

The People’s Complaint & Moses’ Prayer

Passages: Num 11; 14

Memory Verse

“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.” (Philippians 2:14–15)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
1. Because they rebelled against the Lord, the Israelites were denied entry to the promised land. 2. Moses’ prayer of intercession saved the Israelites from destruction.	God is a God of justice who will severely punish those who rebel against Him and reward those who trust in His words.	1. Learn to live a life without complaint. 2. Avoid negatively affecting the church, and instead glorify God with our words.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. The Israelites Complain to God
- B. The Israelites Rebel Against the Lord
- C. Moses’ Prayer of Intercession

Life Application

- 1. How Can We Live a Life Without Complaining?
- 2. How Can We Glorify God with Our Words?

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Those who fully trust in God will not affect others negatively with complaints, but instead speak words of comfort and encouragement and help bring others to keep God’s commands faithfully and joyfully.

Spiritual Teachings

A. The Israelites Complain to God

The Bible records many complaints from the Israelites while in the wilderness. Just three days after leaving Egypt, they complained about the lack of water (Ex 15:22–24), and later, three days after departing from Mount Sinai, the people once again complained to the Lord (Num 11:1–3). Shortly after, the Israelites complained yet again. Let’s read Numbers 11:4–6.

1. The reasons for their complaints

Looking back at their story, it is easy to think that the Israelites were being utterly foolish, maybe even childish. But instead of judging them, we should examine the reasons they were so quick to complain and make sure we avoid falling to the same mistakes.

a. Negative influences

Let’s read Numbers 11:4 again. “Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat?’ ” There are two groups of people described here. The first is the “mixed multitude.” Their distinction from the children of Israel implies that they were perhaps Egyptians or fellow slaves who had left Egypt along with the Israelites. There may have been numerous people involved, but it was a particular group of people who started the complaints.

From this, we can see that the intense craving of the mixed multitude impacted the people of Israel in general. This is because negativity and discontent can have a devastating effect and influence others. We need to be mindful of our attitude and avoid becoming someone who creates negativity in the church. At the same time, we also need to be alert to negativity from others and overcome it with the word of God.

b. They yielded to their desires

The Bible says that the mixed multitude yielded to “intense craving.” The Hebrew word can also be translated as, “longing,” “to lust after,” “to covet,” or “to greatly desire.” They desperately wanted something that they didn’t need, allowing their desires to control them entirely, so much so that they forgot about what God had already given them.

Have you ever wanted something so much that you found it difficult to focus on anything else? It may have been for anything, from food, to games, to technology. We’ve probably all experienced this kind of feeling before, to varying degrees. It is dangerous when we allow our desire to overcome our common sense, or worse, to interfere with our relationship with God. Wanting things makes us forget what God has already given to us. To combat this, if we focus our thoughts on God instead, we can avoid letting our desires control our actions.

c. Their nostalgia blinded them

Let’s read Numbers 11:5. “We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” The Israelites fondly remembered all the varieties and abundance of food that they enjoyed in Egypt, conveniently forgetting the suffering that they had endured as slaves, and the fact that they had once cried out to God for freedom. What a contradiction! They desired food that came with bondage and suffering and rejected the miraculous providence of manna that came with God’s guidance and freedom. This is because they allowed their nostalgia for the better parts of the past affect both their memories of Egypt and their vision of the present.

God had parted the Red Sea for the Israelites, was providing them with a daily miracle of manna, and was guiding them constantly with a pillar of cloud and fire. If they had focused on these facts, then perhaps they would not have complained. Unfortunately, they allowed their lustful cravings to prevent them from accepting God's provision with thanksgiving.

2. The consequences of their complaints

Let's first read Numbers 11:1–3. From here, we can see that when they complained, God heard them and became angry. The Bible does not specify what they complained about, but their complaints reflected their lack of faith, as their complaint was an act of rebellion against the Lord. So, out of anger, He struck them with fire. However, the fire only consumed those at the outskirts of the camp, showing God's mercy even when angry.

Let's now look at God's response when they complained about the food. Let's read Numbers 11:10–23, 31–34. Clearly, the level of complaint and rebellion against God was incredibly severe this time, and the guilty suffered terrible consequences. These events remind us that when we complain against God, we are not only showing a lack of gratitude, but are also despising God (v. 20). Since there is a limit to God's tolerance of our complaints, we need to be quick to acknowledge any dissatisfaction towards the Lord. God is merciful, but He is also just.

B. The Israelites Rebel Against the Lord

In a previous lesson, we learned a bit about the spies who went to Canaan and returned with a bad report. We will be looking at this event in a bit more detail today. First, let's read Numbers 13:1–2. God was preparing the Israelites for their entry into Canaan. Notice the wording of God's command. He ordered them to "spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel." They weren't there to see if the land was suitable or not. It was already being given to them by God! Let's now read verses 26–33. While Caleb encouraged the people with confidence, the other spies spoke the opposite. Let's examine their responses.

