

FRESH WATER

WEEKLY THEME:

LIVING AS GOD'S JUST PEOPLE

BASED ON:

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37

LESSON AIM:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

KNOW: What it means to love one's neighbor as one's self.

FEEL: Reflect on ways to act with compassion.

DO: Pray to live a life of justice and compassion.

TARGET

God instructs His people regarding gathering gleanings and how to relate to foreigners. A number of commandments are given and an imperative to keep the decrees and follow the laws is stressed (Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37).

TOOLS

Student magazines, Bibles, and pencils

OPEN THE LESSON

Ask your Jammers the following questions:

1. What is your definition of the word "neighbor"?
2. Do you consider yourself to be a compassionate person? Explain.

REALITY CHECK

Fresh Water

The youth of Faith Christian Assembly filled the church's gymnasium for a special presentation. The presentation was about donating to help the Sudanese in Africa dig wells for fresh water.

"Can you imagine having no fresh water in your community?" asked the woman featured in the DVD. "Can you imagine thousands of people dying because there is no fresh water?" The DVD showed young mothers and their children walking for miles with large containers on their heads to fill with fresh water, then walking miles back home with the heavy containers.

Jasmine was immediately overwhelmed by all she saw and heard. She wanted to do what she could to help. She wanted to take the lead for the campaign. The name of the campaign was "Fresh

Water for My African Neighbors." Right after the presentation, Jasmine found the Youth Director, Mrs. Jones, and told her she wanted to spearhead the campaign.

"This is exciting, Jasmine!" Mrs. Jones said as she handed pamphlets to Jasmine. "Here, take this information home and tell me your thoughts later."

After reading the material, Jasmine told her mom about the campaign. "Wow, Mom! All we have to do is sacrifice for two weeks and drink nothing but water. And the money we would have spent on soda, juice, and sport drinks will be set aside to donate to the campaign."

"That's great!" Mom said.

Two weeks later the "Fresh Water for My African Neighbors" campaign raised over \$5,000 to send to Sudan. Jasmine was overwhelmed with joy.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What presentation were the youth watching?
2. Who was interested in leading the campaign?
3. Do you think you can change the world with one act of justice and compassion? Explain.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES IN MY HEART

Help Jammers memorize the verse by encouraging them to create a rap or poem! Every other line of their rap should be the Memory Verse. For example: God created me from love/Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD/His

love is divine and comes from above/Love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD! (Leviticus 19:18, NIV).

WORD!

Use “Target” to help you teach this lesson. Research and discuss the reason for leaving the edges of one’s fields unharvested to provide gleanings. Some examples may be found in “Sidebar.”

SIDEBAR

Living as God's Just People

Who is your neighbor? Jammers will read a perspective on who their neighbors are. They will understand that a neighbor isn't just the person next door but the world at large.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

How to Be a Loving Neighbor

Jammers will examine the “Be’s” of a loving neighbor.

1. **Be at peace with everyone.** Always endeavor to keep peace with your neighbor.
2. **Be a good neighbor.** Try to live in harmony with your neighbor.
3. **Be an example of Jesus in the earth.** Let your neighbor see the Christ in you.
4. **Be compassionate.** Do not hesitate to help those in need.

GOT IT!

A. Justice By Caring

Jammers will use Word! to help them find the opposite of the commandments in today's Scripture lesson. The first one has been done for them.

1. Do not lie: **Tell the truth**
2. Do not deceive one another: **Be honest**
3. Do not curse: **Bless**
4. Do not hate: **Love**

B. Neighbors Decree

Students will divide into two groups. Group One will develop a list that depicts the habits of a good neighbor while Group Two will list the habits of a bad neighbor. Then the groups will act out the traits of a good neighbor and those of a bad neighbor, and discuss how to respond to each.

JAM SESSION

Acting with Compassion

Every human wants to feel valued and significant. Everyone wants to be treated with love, justice, and generosity. God says to love everyone just as you love yourself.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

JAM ON IT!

Love For All!

Jammers will research and locate a campaign to participate in that will show acts of compassion and help their fellow citizens. They will share their findings with the class next week.

NOTES

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, leaving small margins at the top and bottom. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

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 Gandhi's 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.

Obedying 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:

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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

CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION!

