

THAT'S LOVE

WEEKLY THEME:

LIVING AS GOD'S JUST PEOPLE

BASED ON:

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37

KEEP IN MIND:

Leviticus 19:34

FROM YOUR BIBLE:

The Scripture is in the student lesson under “Learning From God.”

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

During this lesson, Juniors will know what it means to love one's neighbor as one's self, reflect on ways to act with compassion, and ask God to help them live a life of justice and compassion.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

1. Suggested Materials—Bibles, student magazines, paper, pencils, and two or more sets of index cards with the words from the “Keep In Mind” verse written on them

2. Lesson Background—For background information, read Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37. Be sure to read the student lesson. Also, see Bible Study Guide 3 in the white pages of this book, as well as in *Precepts For Living*®, UMI's Annual Sunday School Lesson Commentary.

OPEN THE LESSON

Get Started Activity

Review last week's “Doing My Part” activity. Begin class today by interviewing the person in your church in charge of the food pantry or outreach ministry so Juniors can be aware how the church shows compassion to those in need.

What's It All About?

Teaching time about 4–8 minutes

Student Story: That's Love

Mom packed a lunch for Jerome and his dad to take on their Saturday trip to the big city. They were going to stop by a big research library so Dad could get some books he needed for a class he was taking. Then they were going to picnic in the park before visiting some museums.

Jerome was very happy when it was time for lunch; he had worked up quite an appetite. However, as Jerome pulled out his sandwich, he saw a young boy sitting on a bench, watching him as he took a bite. He heard the boy say to the woman sitting next to him, “I'm hungry.”

Jerome sat for a minute and then asked his dad if he could offer the little boy one of the extra sandwiches Mom packed. Dad smiled. “That's very kind, Jerome,” he said. “Perhaps they're both hungry and would like to share what we have.” They both stood and headed toward the bench.

What is your attitude about sharing what you have with others? Some Juniors may not have much to give when it comes to food or money. What other ways can someone your age show compassion and kindness? How is compassion related to justice?

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

Learning From God

Teaching time about 10–15 minutes

Begin by asking volunteers to explain the connection between godly justice and caring. Then, have students read an act of compassion contained in the passage and tell how Juniors can apply that act to their lives. Finally, have students discuss why children of God are specifically instructed to love others as we love ourselves. Why are they not only instructed to love others? What does this tell them about the importance of love and compassion?

What I Have Learned

Teaching time about 5–8 minutes

Several actions are listed. Are they acceptable or not acceptable to God?

1. Stealing
Acceptable **Not acceptable**
2. Being honest
Acceptable Not acceptable
3. Sharing with others
Acceptable Not acceptable
4. Spreading rumors
Acceptable **Not acceptable**
5. Feeling hatred toward some
Acceptable **Not acceptable**
6. Loving others
Acceptable Not acceptable

Juniorway® Bible Activities

For additional material, see the activity for this lesson in the *JBA® (Juniorway® Bible Activities)* book.

Keep In Mind

Teaching time about 2–3 minutes

Recite the verse several times aloud. Then, have students work in teams to put the index cards you've provided in the correct order. The students will indicate they are done by reciting the verse again as a group.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Choosing What's Best

Teaching time about 4–8 minutes

Juniors are instructed to describe how they can show compassion to the four groups of people listed. Allow volunteers to read their answers.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Doing My Part

Teaching time about 2–3 minutes

Juniors are challenged to compose a prayer that asks God to help them live a life of compassion and that asks God to show compassion to others.

NOTES

[illegible]

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.

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:

Sources:

- Balentine, Samuel E. *Leviticus. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. 2nd ed. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2002. 160–67.
- Bellender, W. H., Jr. *Leviticus, Numbers. Old Testament Series. New International Biblical Commentary*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. 116–21.
- Bible Pronunciation Chart. Better Days Are Coming.com. <http://www.betterdaysarecoming/bible/pronunciation.html> (accessed January 29, 2011).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003. 67–74.

Harris, R. Laird. *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers. The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990. 604–09.

Hebrew and Greek Lexicons. Bible Study Tools.com. [http:// www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons](http://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons) (accessed November 8, 2010).

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Merriam-Webster, Inc. [http:// www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com) (accessed November 8, 2010).

Old and New Testament Concordances, Lexicons, Dictionaries, Commentaries, Images, and Bible Versions. Blue Letter Bible. org. <http://www.blueletterbible.org/> (accessed July 10, 2010).

Passage Lookup. Bible Gateway.com. <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage> (accessed January 17, 2011).

Robinson, Haddon W. "A Prejudiced Usher." *Our Daily Bread*. March 6, 1994. <http://www.odt.org/1994/03/06/aprejudiced-usher/> (accessed January 29, 2011).

Rogerson, John, and Philip Davies. *The Old Testament World*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989. 242–45.

