

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

* * * ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS WANDERINGS * * *

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Soli Deo Gloria!

CHAPTER 11

THE MURMURING AND INGRATITUDE OF THE ISRAELITES

The LORD took the chronic murmuring of the Israelites in the wilderness extremely seriously. It was the occasion of His judgment of the people on multiple occasions. Murmuring (i.e., complaining) in the context of the LORD's faithful and supernatural provision for the Israelites was **the sin of ingratitude** (Cp., Rom1:21; 2Tim3:2).

- [1] The Israelites had departed from Mount Sinai and journeyed for "three days" (Num10:33), following "the cloud of the LORD" (Num10:34); thus, Israel was experiencing both the visible presence and guidance of the LORD. And yet, a mere three days after the Sinai experience, "the people complained", which "displeased the LORD". In His "anger", "the fire of the LORD" consumed in judgment those on the periphery of the camp.
- [2] Moses acts as the mediator between "the people" and "the LORD" (Cp., Deut18:15; Jn1:17; 1Tim2:5); the mediation of Moses resulted in the cessation of judgment.
- [3] "Taberah" means a *burning*. Naming the place as a memorial of the LORD's judgment emphasizes the historicity of the event (i.e., not a fable; 2Pet1:16).
- [4] The "mixed multitude" were Egyptians and other peoples (i.e., Gentiles; perhaps others in bondage to the Egyptians) who accompanied the Israelites out of Egypt at the Exodus (cf. Exod12:38). They were analogous to those who followed Jesus because he provided bread, without being devoted to Him as Messiah (**Jn6:26**); the "mixed multitude" were a source of continual division within the camp of Israel (Cp., 2Cor6:1).

To ask the question, "Who shall give us flesh to eat?", following the LORD's ongoing supernatural provision, was **unbelief** (Cp., Matt12:38-42). In the Hebrew text, the emphasis is on the subject "Who", such that the unbelief is directed toward the LORD.

- [5] This must be an exaggeration; while they undoubtedly ate such foods on occasion, they had been under grievous oppression in Egypt; the price of good food in Egypt was their sons thrown into the Nile river (cf. Exod1:22). To desire these delicacies rather than the LORD's provision was "lust of the flesh" (1Jn2:16), which was an aspect of man's original sin in the Garden of Eden (cf. Gen3:6).
- [6] For the Israelites to say "there is nothing at all, besides this manna" is to despise the LORD's provision (cf. v20). Note, "manna" was a word that meant *what is it?* (Exod16:15); it was a term of derision coined by the people, whereas the LORD (and Jesus) always

referred to it as "bread from heaven" (Cp., Exod16:14; Jn6:31-32); it was also called "angels' food" (Ps78:25). The Israelites' attitude was even more egregious in light of the fact that "manna" was later revealed to be a type of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Jn6:51).

Manna as a Type of Christ. In a discussion concerning manna in John 6, Jesus said that "the bread of God is he who cometh down from heaven" (v33), and He asserted that "I am the bread of life" (v35) and "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (v51); thus, manna was a type of Christ in that it was freely given by God for the purpose of giving/sustaining life, it was available to all, but an individual had to collect (i.e., receive) it and eat it in order to receive its benefits (Jn6:53-54). Because Jesus is the Word of God (Jn1:1; Rev19:13), manna was also a type of the word of God (i.e., Scripture); Jesus asserted that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (Luk4:4; Cp., Deut8:3).

- [7] Manna was described as the size of "a coriander seed" (i.e., small) and the color of "bdellium" (i.e., pearl).
 - [8] The manna collected by the people was analogous to kernels of grain that had to be "ground in mills" to create a meal or flour to be used in making "cakes" (i.e., bread). It's "taste of fresh oil" was delightful.
 - [9] The LORD faithfully supplied an abundance of manna every "night" for 40 years (cf. Exod16:35).
 - [10] The ingratitude of "the people" not only "anger[ed] the LORD", it "displeased" Moses.
 - [11] Moses refers to himself as the LORD's "servant". The "burden" of leading a rebellious people is indeed heavy. This is undoubtedly an object lesson for Moses to teach him His own frustrations with His people (Cp., Matt23:37).
 - [12] Moses is himself complaining to the LORD. The Israelites are the LORD's people, and it is the LORD (not Moses) who is responsible to bring His people "unto the land which thou swarest to give unto their fathers" (a reference to the Abrahamic covenant; cf. Gen13:14-15; 15:13-21; 17:8).
- Note, synonymous parallelism in this verse provides a definition of "begotten", as it equates "begotten" with "conceived" (Cp., Judg8:30; Luk1:31,35).
- [13] The people want "flesh" in addition to the manna, and Moses feels as if they consider it to be his responsibility to provide it. The people need to be taught to look to the LORD for provision, not a human leader.
 - [14] This was a pivotal point in the life of Moses, which he marks and remembers later (cf. Deut1:9).
 - [15] Moses was in such despair, he desired death over his present condition (Cp., Elijah; 1Kgs19:4).

- [16] The LORD answers Moses' despair over being "alone" (v14) by providing additional leadership. This pattern of leadership over the nation of Israel (i.e., "seventy men" under the headship of Moses) would become the council of the Sanhedrin under the headship of the high priest at the time of Christ's first coming. Note that these men are "elders", which is derived from the Hebrew root meaning *old* (Cp., 1Tim3:4-6). Biblical leadership is consistently assigned to "men" and "elders" (i.e., elderly men; Cp., Isa3:3-5,12). The leadership model for the local church is to be a plurality of "elders" (Tit1:5).
- [17] Moses was unique among prophets in that to him alone did the LORD speak "face to face" (Exod33:11; Deut5:4; 34:10). But the "Spirit [of God]" which was upon Moses was also put upon these seventy men to empower them for leadership (Cp., 1Sam10:6; Jn14:17; Act6:3; Jude19).