



LESSON 32

Israel rejects God's provisions

NUMBERS 11:1-12:16



God punishes those who do not trust in Him.



“And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled” (Num 11:1a).

Supporting Truths

1. Complaining shows that one does not trust in God.
2. God is able to provide for His people.
3. God cares for His people.
4. God is faithful to His promises.
5. God is merciful in His judgment.

Objectives

1. Describe how Israel sinned by complaining and grumbling.
2. Describe how God demonstrated His power and ability to provide for Israel.
3. List some of the ways God cared for Israel.
4. Explain how God was faithful to His promises by both providing for and punishing Israel.
5. Point out some of the ways God was merciful in His judgments.



Lesson Summary

The first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt is remembered for their lack of faith. They quickly forgot God's mighty works and put Him to the test (Ps 106:13–14). God punished them by giving them exactly what they asked for: an abundance of meat. But God also punished their rebellion, sending a severe disease among them (Ps 106:15). Sadly, they did not learn from their punishment and continued in their rebellion.

Spotlight on the Gospel

The people demonstrated their lack of trust in God by complaining against the LORD and against His servant, Moses. They had returned to Egypt in their hearts (Acts 7:39). But Moses, despite his momentary unfaithfulness (11:10–15), continued to grow in his faith (cf. 12:7). Like Moses we must have faith in God, for without faith it is impossible to please Him (Heb 11:6). Those who reject Jesus through unbelief will receive the severest punishment (Heb 10:26–29).

LAST WEEK



God requires holy living
Leviticus 19:1–37

THIS WEEK



Israel rejects God's provisions
Numbers 11:1–12:16

NEXT WEEK



Israel rejects God's plan
Numbers 13:1–14:45

Lesson Commentary

God punishes those who do not trust in Him.

The book of Numbers opens with the people of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai less than one year removed from the great Exodus from Egypt. During the previous 11 months at Mount Sinai, Israel had received the Law of the LORD and entered into covenant with Him. There they had seen the LORD's faithfulness to His word and provision for His people as God personally provided for the needs of two million Israelites. Initially, Israel expressed a degree of obedience to the LORD, but this obedience was short-lived. Three days after crossing the Red Sea, Israel complained against God (Exod 15:22–25). Despite the great signs which Yahweh had done in Egypt, His provision between the Red Sea and Mount Sinai, Israel had not changed. Now, three days after leaving Sinai, on the way to Kadesh, they continued their grumbling against the LORD.

Israel was rebellious so God burned the perimeter of the camp (11:1–3)

At the first sign of trouble and discomfort, Israel was ready to go back to Egypt.

However, to reverse course and return to Egypt would have been to reject the LORD. God had promised goodness and blessing (10:32), but the people responded with rebellion and grumbling. (11:1–3). By grumbling, the nation of Israel gave voice to their own sinful heart. God had graciously led them out of Egypt, but instead of responding with love and obedience, they responded with anger and disobedience. They preferred slavery and the false gods of Egypt to the true God who had freed them by His powerful hand.

Moses immediately interceded for the people through prayer (11:2). Even then God was gracious and burned only the perimeter of the camp, although His punishment could have been much more severe (cf. Nadab and Abihu, Lev 10:1–3). This rebellion marks a shift in the book of Numbers from faithfulness to rebellion. Numbers 11:1–3 marks the first of seven rebellions recorded in the book of Numbers. This

short but dynamic rebellion demonstrates the general pattern of Israel's rebellion: (1) the sin of the people; (2) punishment by God; (3) prayer to God; and (4) salvation.

Israel was faithless so God killed those who complained (11:4–35)

Even after God demonstrated His

own power and grace by burning the perimeter of the camp, the "rabble" **complained**, expressing their unhappiness with words (11:4; cf. Exod 12:38). Their discontent spread throughout the nation of Israel. They recounted with fondness their former life in Egypt, choosing to remember only the good things and none of the hardships (Num 11:5). They had already forgotten all of God's provisions: the water, manna, and quail God provided on the way to Sinai (Exod 15:22–17:7).

They were not content with God's provision, so the LORD promised to punish them by giving them such an abundance of quail that it would be as if it were coming out their noses. The LORD told Moses why He gave Israel so much meat: it was because the people had rejected the LORD (11:20). They doubted God's power and ability to provide for them (11:23). The LORD promised to show them that He had both the power and ability to provide for the needs of all the Israelites.

