

# No Complaining (Numbers 10-11)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Numbers

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## I. Introduction

- a. As mentioned in prior lessons in this series, one of the main benefits of Christians studying the book of Numbers is that it provides a map of the Christian life.
  - i. As Paul explained in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**, the exodus journey of Israel in the Wilderness is not only a true story, but also an allegorical foreshadowing of the spiritual journey of a Christian.
    1. Egypt represents the time in spiritual slavery, before we become Christians.
    2. The Red Sea represents Christian baptism.
    3. The 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness represents the Christian life.
    4. The pillar of cloud and fire represents the Holy Spirit.
    5. The Promised Land represents the reward we look forward to after this life.
    6. The nation of Israel represents the church.
      - a. The various trials they faced represent the trials in this life that test the hearts of Christians.
      - b. The few who were faithful to the end (Joshua and Caleb) represent Christians who remain faithful to the end and receive the promised reward.
        - i. Rather than get discouraged that so few made it, let us follow the example of those two heroes of the faith, so that we also can persevere and reach the goal we seek.
        - ii. The Lord promises that He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, but instead will provide a way of escape when we are faced with temptation.

- c. The many who were baptized and ate the spiritual food and drink, even drinking from Christ, who fell in the desert represent those who become Christians but do not remain faithful. During the time of testing and temptation, they fell and did not make it.
  - d. The trials and temptations they faced (in **Exodus** and **Numbers**) represent the trials and temptations we will face in this life, after we become Christians.
    - i. How we handle those tests will determine whether or not we receive our promised reward.
- b. Read **1 Corinthians 9:24-10:13**.
- i. Let us focus on the *four or five specific trials or tests* that claimed the lives of thousands in the Wilderness. If we determine what events Paul is referring to, we can study these and learn lessons that will help us to avoid spiritual destruction and make it to the end.
    - 1. Paul says these things were examples *for our benefit!*  
Thousands died in the desert to teach us life-saving lessons.
  - ii. Here are the specific trials and temptations that Paul refers to. In each case, we will try to discern where these events are recorded in the Old Testament. Three of them are very easy to identify, while the other two may require a little more thought.
    - 1. “And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” (**1 Corinthians 10:7**, NKJV)
      - a. This refers to the incident with the golden calf at Mount Sinai, as recorded in **Exodus 32:1-6**. In fact, this is an exact word-for-word quote from the Septuagint (LXX), as can be seen by comparing the Greek texts.
        - i. ...ἐκάθισεν ὁ λαὸς φαγεῖν καὶ πιεῖν, καὶ ἀνέστησαν παίζειν (**Exodus 32:6**, LXX)
        - ii. ...Ἐκάθισεν ὁ λαὸς φαγεῖν καὶ πιεῖν, καὶ ἀνέστησαν παίζειν.” (**1 Corinthians 10:7**, Scrivener NT)
          - 1. Note that ‘E’ is upper case (capital letter) epsilon, while ‘ε’ is the same Greek letter in lower case.

2. “Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell...” (**1 Corinthians 10:8**, NKJV).
  - a. This refers to the Israelites' sins with the Moabite women in **Numbers 25**.
3. “...nor let us *tempt Christ*, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents...” (**1 Corinthians 10:9**, NKJV).
  - a. This refers to the time when the people spoke against God and were killed by snakes, in **Numbers 21:4-9**.
4. “...we should not *lust* after evil things as they also *lusted*.” (**1 Corinthians 10:6**, NKJV)
  - a. “... we would not *crave* evil things as they also *craved*.” (**1 Corinthians 10:6**, NASB95)
  - b. For many years I assumed that this was a general statement that was followed by four specific sins. However, a former student pointed out to me that this may be referring to another specific sin (in which case Paul is addressing five deadly sins in the Wilderness, rather than four)
  - c. The Greek words for “crave” and “cravers” here in **1 Corinthians 10:6** (Strong’s #1937 and 1938) are found in the LXX, in the book of **Numbers**. See **Numbers 11** (where they appear 4x) in **Numbers 11:4** and **11:34-35**; and later where this is recounted in **Numbers 33:16-17**.
    - i. We plan to cover the events of **Numbers 11** in today’s lesson.
5. “...nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.” (**1 Corinthians 10:10**, NKJV)
  - a. Some other translations (such as NASB and ESV) render it “do not *grumble* as some of them *grumbled*”.
  - b. The Greek word used by Paul here is Strong’s #1111. This word and a related term (#1112, the noun “grumbling”) first appears in the Bible in connection with the Wilderness journey. Examples are found in several places, including:

- i. In **Exodus 16**, this is mentioned several times (when people first go into the desert and complain about having no water and no food)
- ii. In **Numbers 11, 14, 16** and **17** the Israelites are complaining about all sorts of things (including the food, the plan to enter Canaan, Moses' leadership of the group, and regarding how the rebellious were disciplined).
- iii. Note that four of the five sins we are warned to avoid are addressed in Numbers. Two of them we plan to touch on today, in **Numbers 11-12**.

