

Humans complain God provides

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 05 October 2025

Preacher: Mark Chew

[0 : 00] Well, it didn't take very long, did it? It was only a month ago, on the first day of the first month, in the second year, when the tabernacle was set up.

Then over twelve days, it was consecrated, each tribe bringing their offerings to the Lord. After that, the Passover was celebrated, reminding Israel how God has rescued them, brought them out of Egypt.

Freed them from slavery. The census was taken. They worked out that there were more than 600,000 strong men to go into battle. Instructions were given to them as to how they were to march, to process.

Of course, led by the Lord, with the Ark of the Covenant right at the start. The cloud by day, and the fire by night.

Remember last week, at the end of chapter 10, Moses' words on the slide there, Rise up, Lord! May your enemies be scattered.

[1 : 05] May your foes flee before you. God was with them. And victory was the Lord's. But just like a long, anticipated holiday that you've planned, going horribly wrong, when, say, you know, the airline loses your baggage on that first leg of your journey.

So Israel's journey turned sour soon after they set out from Sinai. Now, you may recall this graphic from a few weeks ago, I think from the very start of Numbers.

Look at that little slide there, or decline after that plateau. Well, that's where we are. Numbers chapter 11. The grumbling and the complaining has started.

Verse 1. What a big change, isn't it?

In only a few verses. For the last 10 chapters, the pattern has been consistent. The Lord speaks to Moses. Moses instructs the people.

[2 : 31] And the people did as the Lord commanded Moses. I did a quick count. There are at least 17 occurrences of those phrases.

And yet, as soon as they leave Sinai, no more than two months after the temple is completed, the complaining starts. Now, it's not new, of course.

If you go into Exodus, they've already been complaining there. Nothing much has changed. Here, in the first few verses, we're not quite sure what they're complaining about. But what this incident does is serve as a pattern that we will see over and over again from here.

And the pattern is this. Israel complains, whatever the hardship. The Lord burns with anger and judges. The people cry out for help, usually to Moses.

Moses prays for them, and the Lord relents. It's a sad cycle that keeps repeating, showing that the people actually have not learned. But it also shows the Lord's patience with His people.

[3 : 38] Rebellious and faithless though they are. And so, it's from this general example in Taberah that we come to a more specific one next. Where we know, actually, what the complaint is.

Verse 4. Now, this is not just food, which they have, but other food.

And notice they're called the rebel, the riffraff, good for nothings, the naysayers. And so, really, things could have stopped right there, right?

The others, the well-behaved in Israel, the leaders, they could have pulled them in line, right? Tell them to stop wedging, let's get on with it.

But no, the rest of Israel decides to join it. To lend their way to the grumbles. And then it says, again, the Israelites started wailing.

[4 : 37] Again, because it's not the first time. And said, if only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost. Also, the cucumbers and melons, the leeks, onions and garlic.

But now, we have lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna. Now, often when we complain, we like to embellish the truth, don't we?

Let's exaggerate. So here, you know, fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. All good ingredients for a soup, isn't it?

But were they really free at no cost? Because they were slaves, weren't they? They were driven hard by their masters in Egypt to produce more and more bricks in order that they could survive. So much so that they cried out to the Lord. Life in Egypt was not a bed of roses, was it? But you would never know this from what they're saying. And look, they knew this.

[5 : 38] This was, it's not like many years ago. This was only a year ago that they've come up from Egypt. And yet, of course, you distort the truth, don't you? To justify your complaint.

And here, the author also makes it a point to say that actually this manna they're complaining about, that was perfectly good food. Right? It says it was like coriander.

I know a lot of you don't like coriander. So it was like coriander seed and looked like resin. But that word resin there is the same material that is actually found in the Garden of Eden.

And if you go back to Genesis 2, where it's described as aromatic resin. The people went around gathering it and ground it into a hand mill, in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar.

They cooked it in a pot or made it into loaves. Now, the point here is that actually, it's not just the one way of eating this. There's a variety. You know, there's a few recipes that you could use to cook this thing up.

[6 : 35] You know? It was a versatile ingredient. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. Here we are. Eat a lot of things with olive oil, don't we? Pizza dough.