Moses himself also demonstrated a lack of trust. First, he complained that the LORD had given him too great a burden (11:10–15). Second, he doubted that the LORD could provide meat for all the Israelites (11:22–23). The LORD responded to his first complaint by pouring out His Spirit on 70 elders of Israel (11:16–17, 24–25). These men would assist Moses, sharing the burden of leadership. The LORD responded to Moses' second complaint by sending an over abundance of quail. Using a wind, the LORD delivered a massive quantity of quail to the areas surrounding Israel's encampment (11:31). The people spent two days collecting the quail before spreading the meat out around the camp to dry after it was cleaned and salted (11:32). But

THINK ABOUT IT
Complaining is very contagious and is the result of a discontented heart.



THINK ABOUT IT
The mouth is a mirror reflecting the heart (Mt 12:34).

STUDY THE BIBLE LESSON

Israel rejects God's provisions • Numbers 11:1–12:16



before the people even had the chance to enjoy the meat, God struck them with a deadly disease. The anger of the LORD burned against the rebellion of those who had craved the meat (11:33).

Miriam and Aaron were prideful so God struck Miriam with leprosy (12:1–16)

The next rebellion sprang up from within Moses' own family. Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother, opposed his leadership on the basis of his wife's ethnicity. After the death of his first wife, Zipporah, a Midianite woman, Moses married a woman from Cush (Ethiopia). Miriam was likely the instigator of this rebellion since her name is mentioned first (12:1). Aaron supported her just as he had supported the people in building the golden calf (Exod 32:1–5, 21–24). Miriam's opposition to Moses on the grounds of his wife was nothing more than a smoke screen to hide her **prideful** heart, she and Aaron were filled with thoughts only about themselves.



THINK ABOUT IT
Pride is the seed of every sin and that seed resides in every single heart.

Miriam and Aaron's pride is revealed in their question (Num 12:2). They were both spokespeople for God: Miriam was called a prophetess (15:20) and Aaron, the high priest, consulted the Urim and **Thummim**

which was a way the LORD communicated with Israel in the early period of Israel's history (Exod 28:30; 1 Sam 14:41–42; Ezra 2:63). But by challenging Moses' unique relationship with the LORD (12:2), Miriam and Aaron revealed the pride and jealousy rooted in their hearts. Moses' response (or lack thereof), reveals his humility (12:3). He didn't respond in fear or jealousy. Moses didn't say anything! It was the LORD who rose to his defense, calling the three out to the tent of meeting (12:4). There, the LORD appeared in a pillar of cloud at the doorway and called Aaron and Miriam over to speak with Him (12:5).

The LORD's words to Aaron and Miriam affirmed His unique relationship with Moses (12:6–8). First, God called Moses "My servant", giving him a title of the highest honor (Num 12:7; cf. Matt 25:21, 23). Second, God told Aaron and Miriam that He spoke with Moses "mouth to

mouth", not in visions or dreams (12:6, 8). To communicate directly with the LORD was a unique privilege. Exodus 33:11 says that Moses communicated with God "face to face, as a man speaks to his friend". To speak against one who had such a special relationship with the LORD was to speak against God Himself.

Therefore the LORD immediately punished Miriam, striking her with leprosy (12:10). Aaron quickly repented of his sin and begged Moses to not hold Miriam's sin against her (12:11). Moses again demonstrates his humility, asking the LORD to heal his sister (12:13). God graciously provided for her healing, but set a condition on Miriam's cleansing. She would need to go through a period of purification, remaining outside the camp for seven days (12:14). The entire community suffered as a result of her sin, delaying their journey to the Promised Land until Miriam was received back into the camp (12:15).

Sadly, the first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt is remembered for their unfaithfulness and evil desires. They did not believe in God or trust in His saving power (Ps 78:22). Despite all of His wonders they did not believe in the LORD (78:32). The apostle Paul said that these things were written for our example, so that we might not desire evil as they did (1 Cor 10:1–13). When we reject God's provision for us through His son, Jesus Christ, we are like that generation of Israelites whom He punished for their unbelief (Ps 95:7–11). God will eternally punish all those who do not place their faith in Jesus (Heb 10:29). However, God is faithful, and will save all those who ask God for forgiveness because of Jesus' death on the cross.



THINK ABOUT IT
The negative consequences of just one sin impacts many people (Rom 5:12).



Lesson Outline

God punishes those who do not trust in Him.



AGES 3–5 LESSON OUTLINE

1. Israel was unhappy with God, so God sent fire from heaven (11:1–3).
2. Israel complained about food, so God sent a severe disease (11:4–35).
3. Miriam and Aaron rejected Moses', so God punished Miriam (12:1–16).