## II. Review from Prior Lesson

- a. The people are ready to depart from the encampment at Mount Sinai about a year after they departed Egypt. The Law has been given to them, and the tabernacle constructed.
- b. They will be led throughout their journey by the pillar of cloud and fire.
  - i. This foreshadows the Holy Spirit, who is to guide us, the church, on our spiritual journey through the Wilderness of life in this world.

## III. Two Silver Trumpets and Breaking Camp at Mt. Sinai

- a. Read **Numbers 10:1-10**.
  - i. The two silver trumpets
  - ii. They will be used to signal important transitions.
    1. To gather the leaders of the people.
    2. To signal when it is time for each division of the people (four divisions, three tribes per division; one division encamped on each side of the tabernacle) to break camp.
    3. To signal going into battle in a war.
    4. To signal the beginning of months, important spiritual feasts, etc.
      - a. Including during the Year of Jubilee (Remission), once every 50 years (**Leviticus 25:9**).
  - iii. Trumpets will play a significant role in signaling major transitions throughout the Scriptures. For example:

1. With the defeat of Jericho, seven priests are blowing seven trumpets (**Joshua 6**).
  2. At the Second Coming of Jesus, the trumpet will sound, as mentioned in several places in the New Testament, including:
    - a. **Matthew 24:31**
    - b. **1 Corinthians 15:52-54**
    - c. **1 Thessalonians 4:16**
  3. Also, in several places in the **Book of Revelation**, the sound of trumpets mark important transitions or announcements.
- b. Read **Numbers 10:11-14**.
- i. The people break camp and follow the pillar of cloud and fire.
  - ii. The tribe of Judah goes first. The other tribes follow in order (as described in **Numbers 10:15-28**).
    1. They are led by “Nahshon, son of Amminidab”.
    2. He is the direct ancestor of Jesus, mentioned in the genealogy of **Matthew 1**.
      - a. Boaz and David are descended from him, as explained in **Ruth 4** and **Matthew 1**.
      - b. Joseph and Mary also are descended from him.
        - i. Joseph, the legal (but not biological) father of Jesus, as explained in the genealogy of **Matthew 1**.
        - ii. Mary also is descended from David, based on the statement by the angel Gabriel in **Luke 1**.
          1. “...and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.” (**Luke 1:32**, NKJV)
          2. Since Mary was the only biological parent of Jesus, this statement indicates that Mary also must have been descended from David.
- c. Read **Numbers 10:29-32**.

- i. Moses asks Hobab to stay with them on their journey.
  1. Seems from this passage that Hobab is the son of Reuel/Jethro. Therefore he would be the *brother-in-law* of Moses and the brother of Zipporah (the wife of Moses).
  2. On the other hand, it says in **Judges 4:11** that Hobab was the *father-in-law* of Moses.
  3. Since people could have multiple names, and names are sometimes repeated from father to son, it is not clear to me whether Moses is asking his father-in-law or his brother-in-law to stay with them as an elder and guide through the Wilderness.
    - a. Moses also appeals to him by stating that the blessings of God that fall upon the Israelites will fall on him as well, if he agrees to go with the Israelites on their journey.
  4. It also does not say whether Hobab accepted or rejected the offer of Moses to stay with the Israelites on their journey.
    - a. Perhaps he did? The Kenites (who are from the line of Hobab) became allies of the Jews. (**Judges 1:16**).
    - b. Also, **Judges 4** tells how Jael, the wife of “Heber the Kenite, of the sons of Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses” drove a tent peg through the skull of Sisera, the feared enemy of the Jews, in the days of Deborah and Barak.
  5. Jael’s bravery was celebrated in song by Deborah and Barak, in **Judges 5:24-31**.
- ii. There are times when we are called to make decisions that will impact not only our own lives, but also the trajectory of *future generations of our descendants* (either physical or spiritual descendants).
  1. This also calls to mind the scene in **Ruth 1**, where Ruth and Orpah are called to make an important decision. After the death of their husbands, will they return to their own people, or will they follow their mother-in-law Naomi and her God?
    - a. Orpah returns to her own people and her own gods. Ruth says to Naomi, “your people shall be my people, and your God, my God” (**Ruth 1:16**).

