But of course the people did not believe, and showed complete disrespect, and fell upon the quail when they landed, taking far more than they could eat to store them up, as if they would not be there tomorrow, and even began eating them raw in their lust. It seemed they would never learn.

And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague.

The lesson for us: 1 Corinthians 10:5-6: *But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.*

The name of the place where this occurred was called Kibroth-Hataavah, meaning the Graves of the Greedy. Let us pray this will not be our legacy.

Brother Terry