

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

**DHW BIBLE CLASS**

**LESSON 5**

**THE BOOK OF NUMBERS**

**CHAPTER 11-12**

**INTRODUCTION**

Chapters 11 to 14 chronicle a sad and solemn picture of the character and conduct of man. The first ten chapters show how gracious and good God was in preparing and providing His people for their journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land. And only three days after they had departed from Sinai, the people complained and murmured against God and Moses. The same happened after the marvellous experience at the Red Sea. Three days after that wonderful experience of singing praises to God, the Israelites complained that they did not have water to drink.<sup>1</sup> Now here, three days after they left Sinai (Numbers 10:33), the people were complaining and murmuring. We will do well to heed the Psalmist's repeated calls that "men would praise the LORD for His goodness and for His wonderful works to the children of men" (Psalm 107:8, 15, 21, 31).

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<sup>1</sup> Exodus 15:22 So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. 23 And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they *were* bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. 24 And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?

Paul, in his letter to the Romans, wrote that "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope" (15:4). As we study these two chapters, let us learn the precious spiritual truths about man so that we will not be found wanting in our heart and mind before God.

**OUTLINE**

**A. The LORD'S Anger and Chastisement Upon the Complaining Israelites (11:1-3).**

1. The LORD was displeased with the complaining Israelites (11:1).
  - a. The LORD heard their complaining (1a).
  - b. The LORD sent fire that burnt them (1b).
2. Moses interceded on behalf of the Israelites (11:2-3).
  - a. The Israelites appealed to Moses for help (2a).
  - b. Moses prayed to the LORD (2b).
  - c. The LORD answered Moses' prayer (2c).
  - d. Moses named the place Taberah (3).

**B. The Israelites and Others Murmur for Food They Once Had in Egypt (11:4-9).**

1. The Israelites together with the mixed multitude craved for the kind of food they had in Egypt (11:4-5).
  - a. They wanted meat (4).
  - b. They remembered the fish and the leeks (5).

2. The Israelites were not contented with manna (11:6-9).
  - a. They complained and were not satisfied with manna (6).
  - b. The description of manna (7).
  - c. They daily collected the manna and cooked it in various ways (8).
  - d. The manna fell upon the dew each night (9).

**C. Moses was Displeased, Disappointed and Depressed (11:10-15).**

1. Moses was displeased with the behaviour of the Israelites (11:10).
2. Moses appealed to the LORD (11:11-15).
  - a. He complained to the LORD about his plight (11).
  - b. He reasoned that it was not his idea to bring them out of Egypt (12).
  - c. He admitted his inability to provide meat for the people (13).
  - d. He acknowledged that he could not endure the burden of the people (14).
  - e. He asked the LORD to take his life if he had dropped out of His favour (15).

**D. The LORD Encouraged Moses and Promised to Provide Meat (11:16-30).**

1. The LORD lightened Moses' burden (11:16-17).
  - a. The LORD instructed Moses to gather seventy leaders to stand with him (16).
  - b. The LORD would put on these seventy the same spirit that He had given to Moses (17).
2. The LORD promised to provide meat (11:18-20).

- a. The LORD instructed Moses to sanctify the people for they would have meat to eat (18).
- b. The LORD would provide them more than they could take (19-20).
3. Moses' response to the LORD'S promise (11:21-23).
  - a. Moses still thought that the LORD meant slaying their herds and flocks for meat (21-22).
  - b. The LORD corrected Moses (23).
4. Moses obeyed the LORD by gathering the seventy leaders (11:24-30).
  - a. Moses gathered the leaders and told them the words of the LORD (24).
  - b. The LORD put upon the seventy leaders the same spirit He put on Moses and they prophesied (25).
  - c. Eldad and Medad were in their camp and they too prophesied (26-27).
  - d. Joshua was jealous for Moses (28a).
  - e. Moses responded that it would be better that all would prophesy (28b-29).
  - f. Moses took Joshua in with the other leaders (30).

**E. The LORD Provided the Meat (11:31-35).**

1. The LORD sent a wind that brought quails to the camp (11:31).
2. The people gathered and ate the quails for two days (11:32-33a).
3. The LORD was angry and sent a great plague upon the people (11:33b).

4. The place was called Kibroth-hattaavah from there they journeyed to Hazeroth (11:34-35).

#### **F. Miriam and Aaron Opposed Moses (12:1-16).**

1. Miriam and Aaron challenged the authority and leadership of Moses (12:1-4).
2. The LORD called Miriam and Aaron through the pillar of cloud and fire (12:5-9).
  - a. The LORD affirmed His sovereign right to choose His prophet to speak in His behalf (5-6)
  - b. The LORD vindicated Moses (7-8).
  - c. The LORD was angry with Miriam and Aaron (9).
3. The chastisement of Miriam (12:10-16).
  - a. Miriam was stricken with leprosy (10).
  - b. Aaron pleaded with Moses on Miriam's behalf (11-12).
  - c. Moses interceded on behalf of Miriam (13).
  - d. The LORD answered Moses' prayer (14-16).

