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Introduction

The people complain, the Lord is displeased, and many of them are consumed by fire, Numbers 11:1. Moses intercedes for them, and the fire is quenched, Numbers 11:2. The place is called Taberah, Numbers 11:3. The mixed multitude long for flesh, and murmur, Numbers 11:4-6. The manna described, Numbers 11:7-9. The people weep in their tents, and the Lord is displeased, Numbers 11:10. Moses deplores his lot in being obliged to hear and bear with all their murmurings, Numbers 11:11-15. He is commanded to bring seventy of the elders to God that he may endue them with the same spirit, and cause them to divide the burden with him, Numbers 11:16, Numbers 11:17. He is also commanded to inform the people that they shall have flesh for a whole month, Numbers 11:18-20. Moses expresses his doubt of the possibility of this, Numbers 11:21, Numbers 11:22. The Lord confirms his promise, Numbers 11:23. The seventy men are brought to the tabernacle, Numbers 11:24; and the spirit of prophecy rests upon them, Numbers 11:25. Eldad and Medad stay in the camp and prophesy, Numbers 11:26, Numbers 11:27. Joshua beseeches Moses to forbid them, Numbers 11:28. Moses refuses, Numbers 11:29, Numbers 11:30. A wind from the Lord brings quails to the camp, Numbers 11:31, Numbers 11:32. While feeding on the flesh, a plague from the Lord falls upon them, and many of them die, Numbers 11:33. The place is called Kibroth-hattaavah, or the graves of lust, Numbers 11:34. They journey to Hazeroth, Numbers 11:35.

Verse 1

And when the people complained - What the cause of this complaining was, we know not. The conjecture of St. Jerome is probable; they complained because of the length of the way. But surely no people had ever less cause for murmuring; they had God among them, and miracles of goodness were continually wrought in their behalf.

It displeased the Lord - For his extraordinary kindness was lost on such an ungrateful and rebellious people. And his anger was kindled - Divine justice was necessarily incensed against such inexcusable conduct.

And the fire of the Lord burnt among them - Either a supernatural fire was sent for this occasion, or the lightning was commissioned against them, or God smote them with one of those hot suffocating winds which are very common in those countries.

And consumed - in the uttermost parts of the camp - It pervaded the whole camp, from the center to the circumference, carrying death with it to all the murmurers; for we are not to suppose that it was confined to the uttermost parts of the camp, unless we could imagine that there were none culpable any where else. If this were the same with the case mentioned Numbers 11:4, then, as it is possible that the mixed multitude occupied the outermost parts of the camp, consequently the burning might have been confined to them.

Verse 2

The fire was quenched - Was sunk, or swallowed up, as in the margin. The plague, of whatever sort, ceased to act, and the people had respite.

Verse 4

The mixed multitude - חֲסִידֵי מִצְרַיִם (hasaphsoph), the collected or gathered people. Such as came out of Egypt with the Israelites; and are mentioned Exodus 12:38. This mongrel people, who had comparatively little of the knowledge of God, feeling the difficulties and fatigues of the journey, were the first to complain; and then we find the children of Israel joined them in their complainings, and made a common cause with these demi-infidels.

Verse 5

We remember, etc. - The choice aliments which those murmurers complained of having lost by their leaving Egypt, were the following: fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. A European may smile at such delicacies; but delicacies they were in that country. Their fish is excellent; their cucumbers and water melons highly salubrious and refreshing; and their onions, garlic, etc., exquisitely flavoured, differing as much from vegetables of the same species in these northern climes as a bad turnip does from a good apple. In short, this enumeration takes in almost all the commonly attainable delicacies in those countries.

Verse 7

The manna was as coriander seed - Probably this short description is added to show the iniquity of the people in murmuring, while they had so adequate a provision. But the baseness of their minds appears in every part of

their conduct. About the rebellion of the ancients the learned are not agreed; and I shall not trouble the reader with conjectures. See the note on Genesis 2:12. Concerning the manna, see the notes on Exodus 16 (note). Numbers 11:11-15. The complaint and remonstrance of Moses in these verses serve at once to show the deeply distressed state of his mind, and the degradation of the minds of the people. We have already seen that the slavery they had so long endured had served to debase their minds, and to render them incapable of every high and dignified sentiment, and of every generous act.

