



What we complain about:

1. Slow but free WIFI
2. Wait at the drive thru fast food
3. Jobs
4. Weather
5. Flying
6. Toilet seat
7. Facebook statuses
8. Grammar
9. Mondays
10. Length of sermons
11. People complaining

Grace For Grumblers [Numbers 11:1-6, 10, 18-20, 23, 31-34]

Virtually, the **very first thing** that Israelites do when they set out to the Promised Land is complain and rebel. The next chapters are unified by a **consistent vocabulary**: grumble, assemble/speak against. What a sad state for God's people. Why are they so **worked up** when only three days has passed on their journey? Why is Moses worked up? Why is the Lord worked up?

You are more likely to complain when you are disappointed (11:1)

The cause of the first complaint is never stated. Likely, they people are **tired** of the forced walking. The root "complain" has a cognate in Akkadian which means to "sigh" they are **walking around breathing through their noses**. **Ever feel/behave like that?**

A modern traveler would sympathize, three days would lead to the inhospitable desert of **Et-Tih**. This is key, **the desert led to disappointment**. **Disappointments often come to the people of God when things you think clash with God's plan and promise**. The desert was never in the plan of Israel but it was in the **plan of God** and led to major disappointment. Everyone has disappointment. **Don't let your disappointment lead to disaffection** (a feeling of being dissatisfied).

You are more likely to complain during difficulty (11:1)

Troubles (hardships) test the people of God bringing to the surface who **you really are**. Want to know someone's character? Watch when they don't get their way. Are you passing the test? Why are you complaining? The desert is hot and difficult. **Rom. 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. Deserts have two outcomes: **despondency or devotion**. **Choose devotion and pass the test.**

Riffraff will always complain (11:4)

The Hebrew here is fun sounding word, *asafsuf*. **Don't be an asafsuf**. This word simply means those **who gather against**. Perhaps this is part of the mixed multitude in Exodus 12:38. Regardless, it appears as if the rebellion starts among the fringes of the congregation. **Here is a truth: riffraff will always complain**. It is easy to complain when you are **on the fringe**. I find it hard to grumble when I am serving Christ. Often it's when **I'm watching** others work-worship-serve that I have **more time** to think about myself than the Lord. **It's when im watching (on the fringe) that I have time to tell others how it should be done. Don't be an asafsuf.**

Complaining has its beginning in sinful cravings (11:4)

What was the root of Israel's grumbling: **garlic, onions, leeks, melons, cucumbers**. Listen, there is no cucumber worth the wrath of God! Literally, the Israelites were complaining about God's **cafeteria menu**. **When God's people begin to govern their lives by their sensual appetite it will always lead to holy contempt.**

Philippians 3:18 For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things,

What are you craving? The appetite for more will lead you to lose appetite for God's provision.

Complaining often distorts your view of the present (11:5)

"Free," the act of looking back and remembering the good ole days had **one major flaw**. The fish of Egypt wasn't free. **Grumbling distorts your view of reality**. For Israel, the past became the golden age.

Complaining reimagines the past as a golden land, it despises the good gifts that God has surrounded you with in the present, and it completely ignores God's promises for the future. –Ian Duguid

Grumbling is never free. Remember God's provision today! Hold to His promises for tomorrow!

Complaining is contagious (11:10)

Family after family. Grumbling is extremely contagious like the Flu, it easily passes from one person to the next. It typically originates among those with little or **no spiritual insight (riffraff) and can draw in** those who know better. **Can you imagine if the Hebrews had social media? And like a disease,** grumbling, whether opening, or privately is contagious and destructive. This includes unfocused complaining which implicates **God as the ultimate cause and denies that He cares.** Have you caused others to sin?

Whining takes your eyes off the Presence of the Lord (11:10)

Every family wept at the entrance of their tent. Instead of going to the Tent of Meeting and seeking the presence of the Living God, everyone stayed at their tent. Why? Because their eyes were not on the Shekinah glory cloud or the fire. **When you take your eyes off the presence of Christ, in an instant, your heart can change. Whining is a symptom of a heart not wholly devoted in that moment.**

Grumbling prepares your heart for the wrong feast (11:18)

The Israelites are to **sanctify themselves** for a special encounter with God, as if they will enjoy a sacrificial meal. The spirit of the Lord was central to the encampment, an **area holy and clean.** The **quails fell outside** the camp, in the zone associated with **uncleanness and death.** The gift of the **Spirit drew men towards the Lord, the quail leads them away** from God.