Yeah? Cakes even. Dumplings. Think about it. It's yummy, isn't it? And then when the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

And what they were saying is that there was no need to grow this stuff. You know? You don't have to even work for it. You go to sleep. You wake up. And God has generously provided from heaven. You just need to gather it. And you can start cooking and eating. Which, of course, is God's way of caring for them, isn't it? Because they were on the move. There was no opportunity to stop and farm and wait for it to grow.

Now, once they got to the promised land, of course, they can grow all the cucumbers they want. All the melons, alright? And eat to their heart's content. But for now, Israel needs to get with the program.

[7 : 43] Focus on getting to the promised land, ASAP. And not worry about what cuisine you might be having in the desert. And mind you, it's not true as well that they didn't have any meat.

Because, remember a few chapters ago, they had made the way offering, didn't they? Of lamb, ram, and goats. And then they celebrated with a feast afterwards.

So, they had meat. As an occasional food, a treat. But what they were complaining about was not having it at every knee. And so, even though the complaints could have stopped, you know, you get to the head of the family, you could have said, Shoosh!

Get to the head of the clan. Get to the head of the tribe. At each point, someone could have put a stop to it. And yet, this groundswell of complaints spreads and bubbles all the way to the top, to Moses' ear.

In verse 10, Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The Lord became exceedingly angry and Moses was troubled. Now, I don't know about you, but I feel for Moses, right?

[8 : 56] He's caught in the middle between God and these difficult people that God chose for himself, right? Let's be clear. And yes, God is rightly angry with them.

I've given all these reasons already. But Moses is probably thinking, why is it up to me to rebuke them? I mean, why me?

What did I do? And I don't know about you, but, you know, having had children before, have you heard wailing? Constant wailing?

It's very distressing, isn't it? It's not like you hear it and you just, you know. No, you can't keep calm or agitated, particularly if it's someone you love. But look what's here is happening.

There was wailing at the front of every tent. Imagine. At least 600,000 tents, right? And wailing at the front of it.

[9 : 58] And so I think Moses' reaction is understandable. Right? He says, Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you, that you put the burdens of all these people on me?

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms as a nurse carries an infant to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors?

Where can I get meat for all these people? Do you keep wailing to me? Give us meat to eat. I cannot carry all these burdens by myself. The burden is too heavy for me.

If this is how you're going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me. If I have found favor in your eyes, do not let me face my own ruin. So, it's understandable, isn't it?

But it doesn't make it right. Because Moses is blaming God for this burden of leadership. It's God's fault. He's lost sight, hasn't he?

[10 : 59] That God has promised to empower Moses for this work. That what God entrusts in responsibly, he will also enable.

But you can tell, Moses is at his limit, right? In fact, he says that it is God's kindness if he was to be taken away.

Right? Take my life. It would be better than having to face what I call my own ruin. Now, given what we've just saw, what's just seen in verses 1 to 3, it would not surprise us if the Lord then just rained down fire in judgment, right?

Both on the people and Moses. But as we read on, that's not how God responds. Instead, the Lord actually gives them what they want.

Now you think, well, is that an act of grace by God? Well, yes. But actually, as we shall see, not without consequences.

[12 : 06] So, let's consider them separately. Firstly, Moses in verse 16, God says, bring me 70 of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting that they may stand there with you.

I will come down and speak with you there and I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them. They will share the burden of the people with you so that you will not have to carry it alone.

So, Moses gets what he wants, right? He has that burden shared with others. And if you jump to the verse 24, you'll see that the elders get exactly what God said, that they have the Spirit put on them and as a sign of it, they prophesy.

But then it says, only just once, not again. Now, why is that? Because I think what's happening here is merely symbolic. It was done to show Moses that yes, God has spread your burden because you've complained so that it's now shared with the elders.

But apart from this, you know, God still continues to use Moses as his prophet. The other elders we never hear of again as having ongoing prophetic ministry.

[13 : 22] Only Moses still spoke with God. And so, what Moses was given is purely or simply comfort by God, isn't it? so that he gets this sense that he's not shouldering all of this by himself.

Now, when we get to verse 26, there were two men, Eldad and Medad, someone's dad, who failed to get to the tent. But still, God's Spirit comes upon them.

Now, there's nothing to indicate that they had been sort of lazy or rebellious or whatever and then come to the tent. So, I don't think they've done anything wrong. But Joshua now is unhappy because he's afraid that this would undermine Moses' authority.

