

1. My title for this lesson is "What God has against grumbling". If most of us made a list of things we believe God hates, I doubt that grumbling would make our top 10 or even our list of top 100. In these two chapters we are going to read of a number of instances of everyone from Moses on down grumbling about their situation and dealing with their punishment for their grumbling.
 - a) The questions I pondered as I read these chapters include: Why did God literally allow some people to die over grumbling? Why did others (Moses' sister) have to suffer for seven days, but not die? Why was Moses' brother Aaron not punished when both Aaron and his sister Miriam complain (grumble) about Moses' leadership? I also wondered why there are two chapters dedicated to the issue of complaining at this specific location in the story? If you think about, people complain all the time. If you also think about this, this story about complaining effectively could have been written at any point in the bible.
 - i) In summary, why is grumbling and complaining such a bad thing, and more importantly how does this affect my life? Tell me why should I care that these people grumbled? The answer is, it affects our own relationship with God.
 - ii) Let me explain this in the form of an acceptable and unacceptable prayer life. It is ok to say, "Dear God I really don't like this situation that I am in right now. I wish I could do something to change it, or You could do something to change it. I don't understand why You are allowing me to go through what I am dealing with right now, but I trust that You have a purpose for allowing all of this to happen."
 - iii) An unacceptable prayer might be, "Dear God, I don't want to follow your lead. I wish I was back living my life before I surrendered it to you. Dear God, I'm going back to living how I did before I trusted You to guide my life."
 - iv) The key point of these two chapters is like asking God, "why are You allowing my life to go "this way" when I want it to go "that way"? It appears like every time I make the effort to change my situation, it just gets worse or doesn't improve?"
 - v) If one is stuck in a situation where one literally does not know what to do next, or one screams out to God, "I can't take another day like this, as I don't know what to do next, I need Your help". That is acceptable. What is unacceptable as far as God is concerned is just to grumble and complain about the situation and not seek Him in order to deal with it or help us through the situation.
 - b) This leads me back to the issue of grumbling. The problem is not to tell God what is on our mind, or why we are suffering at the present moment. The problem is when we don't trust what appears to be His will for our life for the moment. The way God works best is when we literally pray, "Dear God, I don't like what is happening to me right now, but I will accept You will. If it is Your will for me to accept this aspect of my life right now, help me to accept it and trust You through it. If it is Your will for me to change something to bring this situation to an end, guide me as to how to change." The point is not only to seek His will through any situation, but to trust that He is working it out for His glory.
 - c) This also leads me back to the "why now" question: The answer is that the Israelites are in the middle of a really desolated part of world. It is understandable that they complained. If you recall, the Israelites just traveled three days in the last chapter. This is God saying to us, "When things are really bad, and they just getting worse, this is where I really need you (that's us) to trust Me that not only I will get you (us) through this really bad place, but I will lead you (us) to a wonderful future based on trusting Me with our lives."
 - i) To quote Christian apologist Greg Koukl, Jesus never promises life will be easy. What He does promise is a "rope" that will pull us through our difficult times. With that somewhat positive thought, stated it is time to start the lesson itself.

