

ACT IT OUT

WEEKLY THEME:

LIVING AS GOD'S JUST PEOPLE

BASED ON:

Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37, NIV

KEY VERSE:

Leviticus 19:34, NIV

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Knowledge: Primaries will know that God values love, kindness, and generosity.

Attitude: Primaries will want to share what they have with people who need help.

Action: Primaries will share in their church ministry by giving back a portion of what they receive in gifts.

DEAR TEACHER

Today, primaries will learn that love, kindness, and generosity to others who are different are characteristics needed to be faithful Christian believers.

SUPPLY LIST

| SECTION | MATERIALS |
|----------------|-----------------------------|
| Focus Activity | <i>Teaching Success Kit</i> |

OPEN THE LESSON

Focus Activity

Display the picture of the children from different cultures, found in the *Teaching Success Kit*.

Write one letter under each child (use the letters A, B, C, D, and E).

Show the picture to the class. Say: *Let's pretend that each one of these children REALLY needs your help. They are relying on you. Which one would you want to help first: A, B, C, D, or E? And why would you choose to help them first?* Take a poll by way of hands raised. Listen to a few responses. Then explain that it seems to be much easier to help people who look like us and talk like us. We tend to feel comfortable with what is familiar to us. But God commands us to accept and show kindness and love to people who are different from us, also.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

Life Application Story

(Distribute the student folders.)

Lead the class in a roundtable discussion. Brainstorm situations in the life of a student of

primary age in which they could show compassion to the poor and with strangers. (Be sensitive to using the word “poor” verbally in case there are children in your class in need. As an alternative you can tell the class, “people who need help or don’t have their needs met.”)

Write the students’ suggestions on the board as they are shared. Introduce what tithes and offerings are. Encourage the students to develop practical ways they and their family members could show kindness to others in the community who are different than them.

Note: At pick-up time, be sure to share the students’ wonderful ideas with parents. Involving parents will certainly help to bring the main concept of the lesson “home.”

Bible Story

Act it Out

The Bible Story in the student folders is designed for primary students to read. The Scripture Scene® is provided as a visual aid. Be sure to study the information on this Bible passage in the white pages of the Teacher Guide.

God teaches us important rules about how to live. He says: Do not lie and trick people. Do not steal and do not cheat. We must be fair. If we see someone who needs help, we should help him or her if we can. We must never talk badly about people, and we must not spread lies about others. God wants us to be safe and to protect our neighbor, too. When someone is mean to us, we should not be mean back to him or her. We must forgive them. Finally, God wants us to be kind to people who speak other languages, have other homelands, or are different in other ways. We must not treat them badly. We should show love to them. God reminds us that we need to be careful to always do what He commands. It is not good to just know what God commands. We must do what He commands. We must act it out!

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Review

In the Bible Story, God gives us a lot of rules. Following God's rules brings joy, love, and peace to people in the world. We are not allowed to pick and choose which rules we will follow and which rules we will not. We must decide to follow all of God's will. And it is His will that we show love and kindness to EVERYBODY!

To illustrate this point further, play "Buzz, Buzz, Bee!" (This game is similar to "Duck, Duck, Goose," but the children do not run.) Invite the primaries to sit in a circle. The teacher is "It" and remains in that position throughout the activity. Lightly tap each student on the top of his or her head, as you chant the following:

Be kind to Everybody

Buzz-Buzz-Buzz-Buzz-Buzz-Buzz (You can say as many "Buzz's" as you desire.)

Bee!

The student whose head is tapped on the word "Bee!" must jump up and shout one of God's rules for loving each other. They must begin with "Be..." (e.g.: "Be fair"; "Be kind"; "Be honest"; and so on). Continue the activity for five or six more turns.

Memory Verse

"Love each other as I have loved you" (John 15:12, NIV).

Tell the primaries to walk around the classroom and shake hands with everybody. They must recite the verse while shaking hands.

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Be Smart

Love Above All

The students will recreate the drawing of "Lilly Loves Others." Have the students look at the finished grid, which shows each line that makes up the whole picture. Have the students carefully examine each box in the grid and draw the same lines in the empty grid.

Good Attitude

Kind and Caring

The students will write what they can do or give this week to show kindness and compassion. Then they will write the names of two students seated near them and write kind things about those two students on the lines provided.

Worship Time

At the end of the lesson, lead primaries in the chorus of the popular song, "Jesus Loves the Little Children."

Afterward, lead the students in the following prayer:

Dear Lord, I know that Jesus loves all the children in the world. He died for us all, and He rose for us all. Because You love everybody, you want me to love everybody. Help me to show kindness, love, and compassion to EVERYBODY! Amen.

Craft Kingdom®

Craft Kingdom® provides directions to make a craft that reinforces the lesson. Play the *Sing-Along* CD as students work.

