

# THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL COMPLAINED

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE: NUMBERS 11



*God's mercy spares Israel again in spite of their rejection of God.*

## The STORY

Pray with children to start class.

### Teaching Points for Class Discussion:

**God warned the people by consuming the outlying parts of the camp** – The cloud lifted from above the Tabernacle and Moses gave the command for Israel to move-out. Everyone who had grown comfortable in the shadow of Mt. Sinai had to pack their things and begin the journey again. Chapter eleven opens with Israel once again complaining in the presence of the Lord. The Lord's presence dwelt along side the Israelites in the pillar of cloud and fire. The people gave voice to their complaints without shame. They did not just grumble in their hearts, but they spoke out their complaints. We are not told why the Lord burned the outlying parts of the camp. It could be that this was where the complainers were, or perhaps it was simply a demonstration of the Lord's power to warn them against rebelling.

**The rabble tempted the Israelites to complain** – Exodus 12:38 informs us that along with the people of Israel there were others, presumably Egyptians, who left Egypt to follow the God of the Hebrews. This could have been the rabble who craved the things of Egypt. Being along the Nile River, fish were plentiful and free to those who could catch them. Rather than remember the oppression of the Egyptians, they remembered the meat and this tempted the Israelites. They began to long for meat to eat instead of the manna. They did not ask God in faith. They complained and grumbled against God. Not only did they long for meat, but they despised the manna, or bread from heaven. One day Jesus, the bread of life, would also be rejected by men who follow their own desires over the plan of God.

**God provided both blessing and judgment** – Even Moses complained to God in Numbers 11:11 and blamed God for the rebellion of the people. Moses resorted to asking God to kill him. In response, God had compassion on Moses and offered to pour out His Spirit on seventy elders. God promised to give them a portion of His Spirit. Rather than simply destroy all Israel for their sin, God, like a loving father, taught the Israelites a lesson for rejecting the Lord. In the end, only those "who had the craving" (verse 34) were killed by the plague. These were likely the rabble that started the complaining. Not all of Israel turned from the Lord, and the Lord spared a remnant of Israel. The rebellion of the people could not thwart God's purpose to raise up a redeemer from among the descendants of Abraham.

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### WHERE IS JESUS?

*Please use the following comments connecting today's lesson to the Gospel to help inform your understanding and serve you by aiding your preparation for class. Remember, we want to do more than present disconnected Bible stories and lessons to our young children. We want them to understand how each story in the Bible plays a part in God's greater plan of redemption.*

In Colossians Paul tells us that it is God who has rescued us from the dominion of darkness through His son Jesus. We deserved death but instead we received rescue. All people, Old Testament or New, deserved death, but God rescued some by Jesus and His work on the cross

In our story in the book of Numbers, the people of Israel complained within days after leaving the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai. Once again, in response to their sin, the anger of the Lord burned. God sent fire to the outskirts of the camp, which threatened to burn the camp.

The people cried out to Moses, their mediator between man and God. Moses prayed to God and the fire died down. Again, God was reminded of the coming Christ who would one day stand in the gap for God's people. It was Jesus who, during His crucifixion, cried, "Forgive them for they know not what they do." Through His death we have forgiveness. In Him we have redemption.

### SWORD BIBLE MEMORY

#### BE A DOER OF THE WORD

*Take time during the class to review the SWORD Bible Memory verses with the class. Provide the opportunity for each child to recite the verses to an adult worker.*



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### ON THE ROAD TO EMMANUS

Read the following Bible passage from the Old Testament. Use the following questions to help the children understand how this passage points to Christ in the New Testament.

#### Bible Passage: Haggai 2:9

#### Connecting the passage to Christ:

Here the prophet speaks of a greater, latter glory to enter the temple (some translations translate latter glory as present glory). Jesus was the latter glory that would be restored to the temple of God. In the future the temple will not be one made of human hands, but will be Christ's body, the church. Revelation 20:21 tells us that heaven will not need the light of the sun, for the glory shining forth from the Lamb of God will give it light.