1. The ten spies' report

Each time the other spies spoke, they seemed to amplify the danger of the land! First, they simply said, "Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large" (v. 28). Then, they described them as "stronger than we." Worse still, they said the very land "devours its inhabitants" and that they were like grasshoppers in the sight of the giants they spied in the land (v. 33).

Just as they conveniently forgot their slavery while recalling all the different foods they ate in Egypt, these spies once again had a selective memory! They recalled only the dangers that they saw, completely forgetting how bountiful and fruitful the land was. More importantly, they forgot God's power. As a result, they spurned the great gift that He had given to them.

2. Joshua and Caleb's report

Let's now look at Joshua and Caleb's report. First, let's re-read verse 30. Caleb's confident advice was the opposite of his fellow spies' report. Why was he so confident in their ability to possess the land? He had such great confidence because he hadn't forgotten God's power! He also understood that God's command to spy out the land was not to see whether it was possible to take it. The taking of the land was already a given! God had said it; therefore, it would happen.

Let's read Numbers 14:6–10. After the Israelites began to cry out and make plans to return, Caleb and Joshua made one more attempt to convince them otherwise. This time, their words were both in encouragement and in warning. They understood that to reject this gift from God was also to commit a sin worthy of punishment. This shows that they both had a clear understanding of God's nature. His great power was able to save them and give them the land, but it was also entirely within His power to punish those who sinned and rebelled against Him.

Their reactions were completely different because Joshua and Caleb had a clearer understanding of God. The other ten spies allowed their fears to cloud their vision. Worse, they allowed their fears to affect other people. Let's now look at the Israelites' response to the spies' frantic report. Let's read Numbers 14:1–4. When Moses later recounted this incident, he said, "Likewise, when the LORD sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God, and you did not believe Him nor obey His voice." He also chided them for having been "rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you" (Deut 9:23–24).

From their actions, and from Moses' description, we can see that the Israelites did not cherish what God had done for them, and they had no faith in God or His words. They knew His will but chose to disobey and rebel. Unbelief is a choice that reveals the rebellion in our hearts. When we complain to the Lord, it is not that God hasn't done His best for us, but that we have chosen to rebel or argue against him.

C. Moses' Prayer of Intercession

Let's read Numbers 14:11–24. The Israelites had rejected God and did not believe Him despite all the signs He had performed. As a punishment for their lack of faith, He would strike them with a pestilence and "disinherit" the Israelites. The severity of the punishment matched the Israelites' sin. Because they did not believe in God's promises, they would not receive them at all. However, despite all of the frustration and suffering he had experienced in leading the people, Moses stepped in and interceded for the Israelites. Let's examine his prayer more closely.

1. Moses appeals on behalf of God's glory (vv. 13–16)

The first part of Moses' prayer is an appeal not for himself nor for the Israelites, but a prayer for God's glory to be seen. He points out that other nations will misunderstand events and claim, "Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness" (v. 16). Moses, first and foremost, did not want anyone maligning the Lord's name, which could very well happen if He destroyed the very people He had through such great miracles brought out of Egypt.

Do you remember the first few lines of the Lord's Prayer? "Our Father in heaven, hallowed by Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:9–10). Every time we pray, we should pray with the intention of bringing glory to God. How many of our prayers have always begun with our own wishes first and foremost? When we kneel to pray, we must remember to put God's glory first, not our own wants or wishes.

2. Moses appeals to God's mercy (vv. 17–19)

In this part of his prayer, he appealed to God's mercy by quoting the Lord's own words when He made two new tablets with the Ten Commandments (Ex 34:6–8). From these words, we can see that Moses understood God's holy nature. He recognized that the Israelites had sinned and acknowledged their iniquity on their behalf. He then humbly asked the Lord to show His great

power not through His punishment, but instead, through His longsuffering and forgiving nature. As a result of this heartfelt appeal, God refrained from destroying the Israelites.

It is easy to underestimate the power of intercession. The Bible says, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (Jas 5:16). Jesus is our ultimate interceder, and we should strive to be like Him by interceding for one another with love. If we do, God will listen to our prayers.

In the end, the Lord refrained from destroying the Israelites, but they didn’t escape punishment for their sins, either. Let’s read Numbers 14:26–38. In a twist of events, the very children whom the Israelites had used as an excuse against entering the land (Num 14:3) would be the sole inheritors. Anyone aged twenty and above would die in forty years of wandering the wilderness. Lastly, the ten spies died by the plague because of their evil report. We can see God’s justice in serving the most severe punishment to the greatest perpetrators, and His mercy on those who remained faithful, namely Caleb and Joshua.

