

Provision

Numbers 11:4-17

FIRST THOUGHTS

God equips His people for whatever He calls them to do. On our own, we can't accomplish God's purposes, but He provides what we need to live out His design for us. Scripture records the testimonies of ordinary people whom God used in extraordinary ways when they yielded their lives to His purpose. They knew they couldn't face life alone, so they called on God, and He answered. They sometimes faced incredible challenges, but God sustained them.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

In the second year of the people's journey after they left Egypt, God lifted the cloud above the tabernacle, and the people moved out (Num. 10:11-28). The military divisions from each tribe led the way, carrying their respective banners to keep the people organized. The people journeyed from the mountain for three days with the ark of the Lord's covenant in front of them and Moses pronouncing a blessing (10:33-36).

The Lord became angry when the people complained to Moses about the journey's difficulty, and He sent fire along the outskirts of the camp (11:1). Moses prayed, and the Lord ceased the judgment (11:2-3). But people soon began to complain again to Moses about the lack of food (11:4-6). God had provided manna for their journey (Ex. 16:4-36; Num. 11:7-9), but the people longed for more variety.

KEY DOCTRINE *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine.
(See Genesis 1:3; Exodus 31:2-3.)

DISSATISFIED FOLLOWERS (NUMBERS 11:4-9)

Moses used the term *riffraff* to describe some of the more troubling elements of the Israelite community. The term is used only here in the Bible, but it is related to the word "gather." It describes a group that gathered to complain. Their disgruntled attitudes and words were contagious and quickly spread. They expressed dissatisfaction and discontent with what God had provided.

One way this disruptive element demonstrated its discontent with God was through **a strong craving for other food**. Literally, they "craved a craving." In this form, the verb denotes inappropriate desires.

The question about providing **meat** was more like a statement of the people's complaints. God had provided manna (vv. 7-9; also Ex. 16:4-36), but they were not satisfied with God's provision and desired more. Numbers 11:18-20 makes it clear that God was not pleased with their attitude. They were not grateful that He had rescued them from bondage in Egypt. In fact, their question really implied that they had rejected God and His provision! Instead of embracing contentment in their freedom, they looked back with foggy memories on centuries of slavery.

The Israelites were guilty of "selective memory." They remembered the food in Egypt, but they had forgotten the subjugation, oppression, murder, and more. The challenges of the wilderness caused them to recall Egypt as a better place than it really was for them.

Slavery had *not* afforded them comfortable lives by any means! God's people erroneously claimed to **remember** their circumstances through a skewed lens. They inflated Egypt's positive aspects while ignoring centuries of suffering. As a result, their longings for Egypt led them to despise God's provision in the moment.

The people found manna on the ground each morning, six days a week. They were to gather a double portion in preparation for the Sabbath, when no manna would appear (Ex. 16:4-36). Thus, the manna forced God's people

to trust His provision each day of their 40-year journey. But this discontented segment preferred a faulty image of their enemies than the Creator they had seen work with their own eyes.

FRUSTRATED LEADER (NUMBERS 11:10-15)

While God was incredibly angry, Moses was **provoked**. The expression literally reads, “In the eyes of Moses it was evil/bad.” We may understand the words in one of two ways. First, they could mean Moses shared God’s anger at the people’s complaints. Perhaps he also believed the people deserved God’s wrath for their rebellion!

As a second option, the expression could communicate Moses’s aggravation at the situation, not just at the people. Their grumbling exhausted him and fed his feelings of inadequacy. Consequently, he took his concerns to God.

Moses struggled to understand why God had **brought such trouble** into his life. In a sense, he felt like the people’s protests were God’s way of expressing displeasure. He saw himself as the target of God’s anger and the recipient of a heavy **burden**.

Moses showed his frustration in describing his predicament. He did not **conceive** this multitude or **give them birth**. Yet, it seemed like God wanted him to personally care for all of them as **a nursing mother carries a baby**. Moses knew that leading them was a difficult task, especially if he bore that burden alone.

Moses’s words indicate that he knew it was beyond his capability to **get meat** for the people. His later words (vv. 21-22) confirm that he struggled with the idea that even God could provide that much food! Moses had seen God do great things, but he wondered how God could do this. Moses confessed that the people were **too much for me**.

Moses knew that if anyone could meet his need, God could. So, this frustrated leader took his concerns to God and spoke honestly to Him. His example is worth noting and following. God is never afraid of or offended by our honest cries. He knows our struggles, and He wants us to reach out to Him for help.

GRACIOUS PROVISION (NUMBERS 11:16-17)

The term **elders** literally refers to older people. In the Old Testament it commonly refers to leaders or **officers** who had demonstrated the wisdom that came from many years of life and walking with God. The New Testament records how Paul appointed elders in the churches he planted on his missionary journeys (Acts 14:23). Also in the New Testament, the terms “elder,” “overseer,” and “pastor/shepherd” appear together and seem to designate the office of pastor (1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). In this case, God commanded Moses to select **seventy men** from the congregation who were qualified to lead.

Moses would gather the leaders at the **tent of meeting**, God’s dwelling place among His people. This also was designated as a place where God would meet with His people. Thus, the tent provided both a reminder of God’s presence and a place to worship God and hear from Him.

God told Moses that He would take from the Spirit He had given Moses and place the Spirit on the seventy leaders so they could assist him in God’s power. This did not imply Moses lost anything or that each leader would have only a portion of the Spirit’s power. Rather, each leader assisted Moses as the Spirit empowered him.

The seventy elders would help Moses **bear the burden of the people**. It is interesting to note that God did not deny leading Israel was a burden. Instead, He assured Moses that He would also empower the seventy elders with His Spirit so they could share the burden. These leaders would thus lighten Moses’s load and enable him to continue fulfilling God’s call on his life. Moses would go farther with the support of his leadership team.

Next Week – The Land, Numbers 13:17-31