When you go to a nice restaurant, you prepare: **dress up, get your hair did, set reservations, maybe look at the menu ahead of time with anticipation. You clean or purify yourself.** Complaining does the opposite, it prepares us to eat out of the trash. **Don't prepare your heart for the wrong feast.**

The Lord will not ignore rebellion (11:18)

The craving for meat was a **disguised desire to return** to Egypt, tantamount to a **rejection of Yahweh.** So the Lord gave the people what they wanted. The people feasted on dark meat for not one, not two, not five, ten, or twenty days, but one month.

When the quail descended, by the wind/spirit, which is divine agency, the people were up all day and night to collect. Some have conservatively estimated that the plague would have totaled more than **105 million birds.**

The one who took the least literarily gathered 10 homers, which is an Akkadian word for a donkey load. They literally gathered quail by the donkey load.

While the quail meet was still between their teeth they were struck down by the plague. It is no accident **that the same lips and teeth** that men used to complain against the Lord were the instruments of God's judgment. Listen very carefully, God will not hold **you faultless for your gossip,** complaining, rebellion, or rebellion.

This is why even to this day the place where the people complained was named **Kibroth-hataavah or the graves of craving.**

May the Lord make us sick to our stomachs over sin (11:20)

One result of the people's indulgence in the quail was actual sickness. Some suggested it was nausea from over eating or even food poisoning. **Regardless of cause, this should be our reaction to sin in our lives.**

You know if you belong to Christ by your reaction to sin. Both those in the community of faith and outside will sin. The question is when you sin, whose side to you take? Do you **agree** with God with your sin (a Holy Spirit sorrow) or do you take your side? Do you **explain** away your complaining, grumbling and whining?

Head-Heart-Hands

Confession Are you a complainer? Truth is, we are all grumblers. Unbelief works itself out in grumbling, which leads to judgment and death (Hughes, 156). Today God is calling you to repent-confess- and find forgiveness.

Passive participation. Maybe you were not standing outside your tent grumbling. Maybe you don't struggle with gossip. But what is your hindrance? Do you stay inside pointing fingers? Do you ignore those who complain instead of addressing them with biblical love and discipline? May the Lord make us sick over our sin.

Taste. May we lose the taste for our iniquities. Garlic and onions are not worth God's wrath. Holding on to your sin is not worth eternal punishment and judgment. Yahweh will not ignore our sin. When you taste and see that the Lord is good, the taste of sin will turn bitter.

Riffraff. The truth is, we are all complainers. **We are all riffraff.**

Lam 3:39 Why should any living person **complain**, any man, because of the punishment for his sins.

In light of God's mercy, that we are alive, no one has room to complain

Mediator (11:2). Jesus is a better mediator than Moses. He does not **give up** on us after the first incidence of grumbling. What is more, Jesus himself bore the judgment curse that we deserved because of our grumbling and unbelief, and exchange he gave us the blessing that was his by rights (Hughes, 155)

1Tim. 2:5 For there is one God and one **mediator** between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, **6** who gave himself as a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.

Notes

Virtually the first thing the Israelites do after setting out on the second leg of their journey to the Promised Land is—rebel (Fox, 709).

The second part of Numbers details six rebellions of the people, and two of the leaders themselves. They are united by a consistent vocabulary: verbs such as *grumble*, *assemble/gather/speak against* depict complaints against Moshe and Aharon and against God (Fox, 709).

The rebellion cycles are not necessarily chronological, but highly stylized and intentional. The interruptions (between rebellions) allow the audience time “to digest” the images and the drama presented therein (Fox, 709).

The bottom line is that the Israelites could not keep faith with God—even after both staggering acts of divine intervention and demonstrations of force of divine wrath—and this lack of faith led ultimately to their dying out in the wilderness outside the Promised Land, in punishment (Fox, 710).

Why are the Israelites so worked up when only three days have passed and in a few days they are due to be in the land flowing with milk and honey? (Goldingay, 29). Why is Moses so worked up? Why is God worked up?

Num. 11:1 The people took to **complaining bitterly** before the LORD. The LORD heard and was incensed: a fire of the LORD broke out against them, ravaging the outskirts of the camp. **2** The people cried out to Moses. Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. **3** That place was named Taberah, because a fire of the LORD had broken out against them.

Disappointments often come to the people of God, things you might have thought clashed with God’s nature and promises (Goldingay, 29).

