

Teaching Tips

September 17
Bible Study Guide 3

Words You Should Know

A. Stranger (Leviticus 19:10) *ger* (Heb.)—A sojourner; a newcomer, or a foreigner

B. Unrighteousness (Lev. 19:15) *`evel* (Heb.)—Injustice, iniquity, and wickedness

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Acting with Compassion. Those who reflect God’s holy nature and love others as they love themselves, which includes treating them fairly, justly, and respectfully.

A. Pray for lesson clarity.

B. Study and meditate on the entire text.

C. Prepare a PowerPoint presentation or bring news clippings of incidents involving justice and compassion.

D. Complete the companion lesson in the *Precepts For Living®* Personal Study Guide.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Open with prayer, including the Aim for Change.

B. After prayer, introduce today’s subject of the lesson.

C. Read the Aim for Change and Keep in Mind verse in unison. Discuss.

D. Share your presentation.

E. Then ask, “Have you ever personally experienced injustice?”

F. Share testimonies.

G. Have a volunteer summarize the In Focus story. Discuss.

H. Ask, “Knowing how painful injustice feels, how careful should we be to avoid inflicting others with injustice?” Discuss.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read the Focal Verses.

B. Now use The People, Places, and Times; Background; Search the Scriptures; At-A-Glance outline; In Depth; and More Light on the Text to clarify the verses.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Have volunteers summarize the Discuss the Meaning, Liberating Lesson, and Application for Activation sections.

B. Connect these sections to the Aim for Change and the Keep in Mind verse.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Summarize the lesson.

B. Close with prayer.

Leviticus

LIVING AS GOD'S JUST PEOPLE Focal Verses • LEVITICUS 19:9-18, 33-37

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EVALUATE what it means to love one's neighbor as one's self; PERCEIVE ways to act with compassion; and PRAY to live a life of justice and compassion.

In Focus

In the March 6, 1994 issue of *Our Daily Bread*, Haddon W. Robinson wrote: "In his autobiography, Mahatma Gandhi [the preeminent political and spiritual leader of India during the Indian Independence Movement in the first half of the 20th century] wrote that during his student days, while living in Apartheid South Africa, he read the Gospels seriously and considered converting to Christianity. He believed that in the teachings of Jesus, he could find the solution to the 1000's year old caste system that was dividing the people of his native country, India. So one Sunday, he decided to attend services at a nearby church and talk to the minister about becoming a Christian. When he entered the sanctuary, however, a white usher refused to give him a seat and suggested he go worship with his own people. Gandhi left the church and never returned.

"If Christians have caste differences also," he said, "I might as well remain a Hindu."

"That usher's prejudice not only betrayed Jesus but also turned a person away from trusting Him as Savior."

Moreover, that usher's unchristian behavior may have changed the course of history and the destiny of a nation as Ghandis' spiritual influence ultimately impacted 100's of millions of people.

Our lesson today deals with loving and respecting people for whom God has made them, in His image, to be.



Keep in Mind

"But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:34, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV **Leviticus 19:9** And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.

10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.

13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.

15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou

stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

19:33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

34 But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

The People, Places, and Times

A Holy People. God's people have always had a special relationship with Him, one that is based on God's nature and character. When Israel agreed to be God's people and to obey His covenant—following His miraculous deliverance of them from the Egyptians—they bound themselves to ethical and religious responsibilities. These were delivered to them in the form of legal codes (i.e., the Covenant Code and the Holiness Code), which included both positive and negative injunctions. The vertical

relationship of God's people was outlined in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) and was fairly simple and straightforward—they were to have no other gods, they were not to use the Lord's name in vain, and they were to honor the Sabbath. The horizontal relationship was more complicated and came in the form of numerous specific injunctions, all provided as guiding examples and principles for how they were to govern themselves both at home and in the world.

Background

The Holiness Code of Leviticus 18:1–24:9 was given to the Israelites as a set of ethical and religious responsibilities, which includes both positive and negative injunctions. John Rogerson and Philip Davies write, “The basis of the regulations in 19:11–18 about fair dealing with one’s neighbours [sic] is not so much social solidarity as mutual religious responsibility” (145). A large part of Leviticus deals with priestly matters, while chapters 18 and 20 address sexual relations. Chapter 19, the focus of today’s lesson, deals primarily with Israel’s horizontal relationships with others, particularly addressing justice and fairness as examples of holiness.