- b. This decision of faith changed her life and the trajectory of her family for generations.
2. Several years ago, a friend of mine, Wayne Chesley, explained to me how Amish elders were some of the best sociologists he had ever seen since they habitually asked the question, “How will bringing in this new practice (or new technology) impact our communities 100 years from now?”
3. Decisions we have made that have a multi-generational impact include:
  - a. Whether I would move to Alaska (at the age of 28) or go to Boston instead.
  - b. Whether my wife and I would homeschool our children.
  - c. Whether we would start a new house church.
  - d. The decision to take the time to read through early Christian writings.
  - e. The decision to embrace a more non-sectarian view of the church, as was held by many early Restoration Movement leaders and teachers.
4. I do NOT mean to imply that we should make decisions that would lead to abandoning or ignoring our *God-given responsibilities* toward our families of origin, in order to focus on the church.
  - a. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” (1 Timothy 5:8, NKJV)
  - b. However, we need to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and live by faith.
  - c. Let us always consider how the decisions we make now could impact our children, grandchildren and those who will follow!

#### IV. Lusting for the Food of Egypt, and Complaining

- a. Read **Numbers 10:30-11:20 & 11:31-35.**

- i. The cries “Rise up, O Lord” and “Return, O Lord” remind me of the coming of Jesus (being raised from the dead, and the promise He will return at his Second Coming)
  - ii. The people lusted after the food of Egypt.
    1. They were no longer satisfied with the manna.
    2. They look back longingly at their ‘good old days’ in Egypt.
      - a. They start to daydream about the melons, leeks, cucumbers, fish, onions and garlic that they ate while in Egypt.
  - iii. The Lord provides them with meat (quail) about three feet (one meter) deep.
  - iv. Then the Lord sends a plague on them. They are buried at “Graves of Lust” because they lusted after what they left behind in Egypt.
- b. The tendency over time is for Christians to get bored and look back longingly on the enslaving pleasures they enjoyed in the world (fornication, drunkenness, living for pleasure, etc.)
- i. Over time, Christians can forget how bad their lives were like before they became Christians, being enslaved to sin.
  - ii. They forget what they have been delivered from.
  - iii. They can forget what a great blessing it is to be free from spiritual *enslavement*.
    1. I prefer to use the term “enslavement” rather than the popular term “addiction”.
    2. ‘Addiction’ implies that one is dealing with a medical problem, while ‘enslavement’ reminds us of the role of Satan in spiritually enslaving us to sin.
  - iv. Satan will tempt our flesh with pleasures of the world that we left behind.
  - v. People can easily become discontent.
- c. The great contrast: Moses (who had access to *but gave up the pleasures of Egypt*) vs. Esau (who sold his birthright for short-term pleasure of the flesh)
- i. “By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming



the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”  
(**Hebrews 11:24–27**, NKJV)

- ii. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.” (**Hebrews 12:14–17**, NKJV)
- d. God calls us to be content with what He has given us.
- i. Read **1 Timothy 6:6-10**.
    - 1. The challenge: godliness with contentment! Let us always be content with what the Lord has given us.
    - 2. This is NOT an excuse to be lazy!
  - ii. We ask in prayer for our ‘daily bread’: simply for what is sufficient to meet our most basic needs.
  - iii. May we not be like the Israelites who lusted for the things they had in Egypt (for us, the sins we gave up before we were Christians).
- e. The other problem: the people are *complaining*.
- i. The people are complaining about boring food.
    - 1. They complain a lot in the Wilderness.
    - 2. They are severely punished by the Lord for complaining, in **Numbers 11:1-3**.
    - 3. They will complain about Moses’ wife in the next chapter; after that, they will complain about their leaders and other challenges.
  - ii. Most people do not think of complaining as a major sin, certainly not in the same league as things like sexual immorality or idolatry.
    - 1. **Question:** *How does God feel about His people complaining? How did Moses feel about it?*