Troubles test the people of God, bringing to the surface who they really are.

Disaffection = a state of feeling of being dissatisfied with the people in authority and no longer willing to support them.

Taberah is not listed as one of the stations on the journey. It would seem that this site is prime example of the disaffection and rebellion of Israel in the wilderness (NICOT, 201).

The mood of the book, which up until now has been orderly and celebratory, abruptly shifts (Fox, 712).

The Israelites soon found themselves in the most inhospitable desert of Et-Tih, and they began to complain. A modern traveler would sympathize. But the biblical writers did not (Wenham, 106).

Complain

The basis for the first complaint is not stated. Likely, they complained about the forced marches, according to Ramban (JPS, 82).

Here the problem is left undefined.

The root is rare and occurs only here and in Lam 3:39. Similar words exist in cognate languages, and the Accadian unninu “to sigh” could be the most relevant (WBC, 119).

Before the Lord

Literally in the “ears of the Lord,” implying that they voiced their complaints directly, brazenly to God (JPS, 82).

Fire

Probably lightening (Exod. 9:23-24). In any case the outbreak of fire was the result of a miracle.

Outskirts

Shows that the destructive fire did not come from the Tabernacle as in cases cited later (Num. 16:35). Outskirts can also refer to people, those who live on the fringe of society (JPS, 83).

Taking too much notice of people on the edge of the community may lead the community astray.

Prayed

Does not indicate general prayer but intercession (NICOT, 202).

Num. 11:4 The riffraff in their midst felt a gluttonous craving; and then the Israelites wept and said, “If only we had meat to eat! **5** We remember the fish that we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. **6** Now our gullets are shriveled. There is nothing at all! Nothing but this manna to look to!”

Riffraff- Hebrew asafsuf, from the verb that means “to gather.” Perhaps parallel to the ragtag mixed multitude of Exodus 12:38. So the rebellion over food starts among the fringes of the community.

Word occurs only here. There may be a degree of contempt in the word, those governed not by powers of discrimination and insight, but by sensual appetite (WBC, 127).

Craving

Philippians 3:18 For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19 Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things,

Root means to desire and denotes ordinary wishes which may be perfectly legitimate. Here, the idea seems to be of an indiscriminating passion controlled only by the senses (WBC, 127).

In the wilderness of Sin (Exod 16:3) it was a lack of food that prompted complaint, here it was the lack of variety (Wenham, 107).

That focusing on lower bodily goods can get in the way of God's higher purposes for us in commented on by Jesus in the sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:33).

The Israelites are complaining about God's cafeteria menu.

Free

The act of looking back and remembering the good ole days had one major flaw. The people remembered eating, but it was hardly free. In fact, the cost of that plenty had been slavery, and the contrast drawn by the people between the plenty of slavery and the nothing at all (manna) of their freedom is seen as rebellion against God the Liberator (Ashley, 208).

Freedom allows for the possibility of complaining.

A Russian Jew was allowed to emigrate to Israel during the Soviet period, when this was a rare occurrence. When he landed at Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, a reporter met him and asked, "How was life in Russia?" the new emigrant replied. "I do not complaint." Another question ensued, "How was the housing situation in Russia?" "I do not complain." What about working conditions? "I do not complain." Exasperated, the reporter demanded, "If you don't complain about life in Russia, why do you come to Israel?" The Russian retorted: "Because in Israel I can complain?"

The root of gumpling is unbelief because the vision of the grumblers was fatally flawed (Hughes, 149).

The past suddnely became a golden age in which everything had been wonderful (Hughes, 149). Not only was their memory of the past selective and flawed, so was their perspective on the present. It reimagines the past as a golden land, it despises the good gifts that God has surrounded you with in the present, and it completely ignores God's promises for the future.

Yet when we talk to people of faith it strengthens our faith having the reverse effect of grumbling.

What if the past really was better?

Num. 11:7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and in color it was like bdellium. **8** The people would go about and gather it, grind it between millstones or pound it in a mortar, boil it in a

pot, and make it into cakes. It tasted like rich cream. **9** When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall upon it.

Num. 11:10 Moses heard the people weeping, every clan apart, each person at the **entrance of his tent**. The LORD was very angry, and Moses was distressed. **11** And Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me?"

Enough manna fell each night only for the next day, thus pointing day by day, to the loving watch care and providence of Yahweh (Ashley, 209).