At-A-Glance

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9–16)
2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (vv. 17–18)
3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34)
4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37)

In Depth

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9–16)

Jesus summarized the horizontal part of a proper relationship with God as “love thy neighbour as thyself” (see Matthew 22:38–39; Luke 10:27). Inherent in every aspect of God’s holy nature and His laws regarding holiness is His heart of love. Every injunction contained in the entire Sinai Tradition reflects God’s heart of love. Treating others right, or loving one’s neighbor, is the ultimate expression of social justice. Contained within this overriding principle are the following details:

Proper handling of the land (vv. 9–10).

Inherent in treating others right is the matter of strangers (e.g., travelers), but also includes the ubiquitous poor and those who perhaps once were better off but have fallen on hard times. By generously leaving the corners of one’s fields or vines for those less fortunate, the Israelites demonstrated a godly attitude toward others. Today, one’s surplus can be shared with others in any number of ways.

Honesty with everyone (vv. 11–13). It might seem obvious at first, but the injunctions against committing perjury, stealing, and lying (which parallel the third, eighth, and ninth commandments respectively) are sometimes harder to obey when the boundaries are less clear. When the cases are obvious, the choices between right and wrong are clear. But often deception, deceit, and fraud can take very subtle and more easily justified forms. The godly person avoids all such acts, however minor, that dishonor God and harm others.

Not taking advantage of others (vv. 14–16). Much like the previous injunctions, these specify taking advantage of the disadvantaged. In particular, singling out weak or easy “marks,” such as the handicapped or someone in a desperate situation, is injustice defined. The opposite type of person is also included—God’s holy people also are not to act dishonorably toward the privileged. An easy example would be filing unjust lawsuits against “deep pockets.” In all cases, embodying social justice excludes all forms of gossip, backstabbing, and slander, as these are harmful to others and dishonoring to God.

2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (vv. 17–18)

Don’t hate and don’t seek revenge. Jesus was very clear when He commanded in Matthew 5:43–44 to love even one’s enemies, which would more than encompass these verses speaking primarily about “neighbors.”

Jesus knew that murder started with hate and frequently originated with a grudge that morphed into vengeance. An injunction against this evil root would preclude much trouble, grief, and heartache, not to mention it would spare lives. God is fully capable of exercising vengeance, as eloquently captured in the prayer of Psalm 94:1, “O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.” In verse 3, Psalm 94 asks the timeless question, “How long shall the wicked triumph?” The answer is that however long it is, their judgment belongs to God and God alone.

Love your neighbor as yourself. The second greatest commandment is reiterated in both testaments and reinforced by Jesus and others (see More Light on the Text). This is presented as one of several positive injunctions, but it happens to capture the heart of the entire Holiness Code—in fact, all the law codes. Nothing better defines the child of God or social justice than loving one’s neighbor as one’s self.

3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34)

Strangers are sojourners (travelers). Strangers also may be newcomers or foreigners (aliens), and God’s children are to treat them as they would be treated—again invoking the second greatest commandment. This clarifies beyond question the New Testament rhetorical question, “Who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29). The answer is abundantly clear—everyone! None are excluded from the injunction, as clarified by the various specific examples. Whether they are visitors just passing through, settlers from another culture, or foreign outsiders, all are to be treated like blood relatives and loved as one’s self.

Israel once was a stranger in Egypt. Considering that the great Exodus from Egypt

had not happened very long before the time of these injunctions, the reminder should have been a very familiar example. Nothing drives a point home better than a personal example, especially a recent one. For Christians, the parallel is with their personal deliverance from the bondage of sin, which more often than not is remembered with great fondness, no matter how many years transpire. Occasionally, however, some need to be reminded that they once had been delivered from oppression and bondage, and they should not even consider mistreating others or inflicting them with any kind of injustice.

4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37)

Just scales, righteous dealings, and fairness toward all. Occasionally, some Old Testament laws translate perfectly into modern society without need for any kind of cultural filter. The injunction about unjust scales is preceded by a general command of not doing any unrighteousness in “judgment” or in weighing any matter, but specifically when scales determine values and deception is difficult to detect. This could find countless modern applications, such as gas stations not setting their pumps accurately; taxi drivers “running up the meter”; expense accounts or invoices being “padded”; accountants doing “creative” bookkeeping.

Obeying God’s just ordinances is evidence for righteousness. Even where there is an unbridgeable cultural distance between the laws of the “Sinai Tradition” and today, God’s people are still called to a standard of holiness measured against God’s own holiness. Nothing demonstrates personal righteousness more than being faithful to living in a way that honors God. Nothing more explicitly defines such a life as one that is committed to loving others through practical expressions of social justice.