- a. Moses wanted to die. He couldn't stand the weeping and complaining.
  - b. The Lord killed the complainers in the Wilderness, to teach *us* a lesson.
2. Lack of gratitude is the first bad step of mankind into the descent into every form of depravity and wickedness.
- a. Read **Romans 1:18-21**.
  - b. Consider what the Lord had done for Israel.
    - i. The Lord sent them a deliverer, Moses, who was the most humble man on the face of the earth.
    - ii. He brought the 10 plagues upon Egypt.
    - iii. He parted the Red Sea.
    - iv. He led them by the pillar of cloud (by day) and fire (by night).
    - v. He spoke to them from Mount Sinai.
    - vi. He fed them miraculously with honey-flavored manna and satisfied their thirst with water from the rock.
    - vii. YET THEY COMPLAINED ABOUT EVERYTHING
      1. Were there hardships? Yes. However, there was no just cause to complain!
  - iii. In the first chapter of *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas à Kempis (c. 1420 AD), the reader is challenged: "What good does it do to speak learnedly about the Trinity if, lacking humility, you displease the Trinity? Indeed it is not learning that makes a man holy and just, but a virtuous life makes him pleasing to God." In the eleventh chapter is the admonition: "If we were to *uproot only one vice each year*, we should soon become perfect."

### 1. Challenge:

- a. Over the next year, uproot the vice of complaining from your life!
- b. "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and

trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure. *Do all things without complaining and disputing*, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.”  
**(Philippians 2:12–16, NKJV)**

- c. Parents: Do you model this way of life (doing all things without complaining) for your children? Is your home characterized by a spirit of complaining?
- d. What things (or people) do you tend to complain about?
  - i. Your job/career?
  - ii. The cost of living and other challenges for those living in Boston?
  - iii. Your church (current or past experiences)? Other Christians?
  - iv. Living situation? Finances? Government?
  - v. Do you complain about your spouse? Your children? Other relatives?
- e. One of the best antidotes for a complaining spirit: being thankful and grateful.
  - i. Stop and count the many blessings that God has given you.
    - 1. This is how the Israelites got into trouble. They forgot about all the things that God had done for them.
    - 2. We may tend to think of complaining as a relatively ‘minor sin’, certainly not in the same league as sins such as idolatry or sexual immorality. However, God sees this as very serious, something that can disqualify us from our eternal inheritance!

- ii. Be content with what you have. The richest man in the world is the man who is content with what he has.
- iii. *Do not complain!* Many Israelites were destroyed in the desert for complaining.
  - 1. This was recorded as a potentially life-saving lesson for us on our Christian walk!

## V. A Reflection for the U.S. Thanksgiving Holiday

- a. This lesson is being given a week before the U.S. holiday of Thanksgiving.
- b. Let Thanksgiving be a time of giving thanks to God for what He has given us.
- c. Governor Bradford of Massachusetts made the first *Thanksgiving Proclamation* in 1623, three years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth. (Note that the Pilgrims had experienced significant challenges: starvation, death, etc. prior to this point.):
  - i. "Inasmuch as the great Father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, beans, squashes, and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the ravages of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.
  - ii. "Now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the daytime, on Thursday, November 29th, of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Pilgrim Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings."
    - 1. - [issued by] William Bradford, ye Governor of ye Colony"

## VI. Other Things in Numbers chapter 11

- a. Eldad and Medad were not part of the 'official' group, yet the Lord was working through them as well.
  - i. Recall that the Lord promised to Moses that He would "raise up a prophet...like Moses" in the future (Deuteronomy 18:15-19), a

prophecy which pointed to Jesus. With that in view, does this story about Eldad and Medad remind us of a similar event in the ministry of Jesus?

1. “Now John answered Him, saying, “Teacher, we saw someone who does not follow us casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow us.’ But Jesus said, ‘Do not forbid him, for no one who works a miracle in My name can soon afterward speak evil of Me. For he who is not against us is on our side.’” (**Mark 9:38-40**, NKJV)
  2. Don’t be surprised if we find others not connected directly to us who God is using. Don’t stop them!
- b. Moses says, “If I have found *grace* in your sight....” (**Numbers 11:11**)
- i. Moses’ attitude: I have done nothing wrong. Why are these people complaining about me?
  - ii. The word ‘grace’ appears over one hundred times in the LXX, and we see it in this passage as well. When Paul uses the term ‘grace’ in **Ephesians 2:8-9**, he is not introducing a new, unfamiliar word or concept!
    1. This common Greek word simply means ‘favor’ (as opposed to ‘*unmerited* favor’, as many inaccurately teach today).
    2. Peter and James also use the same word when quoting **Proverbs 3** “God opposes the proud but gives grace (favor) to the humble”.
    3. As can be seen clearly from how the term is used in the LXX, it simply means “*favor*”, not “unmerited favor” (which would make no sense if you switched it into this passage from **Numbers 11:11** or **Proverbs 3:37** from the LXX).