

The Lord Sends a Large Number of Quail to Discipline the People

Numbers 11:26-35

Numbers 11:26-35 - *“But two men had remained in the camp: the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them. Now they were among those listed, but who had not gone out to the tabernacle; yet they prophesied in the camp.”* ²⁷ *And a young man ran and told Moses, and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”* ²⁸ *So Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, one of his choice men, answered and said, “Moses my lord, forbid them!”*

²⁹ *Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”* ³⁰ *And Moses returned to the camp, he and the elders of Israel.* ³¹ *Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and about a day’s journey in any direction all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground.* ³² *And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers); and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.* ³³ *But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague.* ³⁴ *So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.* ³⁵ *From Kibroth Hattaavah the people moved to Hazeroth, and camped there.”*

Background Notes

At the beginning of Numbers 11, the children of Israel complained about their problems and their provisions in the wilderness. And Numbers 11:1 says that **when the people complained, the Lord was displeased!**

Complaining was one of the “sins of the wilderness.” The sins of the wilderness kept the children of Israel from moving on into the Promised Land, where God wanted His people to live. As a result of the sins of the wilderness, Israel remained in the wilderness for forty years before entering the good Land of Promise.

All of this, of course, has application for us. In Romans 15:4 we read, *“These things were written long before to teach us, and the Scriptures give us hope an encouragement as we wait patiently for God’s promises to be revealed”* (NLT). God included this portion in His Word to teach us that if we commit the “sins of the wilderness,” we too will fall short of all the spiritual blessings that the Lord has for us in this Christian life. Instead of appropriating and enjoying our spiritual blessings in Christ, we will “wander in the wilderness” of Christian experience. Have you ever noticed how complaining disrupts your fellowship with the Lord?

Here at the end of Numbers 11 we see how the Lord answered when Israel complained about the manna. The people were tired and bored with the manna - God’s special provision for them – and they wanted meat! So God answered their

complaint by giving them so many quail that they became sick of the meat! Just as God had promised, they ate quail for a whole month “until it came out of their nostrils!” (v20)! Do you remember that verse?

In the earlier part of Numbers 11 we saw that Moses himself complained to the Lord about His heavy workload. In response to Moses’ request, the Lord had Moses choose seventy elders from among the people of Israel. The Spirit of God came upon these seventy men to empower them to help Moses with his spiritual leadership of the people. *“Then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.”* This temporary gift of prophecy confirmed Moses’ choice of the seventy elders. It showed the people that God had chosen these men and empowered them by the Holy Spirit.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Lord is pleased with the spiritual desires of His people.

Question: Without looking at your Bibles, what were the names of the two elders at the time of Moses who remained in the camp and prophesied? Answer: *“...the name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them.”* The fact that the Spirit of the Lord came upon these two men who remained in the camp, emphasized that this sovereign act of **God** was independent of the presence of Moses. At that time Moses was at the Tabernacle with the rest of the seventy elders.

Joshua was Moses’ assistant at this time, and he tried to get Moses to restrain Eldad and Medad. It seems that Joshua was concerned that Moses’ leadership position would be threatened. This reminds me of the disciples’ reaction when they saw someone casting out demons in Jesus’ name. Do you remember that event in Luke 9:49-50? *“Now John answered and said, “Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us.” But Jesus said to him, “Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side.”*

I love Moses’ response to Joshua: *“Then Moses said to him, “Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”* (v29). Moses was not jealous! He was big-hearted and magnanimous in his response.

Moses is a great example for all of us to follow. He wanted **all of God’s people** to be gifted and spiritual! This is the Lord’s desire for us today. Today, God’s Holy Spirit indwells **every** believer, and **every** believer has spiritual gifts to use for God’s glory. 1 Peter 4:10 - *“As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”*

God is pleased when we want to use our spiritual gifts and our natural talents and abilities to serve one another, and thus bring glory to the Lord Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:1 says, *“This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of an elder, he desires a good work.”* God is not only pleased with our Christian service, but He is pleased with our spiritual desires as

well. How are you doing with **spiritual desires**? Notice, I didn't ask, "What is your Christian service, or what are your spiritual gifts? I asked, "What are your spiritual desires?"

The Lord is pleased with the spiritual desires of His people.

2. The Lord is displeased with the selfish desires of His people.

The Lord answered the people's complaint about having no meat (v31). The Lord brought quail in from the sea: "*Now a wind went out from the LORD, and it brought quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp, about a day's journey on this side and about a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp, and about two cubits above the surface of the ground.*" The "sea" mentioned here would be the Rea Sea, and the quail were probably blown off their normal migratory course by a strong wind that the Lord may have sent for that very purpose.

The birds were "two cubits above the surface of the ground" -- that's three feet above the surface all around the camp. This fact can be interpreted in two different ways. One view: there were so many quail that they were piled up three feet deep all around the camp. The other view: the exhausted quail flew only three feet high, and the people could catch them or club them down, as with a baseball bat. (By the way, did you notice that baseball is mentioned in Numbers 11? A lot of "fowls" were hit, and the one who gathered least got ten "homers"!)

Seriously speaking, either of those interpretations is in line with the Hebrew text here - whether the birds flew three feet off the ground, or the birds were piled three feet deep. Ten *homers* is over one hundred bushels, and if there were a couple of million people, that's a lot of quail! Verse 32 says, "*And the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers [over one hundred bushels]; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp*" (v32).

Remember that the Lord said that they would eat so much quail that it would come out of their nostrils? Verse 33 says that while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was swallowed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck them with a severe plague. Why? Because the people never even paused to thank the Lord for His goodness -- they just gorged themselves to satisfy their greedy appetites. They didn't even pause to chew their food properly, let alone give thanks to the Lord! The Lord was very displeased, and He disciplined His people with a severe plague.

The Lord is displeased with the selfish desires of His people today as well. Are we pleasing the Lord with our desires - or are we greedy and dissatisfied with what the Lord has provided for us, and thus displeasing the Lord? In 2 Corinthians 5:9 we read, "*Therefore we make it our goal to please Him.*" And Colossians 1:10 says, "*Walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God...*"

When believers have selfish desires, and they're discontented and complaining, the Lord is not pleased. He must discipline His people.

The Lord is displeased with the selfish desires of His people.

Practical Application

Don't have "Kibroth Hattaavah" written on your gravestone!

"So he called the name of that place *Kibroth Hattaavah*, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving" (v34). *Kibroth Hattaavah* literally means "graves of craving." Many people died and were buried there because of their selfish and greedy desires.

Most likely your family would not actually put *Kibroth Hattaavah* on your gravestone, even if your life was characterized by selfishness and greed! Seriously speaking, however, when you leave this life, what kind of legacy and memories do you want to leave for your family and friends? Do you want to be remembered as a person who was never satisfied, and who was characterized by selfish cravings and greedy desires? Or would you like to be remembered as a person who was characterized by Christian love and giving?

You can't hide selfish desires and cravings from your family or friends and fellow-believers for long. It won't be long before they see behind the masks and the smokescreens you use to try to disguise your selfish desires. Don't have *Kibroth Hattaavah* written on your tombstone!