#### Questions for reflection:

- What do you think the prophet is speaking of when he tells us that the latter glory of the temple will be greater than the former? (1 Kings 8:10-11 tells us the glory of God descended on the temple and at times it was so great that the priests could not enter the temple to perform their service. In heaven the glory of God will be even greater, not because the glory of God lacked any greatness, but perhaps because we will dwell in the glory of God without fear and worship the lamb freely. The salvation of Christ, to take away all the sins of man, is God's glory fully worked out through the work of His Son.)
- Why would this prophecy encourage Israel? (After starting to rebuild the temple, the people had given up and were building their own houses. They were discouraged at the slow work of building the temple and the result being not as splendid as that of Solomon's temple. The prophet's words encouraged them that indeed there would come a day in the future that the glory of God would surpass the temple's past glory.)



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### ACTIVITIES & OBJECT LESSONS

*Use the following activities for practical application and discovery of this lesson. For the younger children, review the preschool questions and use them to help the children relate to the passage. For older children, ask them why they think this passage is in the Bible for us today. How is it supposed to affect our lives?*

#### IT IS EASY TO GRUMBLE

##### Supplies

- paper napkins
- a large bag of popcorn
- bag of M&M's™
- 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.

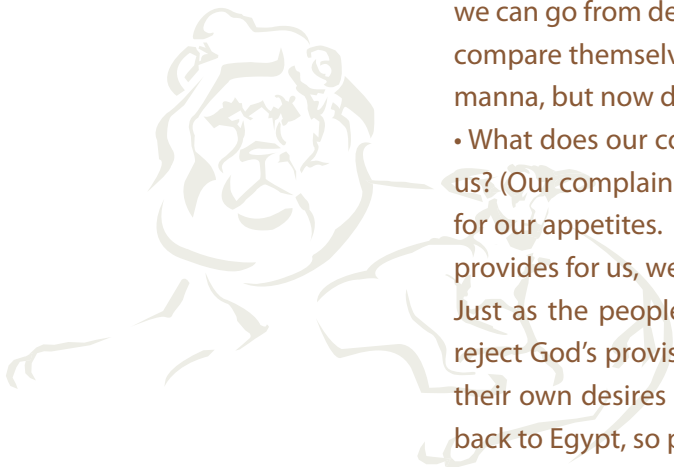
Hide the candies and place the popcorn on a table for all to see. Explain to the class that you are going to toss a coin to see who will get the popcorn, the boys or the girls (or you can use birthdays from January to June instead). Have one of the children call the toss for their representative group. Give the popcorn to whichever group wins. Tell them that they can eat it as soon as they get their share. Give a handful on a napkin to each selected child.

Go on by reading the passage of scripture. Move ahead slowly and listen to any complaints by those who didn't get any popcorn. Do not explain why some received the popcorn and some did not. At some point before reading the passage pull out the M&M's™ and give a portion to all those who did not receive the popcorn, again without explanation. Listen again for complaints.

Read Numbers 11. Then ask the class the following questions:

- Did you find a desire to complain when you didn't get what the other person received? (Draw the children out regarding how they felt.)
- How did you feel when you received popcorn first? How did that change after the other children received M&M's™? (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 been very grateful for the manna, but now despised it.)
- What does our complaining say about our gratefulness to God for what He gives us? (Our complaining reveals that our desires are not foremost for God, but instead for our appetites. 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.



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### LOATHSOME TO YOU

#### Supplies

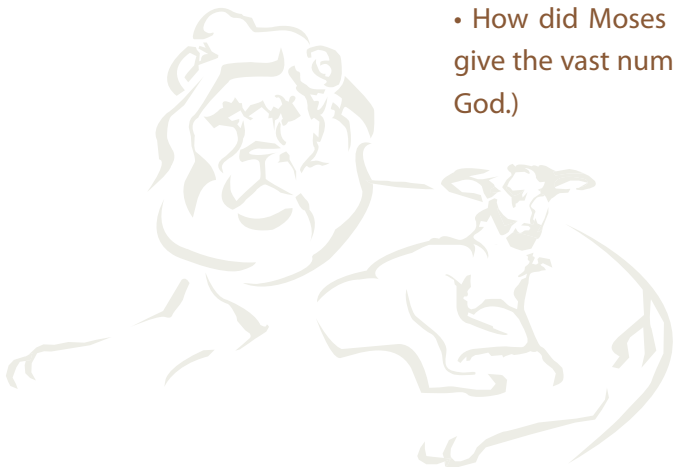
- a jar of peanut butter
- a jar of jelly
- paper plates
- knife
- loaf of bread

The object is to demonstrate how too much of a good thing can become loathsome.