NOTES

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:

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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

DON'T GRUMBLE

WEEKLY THEME:

PEOPLE GRUMBLE

BASED ON:

Numbers 11:1–6, 10–15, NIV

KEY VERSE:

Psalm 103:2, KJV

LESSON OBJECTIVES

Knowledge: Primaries will recognize what it means to “grumble.”

Attitude: Primaries will recognize an “attitude of gratitude.”

Action: Primaries will play musical chairs to review the lesson.

DEAR TEACHER

This lesson points out how complaining about “what was” causes us to forget what God has given and miss the blessings God has for us right now.

SUPPLY LIST

| SECTION | MATERIALS |
|----------------|---|
| Focus Activity | Jump ropes |
| Review | Chairs, <i>Sing-Along</i> CD, and <i>Teaching Success Kit</i> |
| Worship Time | Small paper bags, sweets, and crackers |

OPEN THE LESSON

Focus Activity

Before class, and if space permits, play a quick game of jump rope asking how many times each person can jump before they step on the rope. Everyone gets only one chance.

If there is no space for jumping, ask how many people have ever jumped rope and how many people you need to play the game.

PRESENT THE SCRIPTURES

Life Application Story

(Distribute the student folders.)

Lead into the Life Application story which is about a group of children who played jump rope.

After the story, talk about how Rosa’s wheelchair did not prevent her from joining in the game. Ask how her friends felt at first and how students would have felt. Have students explain the kind of attitude Rosa and her friends developed. (An attitude of gratitude.)

Bible Story

Don’t Grumble

The Bible Story in the student folders is designed for primary students to read. The Scripture Scene® is provided as a visual aid. Be sure to study the information on this Bible passage in the white pages of the Teacher Guide.

Before the story, ask if anyone knows what it means to complain. Ask if the children have ever grumbled or complained. Explain that most people have grumbled at some time. Then ask why people complain.

Have children volunteer to read the story aloud.

After the story, ask why the people grumbled and complained. Why was God angry? Why was Moses angry? Have the children compare the attitude of Rosa to that of the Israelites.

TEACHER VERSION (Student version appears on the student folder.)

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He delivered them from the evil Pharaoh and took

them across the Red Sea and into the wilderness. God made Aaron and his sons priests. God blessed His people. But the Israelites were still not happy. They started to mumble. They started to grumble. They complained all the time.

“We don’t want to eat God’s food. We want onions like we had in Egypt. We want fish like we had in Egypt. God gives us food every day, but we don’t want that food. We want our old food again.”

This made God angry! Their grumbling was too much for Moses, too. Moses spoke to God. “Why do I have to listen to these grumbling people? Why do I have to hear them complain? I cannot help them. They make me very tired!”

God told Moses to get others who could help him listen to the complaining people. The Israelites had forgotten God’s blessings.

EXPLORE THE MEANING

Review

Have the children play this variation of musical chairs using one fewer chair than you have students. Do not alter the number of chairs during the game. Play music from the *Sing-Along* CD. When the music stops, the children must sit down. The child without a chair must answer a question from the lesson. If the same child is left standing more than once, that child may pick another child to answer the question. Continue until everyone has a chance. Review questions can be found in the *Teaching Success Kit*.

Memory Verse

“Bless the LORD, O my soul” (from Psalm 103:2, KJV).

Use toy instruments, homemade instruments, and noise makers to help children sing the chorus to “Bless the Lord, O My Soul.”

NEXT STEPS FOR APPLICATION

Be Smart

Grumble, Mumble, Fumble

Select letters from the box to complete the sentence and answer the question.

Answer: The people complained.

Good Attitude

Attitude of Gratitude

Children are to write 3 letters: One to Israel explaining how they could have had an attitude of gratitude, one to Rosa telling her how she showed an attitude of gratitude, and one to themselves to tell how they can have an attitude of gratitude for God and others.

Worship Time

Before class, prepare enough small paper bags for each student to receive one. Place either a sweet or a cracker in each bag and then pass out paper bags randomly. Allow the children to open their bags and wait for reactions. Those with the sweets will be grateful and those with the crackers will not. Encourage the children to talk for three minutes about how they felt. Did they grumble, or did they have an attitude of gratitude? (Make sure you have sweets for those who had crackers in their bags.) Have the children sing “Thank You, Lord.” Allow volunteers to tell things they are thankful to God about or something that they have complained about before but will stop complaining about and develop an attitude of gratitude. Close with prayer.

Craft Kingdom®

Craft Kingdom® provides directions to make a craft that reinforces the lesson. Play the *Sing-Along* CD as students work.

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 "mixt multitude" 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 "mixt multitude" 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 "mixt multitude" (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