Search the Scriptures

1. Where is the Holiness Code found in Scripture (Leviticus 19)?
2. Were the laws in the Holiness Code exhaustive?

Discuss the Meaning

Locate some of the examples given in the Holiness Code of specific examples of injustice. Try to find modern examples that would parallel the same principles. Now think about some of your personal experiences with injustice or unrighteousness. How did these experiences make you feel? Now contrast these memories and feelings with a memorable time when you witnessed holiness, justice, or righteousness. Finish by thinking about how you have treated others justly and unjustly.

Liberating Lesson

Often, the lofty matters of holiness and justice become elusive principles when confronted with complex, emotional, and controversial events and circumstances—such as the nation’s concern for border security and how that should be translated into laws and actions. As much as one wants to obey God’s Word and love one’s neighbor, how are those realities impacted when a neighbor is breaking the law? Should everyone crossing the border illegally be granted unlimited freedom to enter the U.S., even if some of them are criminals from the Mexican drug cartel, murderers, kidnappers, and drug and weapons dealers? How should the thinking of law-abiding Christians be balanced to reflect the concerns for the innocent poor seeking a better life as well as the safety of fellow American citizens? These are not easy questions or simple issues. God’s people must be careful to weigh (judge) the issues and allow themselves to be driven by principles of biblical justice and not let God’s definitions be confused by the vested interests of politics.

Application for Activation

God’s people are to be in the world but not of it. Theirs is a higher calling to the kingdom of God and to holy living as defined by Scripture—which translates to a timeless command to treat others as we would be treated, to love others as we would be loved, and a determination to be just and fair in all one’s human relationships. Surely, there are enough challenges in this one paragraph to last a lifetime.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37

Introduction

Just in this lesson, the phrase “I am the LORD” appears eight times. With other verses in chapter 19, it appears a total of 16 times and 162 times within the entire Bible. Within the lesson, the phrase expands in verses 10, 34, and 36 as “I am the LORD your God” (see also vv. 3, 4, 7, 24). All of the above are abbreviations

of the full first use in the chapter, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2), which serves as the introduction to the chapter and this lesson. These words are the simple but all-sufficient reason that Israel (and the church) is to obey. This portion of Scripture is all about God’s holiness and His requirements for our holiness, and thus has been called the “Holiness Code.”

The chapter spells out Israel’s ethical and religious responsibilities. Some injunctions are negative (to be avoided) while others are positive (to be embraced), which together “say both yes to what God requires and no to what God forbids,” in the words of Samuel Balentine (160, emphasis added). As a whole, this chapter underscores and elaborates the Ten Commandments (Decalogue) given to Moses in Exodus 20:2–17 and reiterated in Deuteronomy 5:6–21.

9 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. 10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.

Jesus quoted from the Law to confirm that the greatest command is vertical, to love God (Deuteronomy 6:5, right after the great “*shema*” verse in 6:4), while the second greatest command is horizontal, to love one’s neighbor (see commentary here on Leviticus 19:18 and 19:34; also Matthew 22:38–39; Luke 10:27). Virtually all of Leviticus 19 deals with the horizontal, which includes proper handling of the land in order to care for the needs of the poor. In 19:10, the Hebrew word for “poor” is *‘aniy* (aw-NEE) and has been consistently interpreted among most versions. The Hebrew word for “stranger” is *ger* (gare), but this word

has been interpreted as “foreigner,” “alien,” and “sojourner.” The point is to *not* pick the fields or vines clean and to *not* think only of oneself or one’s own profits. The point is to act generously with every harvest and crop and to consciously think of others, especially those less fortunate, like the poor and those who are away from home—the travelers—and to care about their needs in a practical and tangible way.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another. 12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. 13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

This part of the Holiness Code of Leviticus is cast in the negative, by way of prohibitions, just as there were both positive and negative injunctions in the Decalogue. It is all about social justice, which involves much more than economic justice, as some might think incorrectly. To steal, deceive, or lie is squarely denounced in the eighth and ninth commandments (do not steal and do not bear false witness), but in this context, it seems to apply especially to the poor. Later verses in this lesson directly include all who are in a state of vulnerability and indirectly include everyone. Ultimately, the prohibition is against deception and deceit of any kind, against anyone, for any reason. Paralleling the third commandment (do not take the name of the Lord in vain) with different words in Leviticus 19:12 refers to using God’s name in an oath that one does not intend to keep. Today’s swearing on a Bible in a courtroom, but planning to commit perjury, specifically would violate this injunction. Dishonesty compromises both the individual and the entire human community, and it is contrary to and destructive of God’s holiness.