Verse 17

I will take of the spirit which is upon thee - From this place Origen and Theodoret take occasion to compare Moses to a lamp, at which seventy others were lighted, without losing any of its brightness. To convince Moses that God had sufficiently qualified him for the work which he had given him to do, he tells him that of the gifts and graces which he has given him he will qualify seventy persons to bear the charge with him. This was probably intended as a gracious reproof. Query. Did not Moses lose a measure of his gifts in this business? And is it not right that he whom God has called to and qualified for some particular office, should lose those gifts which he either undervalues or refuses to employ for God in the way appointed? Is there not much reason to believe that many cases have occurred where the spiritual endowments of particular persons have been taken away and given to others who made a better use of them? Hence the propriety of that exhortation, Revelation 3:11: Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown. The gracious God never called a man to perform a work without furnishing him with adequate strength; and to refuse to do it on the pretense of inability is little short of rebellion against God. This institution of the seventy persons to help Moses the rabbins consider as the origin of their grand council called the Sanhedrin. But we find that a council of seventy men, elders of Israel, had existed among the people a year before this time. See Exodus 24:9 (note); see the advice given to Jethro to Moses, Exodus 18:17 (note), etc., and the notes there.

Verse 22

Shall the flocks and the herds be slain - There is certainly a considerable measure of weakness and unbelief manifested in the complaints and questions of Moses on this occasion; but his conduct appears at the same time so very simple, honest, and affectionate, that we cannot but admire it, while we wonder that he had not stronger confidence in that God whose miracles he had so often witnessed in Egypt.

Verse 23

Is the Lord's hand waxed short? - Hast thou forgotten the miracles which I have already performed? or thinkest thou that my power is decreased? The power that is unlimited can never be diminished.

Verse 25

When the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied - By prophesying here we are to understand their performing those civil and sacred functions for which they were qualified; exhorting the people to quiet and peaceable submission, to trust and confidence in the goodness and providence of God, would make no small part of the duties of their new office. The ideal meaning of the word נָבִיא (nabi) is to pray, entreat, etc. The prophet is called נָבִיא (nabi), because he prays, supplicates, in reference to God; exhorts, entreats, in reference to man. See on Genesis 20:7 (note).

Verse 27

Eldad and Medad do prophesy, etc. -
 Eldad, they said, and Medad there,
 Irregularly bold,
 By Moses uncommission'd, dare
 A separate meeting hold!
 And still whom none but heaven will own.
 Men whom the world decry,
 Men authorized by God alone,
 Presume to prophesy!

Verse 28

My lord Moses, forbid them -
 How often have I blindly done
 What zealous Joshua did,
 Impatient to the rulers run,
 And cried, "My lords, forbid!
 Silence the schismatics, constrain
 Their thoughts with ours to agree,

And sacrifice the souls of men
To idol unity!â€•

Verse 29

Enviest thou for my sake? -
Moses, the minister of God,
Rebukes our partial love,
Who envy at the gifts bestowâ€™d
On those we disapprove.
We do not our own spirit know,
Who wish to see suppressâ€™d
The men that Jesuâ€™s spirit show,
The men whom God hath blessâ€™d.

Would God that all the Lordâ€™s people were prophets -
Shall we the Spiritâ€™s course restrain,
Or quench the heavenly fire?
Let God his messengers ordain,
And whom he will inspire.
Blow as he list, the Spiritâ€™s choice
Of instruments we bless;
We will, if Christ be preached, rejoice,
And wish the word success.
Can all be prophets then? are all
Commissionâ€™d from above?
No; but whomeâ€™er the Lord shall call
We joyfully approve.
O that the Church might all receive
The spirit of prophecy,
And all in Christ accepted live,
And all in Jesus die!

Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures, by Charles Wesley, M. A., and Presbyter of the Church of England. Bristol, 1762. 2 vols. 12mo.
These sentiments are the more particularly remarkable as they come from one who was sufficiently bigoted to what was called ecclesiastical orders and regularity.

Verse 31

A wind from the Lord - An extraordinary one, not the effect of a natural cause. And brought quails, a bird which in great companies visits Egypt about the time of the year, March or April, at which the circumstance marked here took place. Mr. Hasselquist, the friend and pupil of the famous Linnaeus, saw many of them about this time of the year, when he was in Egypt. See his Travels, p. 209.

Two cubits high upon the face of the earth - We may consider the quails as flying within two cubits of the ground; so that the Israelites could easily take as many of them as they wished, while flying within the reach of their hands or their clubs. The common notion is, that the quails were brought round about the camp, and fell there in such multitudes as to lie two feet thick upon the ground; but the Hebrew will not bear this version. The Vulgate has expressed the sense, Volabantque in aere duobus cubitis altitudine super terram. â€œAnd they flew in the air, two cubits high above the ground.â€•

Verse 32

The people stood up, etc. - While these immense flocks were flying at this short distance from the ground, fatigued with the strong wind and the distance they had come, they were easily taken by the people; and as various flocks continued to succeed each other for two days and a night, enough for a monthâ€™s provision might be collected in that time. If the quails had fallen about the tents, there was no need to have stood up two days and a night in gathering them; but if they were on the wing, as the text seems to suppose, it was necessary for them to use dispatch, and avail themselves of the passing of these birds whilst it continued. See Harmer, and see the note on Exodus 16:13.

And they spread them all abroad - Maillet observes that birds of all kinds come to Egypt for refuge from the cold of a northern winter; and that the people catch them, pluck, and bury them in the burning sand for a few

minutes, and thus prepare them for use. This is probably what is meant by spreading them all abroad round the camp. Some authors think that the word *salvim*, rendered quails in our translation, should be rendered locusts. There is no need of this conjecture; all difficulties are easily resolved without it. The reader is particularly referred to the note on Exodus 16:13 (note).

Verse 33

The wrath of the Lord was kindled - In what way, and with what effects, we cannot precisely determine. Some heavy judgment fell upon those murmurers and complainers, but of what kind the sacred writer says nothing.

Verse 34

Kibroth-hattaavah - The graves of lust; and thus their scandalous crime was perpetuated by the name of the place.

1. St. Jude speaks of persons who were murmurers and complainers, walking after their own lusts, Judges 1:16, and seems to have this people particularly in view, whom the sacred text calls *complainers of their lot*. They could never be satisfied; even God himself could not please them, because they were ever preferring their own wisdom to his. God will save us in his own way, or not at all; because that way, being the plan of infinite wisdom, it is impossible that we can be saved in any other. How often have we professed to pray, *Thy will be done!* And how seldom, very seldom, have our hearts and lips corresponded! How careful should we be in all our prayers to ask nothing but what is perfectly consistent with the will of God! Many times our prayers and desires are such that, were they answered, our ruin would be inevitable. *Thy will be done!* is the greatest of all prayers; and he who would pray safely and successfully, must at least have the spirit of these words in all his petitions. The Israelites asked flesh when they should not have asked for it; God yields to their murmuring, and the death of multitudes of these murmurers was the consequence! We hear of such punishments, and yet walk in the same way, presuming on God's mercy, while we continue to provoke his justice. Let us settle it in our minds as an indisputable truth, that God is better acquainted with our wants than we are ourselves; that he knows infinitely better what we need; and that he is ever more ready to hear than we are to pray, and is wont to give more than we can desire or deserve.

2. In no case has God at any time withheld from his meanest followers any of the spiritual or temporal mercies they needed. Were he to call us to travel through a wilderness, he would send us bread from heaven, or cause the wilderness to smile and blossom as the rose. How strange is it that we will neither believe that God has worked, or will work, unless we see him working!