### **COMMENTARY**

#### **A Complaining Spirit**

Moses opened with a general statement that the children of Israel were complaining without giving any details. This implies that the children of Israel were not complaining once or twice, but that they had developed a complaining and a murmuring spirit. As we read on, this complaining and murmuring spirit climaxed at Kadesh Barnea. It cost them dearly for when the

opportune moment came for them to enter the Promised Land, they failed to do so.

The LORD heard their complaining and murmuring and He was displeased. The LORD'S judgement came upon them in the form of a fire that consumed some of them at one of the outer parts of the camp. The people panicked and entreated Moses to pray for them and then the fire stopped. God is love but He is also holy, and when His children do not appreciate His goodness towards them but instead complain and murmur against Him, He does not hesitate to chastise them. God sees, hears and knows our hearts and minds. He weighs and puts us in the balance, and if we are found wanting, His judgement will come sooner or later.

#### **The People You Mix With**

The complaint originated not from the Israelites but from "the mixed multitude" that came with them from out of Egypt. They started complaining and soon the children of Israel joined in. They remembered the variety of vegetables and fish that they could eat and enjoy in Egypt. And they complained that they had nothing but manna all the time. They remembered but did not say anything about their Egyptian taskmasters, the toil in making bricks, the troubles and torture they were subjected to. All these were conveniently forgotten. Nothing was said about the great and mighty ways in which the LORD delivered them. How ungrateful and mean they were.

It is no surprise that God was angry with them and they deserved to be chastised. We must not make the same mistake. We must always be vigilant and be aware of who we mix with so that we do not adopt their ungodly spirit. God loves us, gave Himself for us and

delivered us from the bondage of sin and Satan. We should be grateful and not complain. Be like Paul who shared that he had learned to be content in whatsoever state he was in (Philippians 4:11-12).<sup>2</sup> The manna that God gave them was surely sufficient for their needs. It was only temporary. When they reach and enter the Promised Land, they could enjoy the produce of the land to their hearts' content. Their complaining, murmuring and protest were an affront to God.

### **The People You Discourage**

Moses, their humble and faithful leader, was affected. Moses heard the people weep at the door of their tent. It was a heavy burden for Moses to carry. Moses told God that he was not able to bear all these alone (11:14). And he told God to take his life. God had called him to lead this people out and he had obeyed. But now the burden of responsibility was too great to bear. He was disappointed and exhausted.

God responded graciously to Moses. He told Moses to gather seventy elders who had leadership qualities. He would put in them the same Spirit He had given to Moses so that they could share the burden of responsibility with him. And regarding the request of the children of Israel for meat, God promised that they would get as much meat as they wanted until they would loathe it. God said that they had despised Him, who had been in the midst of them, had saved them and

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<sup>2</sup> Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.

helped them, and provided for all their needs.

Moses replied the LORD that it would be impossible for *him* to supply the amount of meat for the whole multitude (11:21). The LORD did not chide him. The LORD told him, "Is the LORD'S hand waxed short?" Moses was thinking of himself. He thought that since it was his responsibility to lead the people, he had to supply the meat and kill the livestock for meat (11:22). He was wrong. The LORD Himself would supply. We learn a precious truth that when God called a man to serve Him, He will provide the ability for him to perform the task. God will not expect His servant to do beyond what he is capable of. God knew that it would be impossible for Moses to supply the meat so He sent quails that piled up three feet above the ground. The people went crazy gathering and eating them. The LORD smote the people with a very great plague. It was not recorded how many died. It was a judgement from the LORD.

### **Not by Might**

Moses gathered the seventy leaders round about the tabernacle. The LORD came down in a cloud and filled the seventy leaders with the Spirit that was upon Moses. And the manifestation of the in-filling was that they prophesied. The nature and content of their prophecy were not mentioned but it was enough to attract Joshua. Two of the seventy did not present themselves but were at their own tent. They too were filled with the Spirit and prophesied. Joshua told Moses to forbid them.

Joshua's response does not seem strange for it was natural for him to feel for Moses whom he acknowledged as his leader and mentor. He was jealous for Moses in the sense that he thought

Moses' position of authority and leadership had been curtailed. It was not simply a feeling of envy on his part. Moses' response was exemplary. He would like the LORD to fill everyone with the Spirit so that there would be no more problems -- everyone would be dedicated, committed, and obedient.

It has been said that God's work must be done with God's Spirit and in God's way. It is not the number of people and the combined power of numbers that will accomplish the work of God but by the Spirit of God. Therein lies the power. As the prophet Zechariah declares the word of the LORD, "not by might, nor by power, but my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

### **Speaking Against the Lord's Servant**

The complaining and murmuring was not confined to the general congregation of Israel. It affected Miriam and Aaron, Moses' sister and brother, the ones who were closest to him. They spoke against Moses. The text clearly indicates that the reason for their complaint was not because Moses married an Ethiopian woman. The words, which they spoke against Moses, saying, "Hath the LORD indeed spoke only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?" was unrelated to Moses' marriage to the Ethiopian woman. In other words, the cause for their opposition was a pretext. The real hidden reason was that they challenged Moses' position of leadership, his authority and the right to speak for God.