Oppression of any kind does not reflect God's holiness, which demands a higher standard and values even the "least of these" as the same thing as serving God Himself (Matthew 25:31–40). In Leviticus 19:13, the Hebrew word for "neighbour" is *rea'* (**RAY**-ah) and ultimately refers to everyone (see commentary here on verses 18 and 34).

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD. 15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour. 16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

None are more vulnerable than the handicapped, and even in ancient times, it was clear that God would not tolerate injustice of any kind inflicted upon them. In fact, this specific injunction is followed by the familiar and powerful rationalization, as if to say, "Do this, just because I the Lord say it." Verse 15 is a more general reference; as if verse 14 needed another blanket for those who might find exceptions to "do no unrighteousness" of any kind in judgment (negative injunction)—whether it involves the poor or the rich—but rather "judge" your neighbor righteously (positive injunction). "Judge" comes from the Hebrew word *shaphat* (shaw-**FAT**) and can mean to govern, vindicate, or punish, but it can also mean to either decide a controversy or enter into one. "Judgment" in Hebrew is *mishpat* (mish-**PAWT**) and means a just ordinance; it is a little more specific (with the "just" element) than "statute" (see commentary on v. 37). The context of this entire section speaks to men acting like wolves who single out the weak, or sickly, or those most likely to be easy marks. A

child of the holy God is not to do these things—or risk God's anger.

Slander is another specific type of evil or injustice, which in Ezekiel 22:9 is connected to murder. In modern times, the legal definition of slander is publishing something about someone else that is not true and doing it with malice. The biblical injunction refers to gossip, which can involve either true or untrue statements that are spread perniciously. Because it causes so much damage, and because it is so far from holiness, slander or gossip is singled out for prohibition in Scripture (see also Jeremiah 6:28; 9:4; Proverbs 11:13; 20:19). Gossip or slander also violates the eighth commandment.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. 18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

In Matthew 5:43, Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:17–18 (part of the Mosaic Law), understanding clearly that hate in one's heart is what leads to murder. Thus, hate has always been condemned in both testaments of Scripture, with or without the act of murder. The specific expressions of revenge and bearing a grudge in verse 18 are a sharper focus of the general injunction against hatred. Other parts of the Old Testament zoom in even further on the subject of revenge, specifying repeatedly that God alone has the right, and God alone is able to exact perfect justice, regardless of the severity of the act or actions that inspired the hate and revenge (see Jeremiah 15:15; Nahum 1:2; Psalm 94:1). It is common knowledge that resentment and anger fester and invariably result in unholy expressions and deeds. It is also commonly known that such attitudes often harm the bearers more than their targets.

Juxtaposed against, and antithetical to, all forms of injustice, hatred, and evil, love stands as the quintessential solution and antidote. In Leviticus 19:18 the Hebrew word for “love” is *’ahab* (AH-hab). The do’s and don’ts of loving one’s neighbor could have been listed by the thousands, but this list in Leviticus, expanded from the Decalogue in Exodus, should have served as sufficient extension to make the clear point that love for God translates into love for neighbors, and that love does not inflict injustice, hatred, vengeance, and so on. Jesus quoted from the now famous citation of the second greatest commandment, captured by all three Synoptic Gospel writers (Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27), Paul (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14), and James (James 2:8). Again, the only rationale needed is that God is God.

19:33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. 34 But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

As stated, the Hebrew word for “stranger” is *ger* (gare) and can include a sojourner; in verse 33, the phrase “stranger sojourn” is interpreted from the Hebrew *guwr* (goor). Thus, the phrase easily could have been a bit of humorous alliteration (i.e., spelled phonetically, “the *ger guwr*”).

It is easy to see the proper way to treat strangers in a brief sentence: “Love them as you love yourself.” In a literal sense, the Israelites had been “stranger sojourners” in Egypt not long before, so the reference in verse 34 to their former place of slavery was appropriate and the connection vivid. God loved the Israelites when they were sojourners in the foreign land of Egypt, and He also loved them when they rebelled against Him and practiced evil. Likewise, He loves us while we have been strangers and sinners to Him.

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. 36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.

’Evel (EH-vel) is the Hebrew word for “unrighteousness,” and it sounds remarkably like our word “evil.” Indeed, the meaning is synonymous with injustice, iniquity, and wickedness, and it can include violent deeds of injustice. In verse 36 the Hebrew word for “just” is *tsedeq* (TSEH-dek) and means justice, rightness, and righteousness—the exact opposite of *evel* from verse 35. Few Old Testament theological concepts emerge quite as strongly as the twin themes of justice and righteousness (see Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 16:5; Amos 5:24). We are to embody or model our love and obedience to God through our love for and service to others, without exception.