God’s power is truly something to be feared, but it is also something to be relied upon. He wants us to do our best to enter the promised land while relying on Him. As He told the Israelites, we have already been given our inheritance in heaven – the Holy Spirit is evidence of that! However, we must learn from the Israelites, and avoid being wrapped up in either the pleasures of the world, or in the trials that we face. Instead, like Joshua and Caleb, we need to focus on the Lord’s promise, and do our best to obediently follow His commands so that we can receive our inheritance.

Check for Understanding

- 1. What were three reasons the children of Israel complained to God?** They were affected by the negative influences from the mixed multitude; they yielded to their desires; and they allowed their nostalgia to blind them to God’s blessings.
- 2. Why is complaining against God such a serious sin?** When we complain against God, we are not only showing a lack of gratitude, but are also despising God and rejecting His blessings.
- 3. Why was the reaction of the ten spies so different from Joshua and Caleb’s?** Joshua and Caleb had a clearer understanding of God, while the other ten spies allowed their fears to cloud their vision of both God’s power and God’s blessing.
- 4. Why was the Israelites’ refusal to enter the promised land such a serious sin?** It showed their rejection of God and showed that they did not believe in Him despite all the signs and wonders that He had performed. As a result, because they did not believe in God’s promises, they would not receive them at all.
- 5. What does Moses’ prayer teach us about how we should shape our own prayers?** Every time we pray, we should pray with the intention of bringing glory to God.

Life Application

1. How Can We Live a Life Without Complaining?

Try thinking about the last time you complained about something. Was it about lacking something? Perhaps it was about a food you didn’t like, or someone’s actions. *(Allow students to share.)*

Complaining may seem harmless at first. But as we learned from the Israelites today, they can cause serious dissent in the church. Complaints lead to arguments, and they may cause bitterness, envy, or stir up controversy. More importantly, when we complain in our hearts, we are showing our resentment towards God. This is because complaining about something means that we are not satisfied with God’s blessings. So, how do we learn to live a life without complaint?

a. Understand our status as God's children

To live a life without complaint, we need to understand what Christ has called us for. Let's read Philippians 2:14–16. As His children, God has called us to be a light in this world. This means that our words and actions need to reflect Jesus Christ. By keeping His commandments and carrying out His will, we can focus less on the things that make us complain and more on the blessings that God has given to us because He loves us.

Let's think about the last time we complained again. If you encounter this situation again, instead of complaining, what can you be thankful for? *(For example: If they were complaining about bad weather, then they can instead thank God for the beauty of nature that is nourished by the rain. If about a bad driver on the road, thank God that we have not gotten into an accident. If about bad food, thank God instead for nourishment that many others do not have.)*

b. Godliness with contentment

We often complain because we want things. The Israelites complained about the manna because they desperately wanted food that they didn't have. But the Bible teaches us that the things of the world are fleeting and will never fulfill us. Have you ever bought something you wanted, and then after a few months, forgotten entirely about it? Or maybe even wanted a better version of it later? This happens surprisingly often! This is because the things of this world are fleeting. They cannot give us lasting joy or peace.

Let's read 1 Timothy 6:6–7. "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." It is important for us to remember that the things of this world will not last. Let's now read Colossians 3:1–3. We need to "set our mind on things above." This means filling our hearts and minds with God, and with our hope for salvation. When we do so, we will learn how to be content.

Think about something that you have really wanted for a long time. Perhaps something that you are saving up for, or something you have asked your parents for over and over again. Now, on a piece of paper, write down at least three reasons you do **not** need it! *(Teachers: If they are quick with this activity, encourage them to think of more than one thing. Examples: I already have many toys/clothing/etc.; my parents are already under financial pressure, and I should avoid burdening them; there will be a new edition next year anyway; it is not a daily necessity; etc.)*

2. How Can We Glorify God with Our Words?

The Bible says that the tongue is the hardest part of our body to control (Jas 3:8). This is because we often speak without thinking, especially if we are very angry or upset. Let's read Ephesians 4:29. "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers." As God's children, we need to learn to control our words, and only say things that edify ourselves and others. We need to learn to glorify God with our speech.

A great way to ensure that we can constantly glorify God is by examining what we talk about and how we talk about them. Does my speech edify others? Impart grace to the hearers? Bring comfort? Do I help others change for the better, or offer encouragement and hope? Do I use my speech to help bring others closer to God, or do I corrupt both my own faith and that of others'? To help us reflect on these questions, let's now read a scenario about a boy named John.

Scenario

John grew up in a family with a very negative mindset. As a baby, his parents often argued or complained when he needed caring. Of course, at a few months old, he would not have remembered any of this, but as he grew older, he felt every ounce of stress, anxiety, and anger which proceeded from his parents' words and actions. Since shouting and blaming others angrily was the way his parents spoke to him, he behaved the same way.