And how's this? Because when you come to the tent by asking the elders to come to the tent, it's sure that even though the Spirit was being put on them, it was still being done under Moses' leadership.

And these two, by being given the Spirit without Moses being present, that random risk that others would see that their spiritual power was independent of Moses.

[14 : 34] Now, Moses here actually rightly rebukes Joshua in verse 29, Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and the Lord would put His Spirit on them.

So, Moses, to his credit, humbly recognizes that this wasn't about him. Because, as I said last week, it is actually the Lord that was leading Israel, right? God gave His Spirit to Moses, yes, but He was still leading through Moses by His Spirit.

Now, if Moses had realized this from the start, right, if only he had, not just intellectually and deep down, then ironically, I think he would have been given that strength to actually not complain, but to

see that God has given him what he needed to shoulder the burden of leadership in the first place. He would have seen that God's Spirit was sufficient for the task. And symbolically, what God does here now in putting the Spirit on the elders actually conveys that.

Because, what He does is He takes what has already been given to Moses, God's Spirit and power, and then putting it on the elders.

[15:51] Now, all this is symbolic of course. It's not saying that the Spirit has some finite power in quantity and, you know, could be sort of distributed like that. It's just symbolic. But, the point is that Moses already had the full measure of God's Spirit.

When God put His Spirit on the other elders, it's not like He's putting more of His Spirit. But, He's symbolically taking what was already given to Moses and then sharing it and putting it on the elders.

And, sadly, as a result of this as well, symbolically, we see that Moses' authority is diminished by this act.

It's no coincidence, some have noted that from this point on, we will see Moses' leadership being challenged again. And then, eventually, we will also see that he fails as a leader and therefore can't enter the promised land.

But, despite all his shortcomings, Moses, I think, is treated less severely than the people. And, that's where we come to next because of their craving of other food.

[16:58] And, with them, God also gives them what they ask for. He provides them with the meat they crave. But, sadly again, not without consequences. So, let's go back to verse 18 where God instructs Moses, tell the people, consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow when you will eat meat.

And, here's where they go, yes, meat. Let's consecrate ourselves. The Lord heard you when you will. If only we had meat to eat, we were better off in Egypt. Now, the Lord will give you meat to eat. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, five, ten, or twenty, but for a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wailed before him saying, why did we ever eat it?

So, God says, you want meat? I'll give you meat. But, I'll give you so much meat that actually, it will become a curse to you rather than a blessing.

This is my severe judgment of your complaining. And, note here that they're not just complaining because they're immature or selfish even, or ignorant.

[18:13] The Lord said that they complain and therefore they have rejected the Lord. Their complaining is a rejection of the Lord because they failed to trust Him as God.

They failed to see that He is someone who will provide for them because He said He would, that He's never failed them. Now, in verse 21, Moses' leadership is a bit of a fail again because he himself complains about how he'll provide the meat.

And again, you know, God did not say that He needed to provide the meat. All He wanted Moses to do was to tell the people that God will provide. And so God rebukes Moses in verse 23.

Is the Lord's arm too short? Now you will see whether or not what I say will come true for you. And of course, when you jump to verse 31, we see how God provides.

A wind went out from the Lord and drove quail in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp as far as a day's walk in any direction.

[19:22] All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them all out around the camp.

Now that's a lot of quail if you're wondering. It's day and night and day of collecting. So 36 hours or more. Then it's up to two cubits which is about 90 cm.

So at least your thigh. And a homer by volume is about 220 liters. A donkey's load is how they call it.

So ten homers is a lot of quail. So if they ate it all you'll be sick. Now I don't know whether you guys have had quail before.

It's quite a delicacy when you go to Chinese banquet. It's actually more bones than meat to me. But anyway if you ate it all you'd be sick wouldn't you?

[20:25] But we read here actually that it's not the eating of it that actually causes their sickness. Because it says while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed the anger of the Lord burned against the people and he struck them with a severe plague.

So actually it was the plague that God strikes them with that kills them. Not the food that makes them sick. And that's why the place there is named Kibroth Hataba because they buried the people who had craved other food.

So friends we are encouraged to pray to God aren't we? But sometimes we need to be careful what we ask God for. Right? And this is a case in point.