Jesus further underscored the Levitical amplifications of the Decalogue by removing all listed specifics and replacing them with an even more impossible-to-achieve holiness—namely that to simply think about acting unjustly would make one guilty of the whole law (Matthew 5:22). In contrast to unjust weights used in unrighteousness, those in Leviticus 19:36 who use “just weights” both exercise justice and are evidence of righteousness.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.

Again, the word “judgments” in Hebrew is *mishpat* and means just ordinances, an equivalent of “statutes,” although that word in the Hebrew is *choq* (khoke), which refers to God’s laws in this use, but does not contain the clear, “just” element of *mishpat*. We must obey God’s commands!

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Say It Correctly

Decalogue. DEK-uh-log.
Ephah. EE-fuh, EE-fah.
Leviticus. Lih-VI-tih-kuhs.
Zechariah. Zek’uh-RI-ah.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 15

Genesis 43–45

DAY 16

Genesis 46–47

DAY 17

Genesis 48–50

DAY 18

Exodus 1–3

DAY 19

Exodus 4–6

DAY 20

Exodus 7–9

DAY 21

Exodus 10–12

Notes

Teaching Tips

September 24
Bible Study Guide 4

Words You Should Know

A. Mixt (Mixed) *Multitude* (Numbers 11:4) 'acpecuph (Heb.)—A collection or collected multitude—a mass or crowd.

B. Manna (v.6) *man* (Heb.)—The bread from the sky that fed the Israelites, who wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Complaints and Cravings. When people experience difficulties, they often forget their blessings. What happens when we forget our blessings during times of trouble? When God brought the people out of slavery in Egypt and provided for them in the desert, Moses and the people complained repeatedly.

A. Write down any words, concepts, or personal thoughts that will help reinforce this lesson on complaining.

B. Prepare for the lesson by reading today's Bible Study Guide in its entirety.

C. Take notes highlighting points within the lesson that specifically address the AIM for Change learning objectives and the Unifying Principle.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Concentrate on the AIM for Change as you begin the lesson in prayer.

B. As an icebreaker, ask the class: What are some common things most people complain about? Discuss the answers.

C. Ask for a volunteer to briefly summarize (or read) today's In Focus story. Based upon

the In Focus story and the list of common complaints most people have, pose the question found in the Unifying Principle to the class.

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Assess the student's knowledge of today's Scripture text by having the class answer the Search the Scriptures questions.

B. Provide the backdrop for today's lesson by giving an overview of The People, Places, and Times; Background; and Focal Verses sections.

C. Divide the class into two groups. Assign each group an In Depth section and two Discuss the Meaning questions to read, analyze, and answer. Allow each group 10 to 15 minutes of discussion time. Monitor each group's progress.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Initiate an open discussion allowing class members to share their thoughts from the In Depth and Discuss the Meaning discussions.

B. Highlight the three points from the Liberating Lesson section designed to reinforce the Unifying Principle for today's lesson.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Ask the students to consider the questions in the Application for Activation section.

B. Instruct the students to partner with another member of the class. Have the students tell their partner one thing they complain about. Have them pray that their complaining be replaced with words of praise and encouragement.

Numbers

PEOPLE GRUMBLE

Focal Verses • NUMBERS 11:1–6, 10–15

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: EXAMINE the Israelites' grumbling about life in the wilderness; RECOGNIZE that grumbling reflects an ungrateful heart; and GIVE THANKS for the blessings in our lives.

In Focus

After seven years on the job, Regina took a chance and interviewed for a management position. The International Finance Department position paid several thousand dollars more per year than her current position. If offered the position, she would be making enough money to pay off her credit cards, student loan, and buy the new house she and her husband were believing for. Regina prayed she would get the position.

One afternoon, the vice president of finance called Regina into his office. He told Regina that she had the most impressive interview of all the candidates who applied, for the position. Overjoyed, Regina thanked Mr. Warren and left his office with a huge smile on her face—her prayers were answered.

After several months in her new position, Regina sat in her office talking to Michelle, a colleague from the Marketing Department, where she formerly worked.

"Girl, this job is working my last nerve! My boss is overbearing and the people in this department work you like a slave. They expect you to make bricks with no straw! All I do is go to work and come home. My social life is totally dead."