AGES 6–11 LESSON OUTLINE

1. Israel was rebellious, so God burned the perimeter of the camp (11:1–3).
 - The people grumbled about their condition (11:1a; cf. 10:32).
 - God punished the people by burning the perimeter of the camp (11:1b).
 - The people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed (11:2).
 - The LORD responded by making the fire die down (11:2).
2. Israel was faithless, so God killed those who complained (11:4–35).
 - Non-Israelites (“rabble”) began to complain about food and some Israelites joined them (11:4–7).
 - The LORD’s anger burned, and Moses demonstrated a lack of faith (11:10–15).
 - The LORD strengthened Moses’ faith (11:16–30).
 - The LORD punished the people, sending an abundance of meat and a severe plague (11:31–35).
3. Miriam and Aaron were prideful, so God struck Miriam with leprosy (12:1–16).
 - Miriam and Aaron rejected Moses as God’s unique servant and leader (12:1–3).
 - The LORD Himself came to Moses’ defense (12:4–8) and punished Miriam for leading the rejection of His servant (12:9–10).
 - Moses prayed for Miriam, and the LORD allowed her to be restored (12:11–16).





Lesson Questions

Use these questions to teach or to review this week's lesson.



Ages 3–5 Lesson Questions

- 1. Did the Israelites have any reason to complain?**
No. God gave them everything they needed.
- 2. How did the Israelites reject God's provision?**
The people of Israel were not satisfied with what God had given them; they wanted more.
- 3. What did God give the people because of their complaints about not having meat?**
God gave Israel more than enough quail and punished the people with a severe disease.
- 4. What did Aaron and Miriam do in Numbers 12, and what was the punishment?**
They opposed Moses. God punished Miriam for her sin with a terrible skin disease called leprosy.



Ages 6–11 Lesson Questions

- 1. What did the Israelites do in Numbers 11:1?**
They grumbled about their perceived “misfortunes.”
- 2. What did God do when He heard the grumbling of the people of Israel?**
When God heard their complaints, His anger was kindled, and He sent fire to consume some of those living near the edges of the camp.
- 3. Did the Israelites and those with them have any reason to complain about food?**
No. God had provided water, manna, and quail for the people on the way to Sinai (Exod 15:22–17:7). Surely the LORD could provide for the people in the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land.
- 4. What did God give the people because of their complaining about not having meat?**
God graciously provided quail. He provided more than enough quail and punished the people with a severe plague.
- 5. What did Aaron and Miriam do in Numbers 12:1?**
They spoke out against Moses. They were not trusting God's decision for Moses to be their leader. They thought they knew what was best for God's people.
- 6. How did God describe Moses?**
God described Moses as a faithful servant (Num 12:7). Moses was also more humble than anyone else on the earth (Num 12:3).
- 7. What did Moses do when he saw that Miriam had been afflicted with leprosy?**
He prayed to God on her behalf. He had mercy on Miriam and wanted God to heal her.
- 8. What was God's answer to Moses' prayer?**
God would heal Miriam, but first she would have to be sent outside the camp for seven days.

Lesson Activities

Choose from the following ideas to introduce, illustrate, and apply this week's lesson.

AGES 3–5



INTRODUCE

GOD'S PROMISE IS CLOSE

Remind children about the special promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. God had given them a great nation (lots of people) and a law to run the country (like classroom rules), and now He was about to give them their own land (place to build a home). This should have been a very exciting time, but it was not exciting for Israel. The moment their lives became just a little difficult, they complained and failed to trust God.

COMPLAINING PUPPET ROLE-PLAY

Use a puppet to show complaining attitudes. Have the puppet complain about cleaning his room, being kind to his sister, sharing with a friend, or about the food that he has received. What is wrong with having a complaining attitude? In today's lesson, the children will see what happened when Israel complained about their food and their leader.



ILLUSTRATE

CROWD PARTICIPATION

Tell the children that in today's lesson we will see the nation of Israel sin many times. However, we will also see many times when Israel obeys God or when God is merciful to Israel. Explain that every time we hear the Israelites doing something sinful we're going to say "boo" and give a "thumbs down" sign. Every time we hear the Israelites obeying God or God being merciful we're going to say "yay" and give a "thumbs up" sign. Lead the children in these cheers and signs as you teach through the lesson.

GATHERING QUAIL

During part of the Bible lesson, have the children pretend to pick up quail and put them in a basket. Emphasize that the quail were piled three feet high. For small children, this could be up to their necks.