Clans- contrasting with the sacred order of lists and censuses early in Numbers, this time it is the rebellious weeping of the people that is somehow orderly! (Fox, 714).

Entrance

That is openly, defiantly. Their weeping constituted a public demonstration (JPS, 85). We are included to complain to one another, or to our leaders, or to no one in particular before we petition God about troubles.

Disillusion can become contagious, hard to disassociate oneself.

Grumbling behind someone's back is destructive. This includes unfocused complaining, which implicitly implicates God as the ultimate Cause and denies that he cares about every aspect of our well-being (Luke 12:6-7)

Grumbling is extremely contagious. It is an infectious disease that is easily passes from one person to the next. It typically originates among those with little or no spiritual insight and can draw in those who ought to know better (Hughes, 149).

18 And say to the people: Purify yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat, for you have kept whining before the LORD and saying, 'If only we had meat to eat! Indeed, we were better off in Egypt!' The LORD will give you meat and you shall eat. **19** You shall eat not one day, not two, not even five days or ten or twenty, **20** but a whole month, until it comes out of your **nostrils and becomes loathsome to you**. For you have rejected the LORD who is among you, by whining before Him and saying, 'Oh, why did we ever leave Egypt!'"

Consecrate

The Israelites are to sanctify themselves for a special encounter with God, as if they will enjoy a sacrificial meal (NIV, 586).

The spirit was bestowed within the court of the tabernacle, in the clean and holy area; the quails fell outside the camp, in the zone associated with uncleanness and death. The gift of

the spirit drew men towards God; the quails led them away from God (Wenham, 109).

Meat-

The craving for meat expresses a disguised desire to return to Egypt and is tantamount to a rejection of God (v.20) (JPS, 88).

Having answered Moses' need by putting his Spirit on the elders, the Lord delivers fresh meat to the people by airmail, sending a literal wind that blows quail in from the sea (NIV, 582).

There would have been a total of more than 105 million birds, still a flock of staggering proportions that would have occupied a vast area while in full flight before becoming bogged down and concentrated around the Israelite camp (NIV, 583).

Nauseating- or something disgusting

The grouching people get graves instead of gravy (NIV, 586).

A word occurring only here. Some interpret it as actual sickness that suggests violent vomiting. It may however be merely nausea—the deleterious effect of overeating (WBC, 129).

1 Cor. 5:5 hand that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

23 And the LORD answered Moses, “Is there a limit to the LORD’s power? You shall soon see whether what I have said happens to you or not!”

Is the arm of the Yahweh too short: after all, this is the God of the “outstretched arm” in Exod 6:6.

The proof of the true God is whether his word comes to pass (Ashley, 213).

Num. 11:31 A wind from the LORD started up, swept quail from the sea and strewed them over the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey on that side, all around the camp, and some two cubits deep on the ground. **32** The people set to gathering quail all that day and night and all the next day—even he who gathered least had ten homers—and they spread them out all around the camp. **33** The meat was still between their teeth, nor yet chewed, when the anger of the LORD blazed forth against the people and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague. **34** That place was named **Kibroth-hattaavah**, because the people who had the craving were buried there.

Wind- ruah can mean both “spirit” and “wind” as is clear from this chapter. Wind and spirit are two aspects of the same divine agency.

Quail

Hebrew selav has been identified with quail, and salva is the word for quail in modern Egyptian Arabic (JPS, 92).

Homer

Is a dry measure, the name for which is related to the Akkadian word for donkey, hence presumably a donkey-load (Ashley, 218).

Kibroth-hattaavah = Graves of carving

Application

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Disillusion can become contagious, hard to disassociate oneself.

God responds to our prayers and cries.

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Unbelief works itself out in grumbling, which leads to judgment and death (Hughes, 156).

Faith works itself out in thanksgiving and intercession, which leads to blessing and hope (Hughes, 156).

NT Connections

John 6:43 Jesus answered them, "Stop **complaining** among yourselves.

John 6:61 Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were **complaining** about this, asked them, "Does this offend you?"

1Cor. 10:10 And don't **complain** as some of them did, and were killed by the destroyer.

James 5:9 Brothers and sisters, do not **complain** about one another, so that you will not be judged. Look, the judge stands at the door!

1Pet. 4:9 Be hospitable to one another without **complaining**.

Phil. 2:14 Do everything without **grumbling** and arguing,

Jude 16 These people are discontented **grumblers**, living according to their desires; their mouths utter arrogant words, flattering people for their own advantage.