Tired of hearing her complain, Michelle said, "What about the beautiful weather we're having?"

"What?" Regina responded. "What does the weather have to do with work?"

"Nothing!" Michelle said, "That's the point; I can't wrap my mind around the fact that you're complaining about your new position, not to mention the hefty increase in pay that came with it. You asked God to give you a way out of debt, and He did," Michelle said. "My prayer is that you stop complaining and realize that God has blessed you. You'd better be careful, girl. God is not pleased."

Today's lesson teaches us to choose thanksgiving over complaining and grumbling.



Keep in Mind

"And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Numbers 11:4–6, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

2 And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.

3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?

5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me?

12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat.

14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

15 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

The People, Places, and Times

Moses. His name means “drawn out of the water.” He was chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, where they were enslaved and oppressed.

Taberah. A place near the wilderness of Paran, whose name means “burning.” It is the place where God punished the Israelites for murmuring and complaining about only having manna to eat.

Cloud By Day and Pillar of Fire By Night. The cloud by day and pillar of fire by night were the manifestations of God’s direction and His will. When the cloud by day lifted, the people were to follow it. When the cloud settled, it was God’s will that the people stop and set up camp. The pillar of fire by night was a sign of God’s protection during the darkness of night.

Background

After their long enslavement, as they followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the Children of Israel left Egypt and traveled from place to place. The book of Numbers chronicles the story of the 40 years during which the Children of Israel wandered in the desert before entering the Promised Land. After two years camped in the Sinai desert, God lifted the cloud and the Israelites left the wilderness of Sinai. They followed the cloud until it rested in the wilderness of Paran. Today’s text finds the Israelites, only three days into their journey, mumbling and complaining about the hardships they have to endure while traveling in the desert.

At-A-Glance

1. The People Complain
(Numbers 11:1–6)
2. Moses Complains (11:10–15)

In Depth

1. The People Complain (Numbers 11:1–6)

The Children of Israel began to complain only three days into their journey (10:32ff). Angered by their ungrateful attitude, God began to consume the Israelites' camp with fire, and many people were killed. The people looked to Moses and began to cry out for help. Moses prayed for the people, and when God heard his prayers, the fire stopped. Moses then named the place Taberah, which means "burning." The place served as a reminder of God's burning anger against the Israelites for their ungratefulness.

After the fire of judgment was quenched, the spirit of complaining returned, as the "mixed multitude" that followed the Israelites out of Egypt grew tired of eating manna. The Israelites quickly joined in and began complaining that they, too, were tired of eating manna every day. They longed for the days back in Egypt when they freely ate fish, cucumbers, melons, etc. (v. 5).

Even though the smell of fire was still in their nostrils, the Israelites complained about their situation. How quickly they had forgotten their enslavement! They reminisced as though they had lived as princes and princesses in Egypt. When faced with hardships, they quickly forgot about God's provisions and began to grumble and complain yet again.

God is able to provide more than we can imagine. The daily provision (manna) from heaven simply exemplified the provisions and the compassion that God had for His people. If the Israelites had prayed to God instead of murmuring, what might the result have been?

When we complain, it's an indication that we do not trust God. Reflect on your personal experiences. During times of trials, do you forget God's blessings? Do you complain? Are you unhappy because God has not blessed you with more? Consider all that God has done for you. God gives you life, health, strength, family, employment, and many other blessings—too numerous to count. Because we are busy focusing on things we don't have, we appear ungrateful for God's blessings. After just two short years in the wilderness, the Israelites had forgotten that they were enslaved for more than four hundred years when God delivered and saved them for a purpose.

Turn your complaints into praise. Consider praying instead of murmuring. Know that your wilderness experiences are moments to praise and thank God for everything He has provided in your life. By faith, ask God to provide for your needs and quietly wait for God's answer. When we take our concerns to God, He hears us and does something about it. Do not lose sight of God's hand in your life by focusing your attention on things that are not important. Allow God's blessings to lead your life, as you live each moment with a grateful heart.

2. Moses Complains (11:10–15)

God's servant, Moses, did his best for the good of the people. But when Moses heard the people complaining, he could not help but become agitated by their behavior. After all, God had blessed the nation by delivering them from slavery, directing them through the wilderness with a cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, and providing them with daily food from heaven. How could the people be so ungrateful? What more could they want?

Moses did the only thing he knew how to do; he took his concerns to God. Moses knew he was God's man and his divine commission obligated him to intercede on behalf of the

Israelites. But he was so overwhelmed by the people's complaints that he, himself, began to grumble and complain—so much so that he said he would rather God kill him than make him continue to deal with the ungrateful ramblings of the people (v. 15).