WEEKLY THEME:

PEOPLE GRUMBLE

BASED ON:

Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15, NIV

LESSON AIM:

By the end of this lesson, students will:

KNOW: Examine the reasons the Israelites' grumbled about life in the wilderness.

FEEL: Understand the complexity of giving and receiving, and wants and needs.

DO: Begin to recognize and be grateful for God's blessings.

TARGET

The children of Israel complain about their hardships. Moses goes to God on behalf of the people each time they complain (Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15).

TOOLS

Student magazines, Bibles, pencils, index cards

OPEN THE LESSON

Ask Jammers to think about a time when they had to deal with a change they didn't like. Did they respond by complaining? If so, ask them how they could have acted differently.

REALITY CHECK

Can't Get No Satisfaction!

Walter and Aram walked from school into the new subdivision where Aram's parents had just bought a new home. The lawns were thick and green, and Aram's home was beautiful. On the way into the house, Aram pet his two dogs and went straight to the refrigerator.

"Hey, man, you want something to drink?" Aram had asked his mom to buy some soda and pizza, and to rent some movies for the night. He did not see the soda. "Man! They forgot my soda!" Aram said, pulling out a pitcher of sweet tea his mother had made.

"Hey, Aram. Can I use your phone to call my mom? She's going to need to speak to one of your parents."

"Yeah. Hold on. Mom? Moooooooooommm? Where is my soda?" Aram went off shouting through the house.

Just then, Aram's father came into the house from the back yard. "Hey! You must be Walter. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing well, Mr. Johnson. May I use the phone, and could you speak with my mother when I call her to let her know I arrived safely?"

"No problem, just pass me the phone after you call her."

After Walter called his mother, he asked Mr. Johnson if he could sit at the kitchen table to do his homework. Aram had already headed upstairs to set up the video game system so he could play his new games.

Mr. Johnson watched the young man take supplies from his backpack. "Walter, I hope you rub off on my son." He went to the stairway. "Aram, you come on down here and do your homework with your guest. Then you can go upstairs and play."

After the boys finished their homework, they went upstairs to play video games. Immediately, Aram started complaining.

"Man, my parents said we're having spaghetti tonight. We were supposed to have pizza! I can't believe it. They didn't get the movies I asked for, and now they say we're going to play Monopoly as a family—with my sister! This is horrible!"

"Spaghetti? I love spaghetti! Monopoly is fun!" Walter grinned. "And your sister isn't that bad."

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Did Aram have a right to be upset at his parents?
2. Did Aram have a right to complain?

**PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES
IN MY HEART**

Recite this verse: “The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!’” (Numbers 11:4–6, NIV).

WORD!

Use “Target” to help you teach this lesson as the students take turns reading the Scripture aloud.

SIDEBAR**What More Could You Want?**

Jammers learn how Moses had to encourage the people.

EXPLORE THE MEANING**How to Be Satisfied**

Jammers learn four different ways to be satisfied.

1. Make new friends.
2. Learn to live with less.
3. Use your extra money to buy something for someone in need.
4. Visit a children’s hospital.

GOT IT!**A. True or False**

Use “Word!” to help you with this activity. Circle True or False.

1. When the Israelites complained, God felt bad for them. **FALSE**
2. The Israelites missed the food they ate while in Egypt. **TRUE**
3. The Israelites wanted pizza, potatoes, and strawberries. **FALSE**
4. When Moses heard the people complaining, he began to agree; he missed Egypt too. **FALSE**

5. Moses asked God to kill him if he was going to have to continue to deal with the Israelites and their complaining all by himself. **TRUE**

B. What Is Valuable to You?

Give each student five index cards. On the white side of each index card have each student write a number between one and five. On the other side of each card, they should write something that is valuable to them. They write the most valuable thing on the #5 card, and their least valuable on the #1. Jammers then trade cards with everyone until they each have a # 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 card, only one of which may be their own original card. When everyone is done trading, make lists of each thing written for # 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1.

JAM SESSION**Truly Blessed**

Jammers learn the similarities between the Israelites and Aram. Neither of them was able to focus on the tremendous blessings God had given them, because they were focused only on what they didn’t have.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION**JAM ON IT!****Take Inventory**

Jammers will take inventory of things they’ve received and then take inventory of true blessings they have in their lives. Then they will make a comparison between both lists.

NOTES

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:

Sources:

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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