The LORD heard it! God's physical presence might not be there but He heard it nevertheless. Moses was meek and the humblest of men. The LORD'S response to this challenge against His servant was immediate (12:4). The LORD called the three of them to present themselves at the entrance of

the tabernacle. God in no uncertain terms told them that Moses was His very special chosen servant whom He spoke "mouth to mouth". God spoke to Moses personally and face to face. And God chided Miriam and Aaron for their audacity to challenge and speak against "My servant Moses" (12:8; observe the first person possessive pronoun). The LORD was angry with them and left. The next thing that happened was that Miriam was stricken with leprosy. Aaron pitied his sister but there was only one man who could help and he was none other than Moses, the LORD'S chosen servant. Aaron entreated his brother Moses to intercede in her behalf after acknowledging their foolishness and sin against Moses.

It is a serious mistake to speak against the LORD'S chosen servant. God will deal with those who speak against His feeblest and humblest servant. Do not despise the chosen servant of the LORD though he might be weak in some ways. Man tends to look down and take advantage of such people. But God does not. He will ever protect and support His chosen servant. If God's chosen servant should fail in anything, God Himself will deal with him. But let other fellow servants of the LORD beware how they attempt to take matters into their hands, lest they be like Miriam and get hurt.

Moses' character and conduct was exemplary. When Aaron confessed their sin and foolishness to him, and entreated him to pray for Miriam, Moses prayed to God for her healing. The LORD replied that she had to be shut out of the camp for seven days, and after that she might be received in again (12:14). God does not take sin lightly. A man must learn from his sin and mistake. Miriam was not placed back

immediately. Under God's instruction, she had to wait seven days. A comforting lesson we learn is that when a person sins or makes a mistake, he may be restored provided he is willing to confess and repent. One failure in a person's life does not mean that his whole life is finished. If the person is willing to follow the will and ways of God, he will be restored. King David's affair with Bathsheba is another example. After that, David was still referred to as a man after God's own heart.

### **SUMMARY**

These two chapters are rich in moral and spiritual lessons for us. We see for ourselves who we really are. It is in our nature to complain and murmur. We are very forgetful of the good things that others do for us. But we seldom forget even the smallest bad things.

We must learn to be content with whatever God has blessed or bestowed upon each of us. We are all differently endowed, some more, some less, but the secret is to be content.

As for the friends we associate with, we must beware who we fellowship and walk with. One bad apple will affect a basket of good apples. Let us not be proud or boastful that we are strong and that we can change the rotten apple. We do not have the ability or the power. The sooner we learn this precious lesson from God, the better it is for us. We ought to fellowship with the people of God, who are obliged to love and care for one another.

When the people of God are fully dedicated and committed to Him, they will be filled with the Spirit of God. God's work then can progress and increase. It is not mere numbers of people that produce the good results in God's work. It is through those who are filled with the

Spirit of God that God's work can be effectively done. The results will be God pleasing and honouring.

Last but not the least, if a servant of God is truly called to do His service, never speak against Him. This does not mean that there can be no vigorous discussion concerning the work of God. It simply means that one must not challenge the position of God's chosen servant to the extent of crippling his ministry. God will deal with such people, just as God will deal with His chosen servant when he has done something wrong. AMEN

**DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION  
QUESTIONS**

**Daily Readings**

**Monday: Numbers 11:1-9; Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.**

**Tuesday: Numbers 11:10-23; Psalm 106:1-15; Matthew 19:23-26.**

**Wednesday: Numbers 11:24-35; Acts 2:1-5.**

**Thursday: Numbers 12:1-9; Hebrews 3:1-6; 1 Peter 2:5.**

**Friday: Numbers 12:10-16; Matthew 11:28-30; James 5:16.**

**Discussion Questions**

**1. The children of Israel had their “mountain experience” at Sinai. How many days had they travelled? Why do you think they complained and murmured?**

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**2. Do Christians exhibit the same spirit? Can you illustrate with an example?**

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**3. What is the attitude of God towards those who complain and murmur?**

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**4. What is the Christians’ heavenly manna? Do we find our heavenly manna sufficient for us?**

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**5. How important is it that we mix with the right company?**

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**6. Moses complained to God that he was carrying the burden alone. Is it true?**

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**7. What do you think of Moses' outburst of his feelings to God?**

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**8. Was it a good thing or a bad thing for Moses to have seventy co-leaders?**

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**9. Was Moses' portion of God's Spirit depleted when God said, "I will take of the spirit which is upon thee and put it upon them"?**

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**10. What do the additional seventy co-leaders give to Moses? More spiritual power?**

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**11. What do you think of Moses' response to God's promise to give meat to the children of Israel?**

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**12. What are your thoughts of Joshua's response towards Eldad's and Medad's behaviour?**

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**13. What kind of spirit should a servant of the LORD have when doing His work?**

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**14. Was Miriam and Aaron's accusation of Moses' marriage to an Ethiopian woman the real issue of their complaint against Moses? What was the real issue?**

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**15. Which of the two troubles is more harmful to God's work?**

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