It's amazing how easy it is for someone else to make our life a living hell and cause us to forget God's divine providence. Moses was God's hand-picked servant and yet he would rather die than continue to intercede on behalf of an ungrateful people. During their time in desert the Children of Israel witnessed numerous miracles firsthand. Yet they readily joined the "mixture" in complaining when things got a little rough. How about you? Rebellion against God is a serious offense. Because of their ungratefulness, the generation of Israelites that rebelled against God never got to see the Promised Land; they died in the wilderness. The Bible tells us that when we are saved, we are granted full access to all the valuable resources God has to offer. God lavishes His resources on us "according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians. 1:7). As believers, it is our job to appreciate the good things God has provided and continually give Him praise for our many blessings.

Search the Scriptures

1. Why was God displeased with the Israelites (Numbers 11:1)?
2. How did God respond to the Israelites (v. 1)?
3. When God sent the fire, what did the people do (v. 2)?
4. Why did they name the place Taberah, and what does it mean (v. 3)?
5. Why was Moses displeased (v. 10)?
6. Who was this "mixture" that followed the Israelites out of Egypt (vv. 10–15)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. In the opening verses of Numbers 11, we read that the Israelites complained often.

They forgot that God delivered them out of the hands of their oppressors. They had forgotten the numerous things God had done to provide for them and keep them during their wilderness journey. In many ways, we are no different from the Israelites. God blesses us each day, yet we complain about things we don't have or think we deserve to have. We become frustrated when life doesn't proceed as we have planned, and constantly grumble and complain. Discuss what it means to trust in God's provision, even when you feel like God has abandoned your cause.

2. The fact that the fire of God is sometimes harsh offers us insight into the severity with which God treats sin. Discuss a time in your life when you felt the fire of God. How did you react during this time of pressure? Did you gripe or complain or did you pray and wait on God's response?

3. The discontent of the "mixture" (v. 4) greatly influenced the Israelites' attitude. Likewise, the Israelites' complaining affected Moses' attitude. What effect do other people's negative attitudes or their complaining have on your behavior? Do you join in and start to complain as well? Or do you offer words of encouragement and gratitude?

Liberating Lesson

Ours is a society of complainers. With very little effort, just about everyone can find something to complain about every day: the traffic is bad, the schools are horrible, gas prices are high, or the crime rate is up. The list is endless. The Bible says that God is displeased when we grumble and complain. First, because it reflects ingratitude, we must recognize that complaining is a sin.

Second, adopt a positive attitude. Things happen: the train made you late for work; your husband forgot to pay the light bill and now the lights are cut off; your son got into a fight at school and is suspended for three days. While

these are frustrating things, our frustration is not final.

Finally, pray for change. Begin to pray that grumbling and complaining among your family, your church, your community, your neighborhood, and your workplace be replaced with words of encouragement and thanksgiving.

Application for Activation

The reality is that God does not change; He is faithful, omnipotent, omnipresent, and immutable. Do you find yourself complaining about situations instead of focusing on God? Do you need to recommit to following God faithfully? Ask God to forgive your complaining and negativity. Make a decision to focus on God, stop complaining, and begin to pray to God, who is able to answer your cries for help, according to His plans for your life.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15

1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

The Children of Israel were on the march. They left the Sinai and were moving steadily toward the Promised Land. There was a sense of unity and purpose as they progressed forward. Then after a short sojourn in the desert, they began to complain. The Hebrew word *anan* (aw-NAN) refers to murmuring and complaining. It helps us see a consistent attitude of ingratitude on display. People complain when they are uncomfortable, and nothing makes people more uncomfortable than not having the basic needs of food, clothing, or shelter met. Up to this point in their journey, God had been sufficient to meet the needs of His chosen people. Now, however, and for the first time, the people complained that God was insufficient to meet their needs. So because they were uncomfortable, instead of glorifying God, they grumbled.

In response to the complaints of the multitude, God became angry. His anger was displayed by fire that burned only at the outer edges of the encampment. This display of holy anger was sufficient. The people got the message and sought out Moses, whom they asked to intercede with God on their behalf. Perhaps a little discomfort was better than death.