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

SO UNGRATEFUL

WEEKLY THEME:

PEOPLE GRUMBLE

BASED ON:

Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15

KEEP IN MIND:

Numbers 11:4–6

FROM YOUR BIBLE:

The Scripture text is in the student lesson under “Learning From God.”

PURPOSE OF THE LESSON

By the end of this lesson, the Juniors will examine the Israelites’ grumbling about life in the wilderness; recognize the complexity of giving and receiving; and give thanks for the blessings in their lives.

BEFORE YOU TEACH

1. Suggested Materials—Bibles, student magazines, dictionary, chalkboard or dry erase board, pencils, and index cards

2. Lesson Background—For background information, read Numbers 11. Be sure to read the student lesson. Also see Bible Study Guide 4 in the white pages of this book, as well as in *Precepts For Living*®, The UMI Annual Sunday School Lesson Commentary.

3. Key Point—We should give thanks for our blessings.

This passage tells about the Israelites after their freedom from Egypt. As they traveled through the wilderness, they began to complain about their conditions. God was angry with their ungratefulness. He caused a fire to burn the edges of the place where they camped. Finally, Moses interceded with prayer, and the fire was stopped.

Still the Israelites were not satisfied. They complained about the kind of food that God provided for them to eat. They complained that the manna was nothing like the meat, fish, fruit, and vegetables they had eaten in captivity. Again, Moses prayed to God, this time questioning why God had allowed him to be the leader of this dissatisfied group. Moses complained that he

was not their earthly father; yet he shouldered the burden of their care and complaints.

This passage focuses on God’s provision for His people and the importance of distinguishing between what we want (luxuries) and what we need (necessities). The Bible teaches that it is important to be grateful to God for His everlasting care, and we should not expect that everything we want will be handed to us upon our request.

OPEN THE LESSON
Get Started Activity

Review last week’s “Doing My Part” activity. Then, lead a discussion that details a time the students received a gift that they really wanted, as well as a time when they received a gift that they needed. Have them discuss how they felt in both instances. Were they more grateful receiving the gifts they wanted? How did they respond when they received gifts they may not have wanted, but needed?

What’s It All About?

Teaching time about 4–8 minutes

Student Story: So Ungrateful

“I’ll open that one first.” It was Jeremy’s birthday. He could not wait to open the big package on the table. Jeremy just knew that the game system he wanted would be inside. Even though money in the house was tight, Jeremy counted on his mom to get what he wanted.

Jeremy shook the package. Yes! It weighed the same as the game system. Jeremy tore into the paper and opened the box. Then he froze. In the box were two pairs of jeans. . .and no game system!

Jeremy smiled and thanked his mother, but he was fighting back tears. *I don't want these*, he thought to himself.

Have you ever experienced a disappointment similar to Jeremy's? What do you think about Jeremy's attitude: should he be disappointed or should he be thankful? Explain your answer.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

Learning From God

Teaching time about 10–15 minutes

The passage tells how the Israelites complained about their hardships. Even though the Israelites did not have what they wanted (meat, fish, fruits, and vegetables), they had what they needed (food for nourishment). God was displeased by this, and He caused the edges of the camp to burn until Moses prayed for it to stop. The people complained because they lost sight of their blessings and focused on having their wants satisfied. Even Moses complained that he was the leader of such grumbling people.

Have the students discuss some of the things that they complain about. Ask how they think both God and the person they are complaining to feels. If God knows all that we need, should we complain when we don't have the things we want?

The Juniors should leave today understanding the difference between wants and needs and have a greater trust that God will supply their needs. As such, they should try to complain less and should express thankfulness for things God has provided for them.

What I Have Learned

Teaching time about 5–8 minutes

Answer the following questions.

1. Why did the people complain (Numbers 11:1)? **They complained because of their hardships.**
2. How did God respond to their complaints (v. 1)? **God was not happy. He caused part of the camp to burn.**
3. What else caused the people to complain (vv. 4–5)? **They complained because they wanted different food.**
4. If you were Moses, what would you have said to the people? **The answers will vary.**

Juniorway® Bible Activities

For additional material, see the activity for this lesson in the *JBA® (Juniorway® Bible Activities)* book.

Keep In Mind

Teaching time about 2–3 minutes

Print the words from today's verse on several index cards. Have the children work as a team to put the verse in order without referring to their books or the Bible.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Choosing What's Best

Teaching time about 4–8 minutes

Juniors are asked to decipher between a want and a need by circling the things that are considered needs. **Answers: Shoes, food, clothes**

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Doing My Part

Teaching time about 2–3 minutes

This activity encourages Juniors to think on the spot about the blessings that God has provided in their own lives and to write a brief list of some of the things they are thankful for. Instruct them to add to the list as the week goes on and to come next week prepared to share.

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:

From The People, Places, and Times: *Life Application Study Bible*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. 1996.
Packer, J. I., Merrill C. Tenney, and William White. *Nelson's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Bible Facts*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995.
Vine, W.E. *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Edited by Merrill F. Unger and William White Jr. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.

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