Ask the class if anyone is hungry. After a show of hands, ask those who raised their hands who really likes peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Get four volunteers (make sure they are not allergic to peanuts). Make up a sandwich with normal proportions of peanut butter and jelly. Divide one sandwich up into quarters and pass it to them. Make a second one with triple the peanut butter and jelly and again pass out quarters. Then make a third with all the remaining peanut butter and jelly, so that it just oozes out. Divide it up into quarters and pass it to the children. You will likely start getting comments of it being gross, from them or the audience. Don't force this on the participants, but let them try to eat some of it if they desire. It will likely smear all over them. Excuse them to clean up.

Then ask the class the following questions:

- How did God teach the Israelites a lesson by giving them too much of a good thing (quail)? (God gave them so much quail that they literally got sick of it. A little of a good thing is good, but too much of a good thing can make you sick.)
- Have you ever gotten sick by eating too much of something or did you ever get sick and tired of a food you ate all the time? (Accept several answers.)
- What was God trying to teach Israel through this lesson? (Ultimately God was trying to teach Israel that they should look to Him alone for their fulfillment. Though it is fine to desire food, it is wrong to want something more than God and His provision. God wanted Israel to realize they only needed Him.)
- How did Moses express his doubts? (Moses couldn't believe God was able to give the vast number of people meat to eat. Moses underestimated the power of God.)



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### PRAYER

Pick several children to pray based on the day's scripture passages.

### IN CLASS PROJECT

The first and second grade children can use the preschool coloring sheet and questions. Have the older children draw a picture of thousands of quail being blown by the wind to the Israelites.

### FOR OLDER GRADES

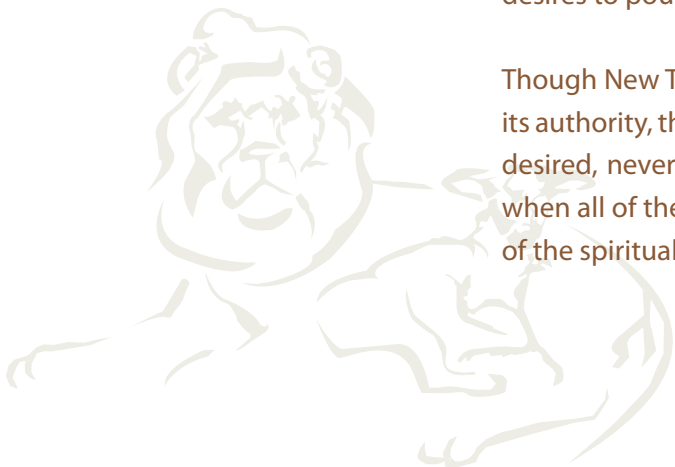
Ask the children to read Numbers 11:1 - 3 and then answer this question:

- How is Moses like Jesus in this story? (Moses is like Jesus in that he interceded on behalf of a sinful people that God's judgment might stop. Moses' intercession foreshadows the work of Christ interceding on our behalf.)

Have the children compare Numbers 11:26-30 with I Corinthians 14:1-5.

- What is the consistent message of these two texts? (The message is that God desires to pour out His Spirit and His gifts upon His people.)

Though New Testament prophecy is different than Old Testament prophecy in its authority, the Spirit of God and the gifts of the Spirit are to be celebrated and desired, never rejected. Little did Moses know that there would come a day when all of the Lord's people would be given the Spirit of God and be capable of the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12 and 14.



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### A LITTLE BIT MORE

**His Spirit** – 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.