2 And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched. 3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.

What Moses said to God is not reported. Perhaps he simply reminded God that the Children of Israel had been in captivity for a

long time and were only now learning how to trust and follow the living God. Certainly, he appealed to God to be merciful to the people, especially because they were now terrified and fearful for their lives. God listened to what Moses had to say and stayed His anger. The fires were quenched, (Heb. *shaqa'*, shaw-**KAH**, which means “to sink down, subside”) and the people were saved. As a result, the place was named Taberah in remembrance of God’s fiery response to ingratitude. The episode helped the emerging nation understand that Moses truly was God’s anointed. His voice was heard when he prayed. The people also learned for the first time, if He deemed it necessary, God would punish them. Complaining was not the way to retain God’s favor and blessing. But God responded favorably to the prayer of a righteous man.

4 And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? 5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick:

The sun scorched the desert by day and its absence chilled the desert by night. It was not a hospitable environment. Water was in short supply and the food God had provided was boring. Manna was no longer sweet, but rather a routine meal. Before long, some of the people, who were not descendants of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, but who had simply joined themselves to the Israelites as they left Egypt, began to want the pleasures and comforts of the life they had left behind. The “mixt multitude that was among them” was not quiet about their “lusting” (Heb. *ta'avah*, **TA**-av-ah) for the good life in Egypt. They now had a strong desire and an intense longing for their old life. Their complaints soon infected the Children of Israel, who also began to want the more “pleasurable” conditions of

Egypt. They wanted to eat meat or fish and anything other than manna. In their wanting, however, the Children of Israel distorted the memories of their reality in Egypt. Their description of their diet gives the impression that they were eating like those who were not slaves. In reality, in Egypt, they were a captive people in bondage. In Egypt, they were slaves.

6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.

For a year, God had been providing a miraculous substance for food for the multitude, but now they were tired of it. They refer to their souls (Heb. *nephesh*, **NEH**-fesh—in this context “soul” refers to life or to one’s self), their very lives as dried away, (Heb. *yabesh*, yaw-**BASHE**). Day after day, God had provided nothing but the same dull substance to eat. The Children of Israel didn’t even know what the substance was; they only knew they were sick of it. There is something about human nature that craves variety.

11:10 Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased.

The joy that the crowd had known during their trek out of Egypt was gone. No longer were the people remembering the strong hand with which God had delivered them from slavery. They had turned their focus inward and away from God. As a result, they stood at the door of their tents and tearfully lamented (Heb. *bakah*, baw-kaw’—“to cry, bewail, shed tears”) their present state. Their ingratitude angered God once more and this time angered Moses as well. A crisis had arisen almost as quickly as the previous circumstance of ingratitude, and the tension was higher than before.

11 And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? 12 Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers?

In his anger, Moses prayed. He wanted to know what he had done that would cause God to put the burden of millions of ungrateful, complaining people on him. Moses had learned to trust God to be sufficient to meet every need, but the people had gotten on his nerves and he had grown tired of them. Moses indicated that he felt afflicted (Heb. *ra'a'*, raw-AH). In this context, it connotes the idea of being injured by having to contend with an ungrateful group of people. It is important to remember here that Moses was dealing with a nation on the move; this was not merely the grumbling of a few hundred people. He was dealing with thousands of people grumbling against him and God. Moses did not ask God to give them more variety in their diet, something God probably would have done had He been asked. Rather, Moses began to follow the pattern of the people and complain about his situation. Moses' complaint was not one of ingratitude. His complaint was one of frustration. He had grown to love some of the men that he had seen standing at the door of their tents crying, and there was absolutely nothing Moses could do to resolve their sadness. Moses' sense of affliction was tied to his helplessness as much as his frustration with the constant grumbling of the people.

13 Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. 14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. 15 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

Moses had been God's instrument for doing the miraculous to get Pharaoh to release the Children of Israel from their captivity. He had been used to the miraculous to deliver them across the Red Sea, but now he was frustrated with the people and there was no thought of miracles. He had not asked God for anything at this point; he just wanted to complain. The lack of support and gratitude from the masses had caused Moses, the leader, to lament his position. Rather than interceding on behalf of the people, Moses looked inward and complained. His complaint was one that reflected a sense of tremendous inadequacy. He knew he could provide nothing for the people, and the burden of their concerns made him focus more on venting his frustration than seeking God's tremendous ability to provide.

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Say It Correctly

Taberah. tab-ĒRĀ.

Daily Bible Readings

DAY 22

Exodus 13–15

DAY 23

Exodus 16–18

DAY 24

Exodus 19–21

DAY 25

Exodus 22–24

DAY 26

Exodus 25–27

DAY 27

Exodus 28–29

DAY 28

Exodus 30–32

Notes