As John grew older, when he did not get what he wanted, or even when he was simply trying to communicate, he would glare angrily, shout, or stomp his feet. As he understood more, he often heard his parents arguing with one another or talking about how bad other people were. Their commute to church involved him sitting in the back, listening to his parents talk about other members. As a result, this time shaped his dislike and distrust of other people. In school, he often got into fights, was rude to his teachers, and was also rude to people at church. As a result, he didn't have many friends, and often bullied other children around him.

When he was a teenager, during a student convocation, one of his RE classmates received the Holy Spirit. This really caught John's attention, but he felt upset and frustrated that he had not yet received the Holy Spirit. During one of his prayers, he cried and repented to God for all of his bad behavior towards others and asked God to help him and to give him the Holy Spirit. To John's amazement, God gave him the Holy Spirit in that prayer. Overwhelmed, he shed tears of joy.

After this event, John began to treat others with respect, and he became a lot more approachable. People who found it hard to talk to him in the past were now no longer afraid to speak to him. After a few months of this change in behavior, an elderly sister approached him and said, "Did you know that you used to be a very angry child?" John was not offended by what she said but was genuinely surprised. He had no idea that people had seen him that way. For him, his behavior was just him being him.

As he became a young adult, John began to speak more to his parents. He had a desire to help them, and God gave him the wisdom to encourage and gently teach his parents. Slowly, he helped them see that not all people were as bad as they made them out to be. He helped them to try and see things from the perspective of the people they were talking about. Even if other people did make mistakes, he reminded them that not everyone is perfect, and instead of criticizing them, we should have the compassion to pray for them and, if possible, to help them practically, with the words of God. Ultimately, John's willingness to draw near to God allowed God's Spirit to transform him so that he no longer harmed others but became a light of Christ.

Discussion

- How did John's environment while growing up affect his personality?
- Have you encountered anyone like John? How do you interact with them?
- Do you normally speak without thinking? Try coming up with some techniques for slowing down and thinking before speaking. (Example: if angry, count to ten before saying anything.)

Memory Verse

"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." (Philippians 2:14–15)

Meaning

If we can do all things without complaining and disputing, we can be a blameless and harmless child of God. Blameless, because we show our trust in God in whatever we do, and harmless, because we will not be a negative influence on others. This is one of the ways in which we can shine as lights in this world, because it shows that we are able to keep the word of life with a joyful and willing heart.

Conclusion

From today's lesson, we can see how the heart and thoughts of a single person will manifest in the way they speak and the things that they say. Someone who does not reflect upon or appreciate God's blessings will choose not to believe, and instead will disobey and rebel against God. Such people do not only place their own salvation in jeopardy, but also negatively influence others with their words. As a result, they may lead others to rebel against God, and collectively, disobey His words. On the other hand, someone who fully trusts God will also speak words of comfort and encouragement to others, so that together, they can faithfully and joyfully keep the commandments of God without complaint.

(Note to teachers: This week's homework includes an activity that you can follow-up on. You may want to go over the instructions first with your students to ensure that they understand the activity. For younger students, perhaps ask their parents to help them out. You can also provide them with jars or containers if you'd like, and maybe even decorate them during class, if time permits. Example decorations may be writing the week's memory verse, drawing pictures of angry or happy faces, or gluing on speech bubbles.)

Lesson 4 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. Why does doing things without complaint or dispute make us blameless and harmless?
Blameless, because we show our trust in God in whatever we do, and harmless, because we will not be a negative influence on others.
2. "Now _____ with _____ is great _____. For we brought _____ into this _____, and it is certain we can carry _____ out." (1 Timothy 6:6-7)
godliness, contentment, gain, nothing, world, nothing
3. "Let no _____ word proceed out of your _____, but what is good for necessary _____, that it may impart _____ to the _____." (Ephesians 4:29)
corrupt, mouth, edification, grace, hearers
4. Why is complaining against God such a serious sin?
When we complain against God, we are not only showing a lack of gratitude, but are also despising God and rejecting His blessings.
5. Why was Joshua and Caleb's report so different from the other spies' report?
They both had a clear understanding of God's nature. They knew that His great power was able to save them and give them the land, and that it was also entirely within His power to punish those who sinned and rebelled against Him.
6. Why is it important to learn not to complain in our lives?
Complaints can cause serious dissent in the church. They lead to arguments, and they can cause resentment, envy, or stir up controversy. More importantly, we are showing our resentment towards God, because to complain about something means that we are not satisfied with what God has given us.
7. (Activity) Find a jar or container and choose something easy to fill it with. The chosen item must be easily color-coded (for example: craft beads, paper stars, or rolled up scraps of colored paper). Choose two colors. Each time you say something that negatively influences others, add the first color. Each time you say something that glorifies God, add the second color. At the end of the week, which color is more dominant in your container? Take a picture and show it to your teacher next week!