APPLY

GOD SENDS QUAIL

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheet, paper bag, black and white construction paper, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Pre-cut wings and verse from craft sheet. Pre-cut two beaks, two feet, two eyes, two pupils, and one feather from construction paper as pictured below. During class, instruct students to glue all these items to the bag in their proper place.



God Sends Quail
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

TEACH THE BIBLE LESSON

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AGES 6–8



INTRODUCE

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Play the game by choosing a child or a teacher to be leader. The children need to do exactly as the leader says (jump on one foot, run in place, remain quiet, etc.). After playing the game ask the children the following questions: (1) Did anyone want to be the leader when it wasn't his turn? (2) Did anyone try to take over as leader when it wasn't his turn? (3) Did anyone refuse to follow the leader? (4) Did anyone think they could do a better job than the leader? Use their answers to discuss how God has chosen leaders for us, including our parents, teachers, pastors, and government officials that we must follow. Tell the children that in today's Bible lesson we will see the Israelites' sinful response to God's chosen leader for them.

COMPLAINING

Tell the children that in today's lesson, we will learn about the Israelites' complaining attitudes. Ask the children the following questions so they can learn what complaining is and how to stop it. Who complains? What is complaining? When do we complain? How do we complain? Why is it wrong to complain? What should we do instead of complaining?



ILLUSTRATE

LEPROUS HAND

Create a leprous hand by coating a white glove in glue and covering it with coconut flakes. Allow the glove to dry. Use this during the lesson to help the children picture God's punishment of Miriam (Num 12:10–15).

QUAIL

Bring in a picture of quail to help the children understand God's provision of meat for the nation of Israel. Talk about how many quail it would take to feed two million people.



APPLY

ISRAEL COMPLAINS AGAINST GOD.

See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

Materials: Craft sheets, oatmeal, tan and orange cardstock, crayons, scissors, and glue.

Directions: Have children color and cut out the pictures and verse from the craft sheet. Glue the pictures, oatmeal, and verse to the tan cardstock as shown below. Use orange cardstock to create flames. Glue the folded base of the flames onto the back of the scene.



Israel Complains Against God.
See Year 1 Craft Book, Book 2.

AGES 9–11



INTRODUCE

THE ROOT OF SIN

Materials: one healthy plant and one dead plant, small tags, bobby pins.

Directions: Before class, prepare the plants by labeling the roots. Write “Pride” on a tag, and attach it to the roots of the dead plant with a pin. Repeat with the healthy plant, but write “God” on the tag. Ask the children to identify differences between the two plants. Ask the children what they think caused the differences; lift up the root of the healthy plant and talk about how God is the root of all goodness, beauty, health, and life. Then lift up the root of the dead plant and discuss the fact that pride is the root of many sins. Explain that in today’s lesson, we will learn about how the sinful pride of Israel.

QUOTATION PREDICTION

Write this quotation from Numbers 11:23 on the board for children to see when they enter the classroom: “The LORD said to Moses ‘Has the LORD’s arm been shortened?’” Ask the children to predict what the Israelites were complaining about when the Lord asked this question. Tell the children that we will find out the answer in today’s lesson.



ILLUSTRATE

OBEDIENCE LEADS TO BLESSING

Ask for a child volunteer. Tell the child that you are going to send them on a journey around the class and that he needs to be very careful to listen to and obey your instructions. Then take out a blindfold and use it to cover the child’s eyes. Direct the child on a journey through the class using nothing but your words. After the activity ask the class what would have happened if the child hadn’t liked your instructions or chosen not to listen to them? Compare this to Israel’s rejection of what God’s provision.

“COMPLAIN” ACROSTIC

Use the acrostic “COMPLAIN” to help children remember the sinful complaints of Israel in Numbers 11–12 (Note: The phrases are not in the exact order of the text).

Craved food they had in Egypt
(Num 11:4–6)

Offended God and displeased
Moses (Num 11:10–15)

Manna was not enough for them
(Num 11:7–9)

People were weeping at the door
of their tents (Num 11:10)

Leadership of Moses was rejected
by Aaron and Miriam (Num 12)

Aroused the Lord’s anger, which
resulted in punishment
(Num 11:1–3)

Israel rejected God’s provision!

Numbers 11–12



APPLY

FILL A PAIL WITH QUAIL

Place a bucket in the center of the room, and spread objects (paper birds, stuffed animals, feathers, etc.) around the room. Have the children fill the pail with all the objects as quickly as they can. For large groups, have multiple buckets and race. Then talk about how God provided so much quail that the people spent 1½ days gathering it. They each gathered at least 10 homers (one homer = 6½ bushels)—a lot! If possible, bring in enough items and buckets to make that amount.