In our own folly sometimes we do ask God for the wrong things. And God in his kindness often does not give us what we ask but actually what is good for us.

But if we reject the Lord and we keep wailing and moaning and complaining God may give us what we ask but as a judgment upon us.

[21 : 40] And all the while we might actually be totally oblivious to it. Sadly there will be many in this world who will desire riches who will crave fame and success and whatever else they want in this world who may actually get these from the Lord.

They might even revel in it thinking wow look how lucky I am. But all the while not knowing that they are storing up judgment for themselves.

Because you see unless we repent and turn to Christ we are going to awake one day when Christ returns to a root shock.

Many of you are studying James in your growth groups and that same idea and truth will come up in chapter 5 as well. So really as we are reading this story I know I have made fun of the Israelites the last thing we need to do is scoff and sneer at them rather this should be a warning to us because honestly it doesn't take much for us to be complaining does it?

You know there is a reason why we call it being hangry right? The tummy rumbles and the grumbles stop immediately. I am guilty of it.

[23 : 05] And so if we are not careful it is very easy to develop a complaining spirit which then slips into blaming God and rejecting his will for our lives.

And at the heart of a complaining spirit is usually the sin of unbelief. When we complain what we are saying to God is that we don't trust him to know what is good for us.

And even if he doesn't always give us things that are easy to say that he's not giving what is best for us. Now sometimes it's not even complaining about what we get but the timing of what we get.

It's very easy isn't it. It's very important to get into that mode of complaining when we don't feel like we're getting what we want. And both the people and Moses they were guilty of this right?

But you know thankfully unlike the people in Moses' time you know they complained to Moses and Moses then complained. But we actually have a leader who when we actually complain he brings our needs to the father instead.

[24 : 22] Because we have a savior actually in Jesus who bears all our burdens on his shoulder and did not utter a word or complaint when he went to the cross.

That's why in our reading in Philippians Paul said that Jesus looked not to his own interests but to the needs of others that even though he is God he did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage but made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant and humbled himself by becoming obedient to death obedient to the father for our sake death on a cross and at the cross he carried not just our physical needs of hunger and complaints and all that but our spiritual needs that of forgiveness for our sins all our complaining and grumbling he bore the plague for us so that we can enjoy the good gifts of God in return now for those of us who lead like Moses and I'm not just talking about ministry but you know you might be a leader at your work or somewhere at uni or something or even at home in the future when you become a parent yes the burden of leadership can be heavy and we know that because often you're not fake when you do the right thing and then the moment you do the wrong thing somebody complains right but we need to remember that when this happens to us we have in Jesus not just a model we can follow but actually someone we can bring our own burdens to him even now and Jesus will carry our burdens! So instead of grumbling and complaining we need to remember to check ourselves for any spirit of negativity and when we feel that to immediately turn to the Lord in faith and dependence later on in Philippians Paul encourages us by saying do not be anxious about anything but in every situation particularly situations of stress and burden bring every situation before God by prayer and petition with thanksgiving present your request to God that's why back in the other reading in chapter 2 today Paul also urged us to do all of that without grumbling or arguing so that we can become blameless and pure and what's more Moses' wish for the people actually comes through today right because unlike them God has now poured out his spirit on our lives what Moses hoped for has

happened to us so that when we go through life in the wilderness we actually have God's spirit to guide us to lead us to strengthen us life is not always going to be easy

God did not promise that we may wish that there's no sickness no disease no stress no need to worry about finances but whether you can buy a house whether you'll get a job whether you'll pass your exams the Lord does not promise that we'll have smooth sailing in all of this but the Lord does say that we can bring all our requests to him and he in Christ will shoulder our burdens he will give us the strength of God's spirit to help us through it so we ought to fill our hearts with this hope that when we get to the new creation then yes all of these things will then go away but until then we need to guard ourselves against complaining which leads to rejecting God in unbelief but instead remind ourselves what Jesus has done for us God has been good to us God continues to be good to us and God will be good to us until the end in

Christ that's right Father thank you for your goodness to us in Jesus we praise you that he has carried the burden of all our sins on his shoulder and lifted it at the cross for us please teach us to bring our request and knees to you in humility instead of grumbling in thankfulness rather than complaining help us to believe rather than to doubt your goodness and love in Jesus name we pray!

[29 : 15] Amen