

# Lesson 38: The People of Israel Complain

Numbers 11 (pg. 76-77, Gospel Story Bible)

## Teaching Points:

**God has been faithful, yet Israel complains** — It has been more than two years since Israel left Egypt. During these years, God has been perfectly faithful. He has given manna to eat and created springs of water in the desert. He has been with them in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire.

The people had been camping at the foot of Mount Sinai for some time, but now they take a three-day journey to the edge of the Promised Land. Once again, the Israelites begin to complain. Even though they have seen God's faithfulness and they have seen God's anger when they are disobedient, they still complain. We are not told why the Lord burns the outlying parts of the camp. Maybe this is where the complainers are.

**The rabble tempts the rest** — At first, it looks as though only some people were dissatisfied with eating manna. These are called "the rabble." But as they complained, the rest of the Israelites became dissatisfied as well. They did not remember how it was being slaves in Egypt; they only remembered that they ate different food that they liked better.

They began to long for that food instead of manna. God had given them manna to eat every day, but now they despised it, and they complained and grumbled against God. One day, Jesus, the Bread of Life sent from heaven, would also be rejected by people who wanted their own way more than they wanted God's way.

**God provides both blessing and judgment** — Moses himself begins to complain to God and blame God for the rebellion of the people. Moses is so tired of all the challenges of leading the Israelites that he asks God to kill him. So God has compassion on Moses and gives him 70 elders to help him.

God could have destroyed all Israel for their sin. But like a loving father, he teaches the Israelites a lesson for complaining against him. A plague comes over the people, but it kills only those "who had the craving." This probably refers to the rabble who started the complaining. The rebellion of the people and even the complaining of Moses could not change God's plan to raise up a redeemer from among the descendants of Abraham.

## Where is the Gospel?

### How does today's Bible story fit into God's greater plan of redemption?

Read Colossians 1:10-14.

Paul encourages us in these verses to have endurance, patience, and joy as we serve God. He wants us to give thanks to God, who has given us redemption and forgiveness through Jesus.

Just like the Israelites, we are tempted to grumble and complain against God when we do not like his plan for us. Just like the Israelites, we deserve death, but instead, we can receive rescue through Jesus.

Whenever the Israelites sinned and God had mercy on them, he gave them mercy because he knew that a Savior was coming. Any time God has ever had mercy on anyone, it was because of Jesus.

### Bible Truth:

God shows  
mercy to His  
people.

### A Little Bit More (grades 3-5) - His Spirit (Numbers 11:29)

The Spirit of God is the third person of the Trinity. Acts 5:3-4 unquestionably equates the Holy Spirit with God. In addition, the Spirit is frequently used in the Old Testament interchangeably with God. The Spirit of God is omniscient (1 Corinthians 2:10-11) and omnipresent (Psalm 139:7-8). The Trinity is all mentioned together in the benediction of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:14.

## Object Lessons:

### 1. Cheer-O-Meter for Food (Grades K-2)

#### Supplies:

- Ten different canned or dry goods (Select some that the children would enjoy like canned fruits and others they might dislike such as canned fish, or vegetables.)
- paper bag or other container to conceal the cans.

The object of this exercise is to show the children how easy it is to complain.

Say, "What if you went on a boat ride and were out in the middle of the ocean, and the only food you had to eat was ..." Then show them one of the most pleasant of foods. Repeat the opening phrase again, but this time show them one of the more disliked foods. They should complain. Interview a few children who were the most vocal about the food you presented.

One by one set all the cans on a table where everyone can see them. Have the class rank the foods from their most favorite to least favorite and shuffle the cans accordingly.

Read Numbers 11:1 aloud, and ask the class how they think they would have done had they been in the Israelites' place, living in the desert and eating the same thing every day. The point is to help them identify with the sinful complaining of Israel instead of self-righteously seeing themselves as better.

### 2. It's Easy to Grumble (Grades 3-5)

#### Supplies:

- a word find or fun coloring sheet
- a useful, but plain item for 1/2 the class (plain stickers, tub of crayons to color, older regular pencils)
- a more enticing item for the second half of the class (fun stickers, new crayons, gel pens, new fun pencils)
- a coin

The object of the illustration is to show the children just how easy it is to grumble and how our sinful hearts and our sinful desires can lead us to complain.

Hide the enticing items and place the plain items on a table for all to see. Explain to the class that you are going to toss a coin to see who will get the items, children with birthdays in January through June or children with birthdays in July through December. Have a child from each group call heads or tails. Give the plain items and a word find (coloring sheet) to whichever group wins. Tell them that they can use it as soon as they get it.

Move ahead slowly and listen to any complaints by those who didn't get any items. Do not explain why some received the items and some did not. After a few minutes take out the fun items and distribute them (with word finds) to all those who did not receive the first items, again without explanation. Listen again for complaints.

Go on by reading Numbers 11:1–6. Then ask the class the following questions:

- Did you want to complain when you didn't get what the other children got? (Draw the children out regarding how they felt.)

- How did you feel when you received items first? How did that change after the other children received more fancy items?

(Help the children identify with how quickly we can go from delighting in what we have to despising what we have. Help them compare themselves with Israel, who would at one time have been very grateful for the manna but who now despised it.)

- What does our complaining say about our gratitude to God for what he gives us?

(Our complaining reveals that our desire is not first and foremost for God, but rather for what we want. If we truly would find our satisfaction in him alone and what he provides for us, we would be content.)

Just as the people of Israel rejected God's provision of manna, so people today reject God's provision of Jesus, who is the bread of life. They would rather pursue their own desires and appetites. Just as the people of Israel were tempted to go back to Egypt, so people today are tempted to fall back into sinful rebellion.