2. Numbers Chapter 11, Verse 1: Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. ² When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the LORD and the fire died down. ³ So that place was called Taberah, because fire from the LORD had burned among them.
- a) Speaking of grumbling and complaining, I present the first three verses of this chapter.
 - i) Know that this complaining trend continues through all of Chapters 11 and 12. The same way complaining and negativity is contagious, pay attention to how that trend spreads in these two chapters.
 - ii) Back to these verses, it starts off by stating that these Israelites were complaining about how bad their situation was. The text says a fire started in the outskirts of the camp. That could be anything from a wilderness fire to some tents accidentally catching on fire. Remember that these people had to make fires at the least to cook things, let alone keep warm in the cool nights of the desert.
 - iii) As I just mentioned, this grumbling continues through two chapters. Visualize a wildfire left alone. What does it do? Continue to grow until there is nothing left to burn. In a symbolically similar way the grumbling grows in these two chapters.
 - b) Meanwhile, let us focus on the literal fires of these verses. My first question I wondered is how did they know God was behind the fire? Why didn't they just blame the fire on bad luck? Does this mean that every bad thing that happens to us is God ordained?
 - i) If we accept the fact that God knows all things, then no matter how the fire started, (or whatever problem we are dealing with), if we accept the fact that a perfect God knows all things, then during times of tragedy, we should all the more seek Him and say in effect, "OK, God, You've got my attention, what do I do now?" That is in effect what Moses realized and He prayed about those fires.
 - ii) Notice that once Moses prayed, the fire died down. So does that mean we should not call a fire department for help? Of course not. It just means that when life gets difficult, seeking God's help may help put out our own fires out, or at the least, He will give us guidance as to how to deal with the situation.
 - iii) This leads me back to the issue of grumbling. When we get in a bad mood and complain about things, notice how it spreads. Notice how others around us will join in and start complaining about their own problems. If you want to try an interesting experiment, try going say, one whole evening without complaining about anything. Be in a good mood and be complimentary to those around us. My point is just as complaining and grumbling is contagious, so is joy. This is why Jesus encourages us to be joyful in our lives so it can spread to others.
 - c) Last thing about these verses. In Verse 3, we have an untranslated (transliterated) word "Taberah". The idea of that word is that Moses was describing the location the Israelites were at as a "place of fire". OK, so what? The point is for us to remember that just as the Israelites were complaining, and that started a fire that spread, so Moses is trying to teach us of the dangers of grumbling and how that can spread and get worse.
 - i) Going back to the introduction, why is grumbling so bad? Again, for most of us, it would not probably make our "top 10 or top 100" things that are bad. The answer, as we will see throughout this lesson is just that grumbling spreads, just as this fire spreads. We all know life can be difficult and I'm no denying that fact. My point is just complaining about a situation never makes it better or relieves our stress.
 - ii) What we should do is take our issues to God and say we are having difficulty dealing with this particular issue right now. I turn this problem over to You. If it is Your will for me to keep on dealing with this situation, help me to accept Your will. If it is Your will for me to end this part of my "wilderness", help bring it to and end." With that said, it is time for the next grumble. ☺

3. Verse 4: The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat!"⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"
- a) In the first three verses we had some Israelites complaining about how hard their life is and a fire broke out within the camp. Now in Verses 4 through 6, we have a new group that started complaining. This group is called the "rabble". The King James version of the bible (and a few others) call this group the "mixed multitude", which I consider to be a better translation. To explain I have to recall a few facts about the Israelites leaving Egypt.
 - i) When the Israelites left Egypt, some non-Israelites went with them. (See Exodus 12:38). The point is other people besides the Israelites were probably slaves in Egypt. When these other people saw the plagues, they went, "We're out of here too, and this other group went along with the Israelites out of Egypt."
 - ii) The point is this other group and the Israelites themselves were now reminiscing about Egypt. Our memories at times can be selective. We can remember some past part of our lives and think, life was so much better back then. We forget about hardships that we went through when life was better. Here was this group of non-Jews thinking about the great variety of food they had in Egypt. They were thinking about the fact that they could go fishing in the river and in effect get free fish. In other words, the food that God was providing for Israelites out in the wilderness was not good enough for them and they complained.
 - b) Going back to our complaints, the problem is not that hardships are not real. The issue is what are we doing about it. Are we just standing there complaining about how hard life is, or are we taking our issues to God? The reason the "mixed multitude" is singled out here, is not that God didn't love them or provide for them. The issue is that they were not trusting in the God of the bible. They missed their old lives before God rescued them (not just the Israelites but others who wanted to join them and they wanted to go back to their old lives. The sin is not about craving variety in food. The sin is not trusting God to take care of what we desire in life.
 - i) As to these people, remember that God was trying to lead all of them into a new "Promised Land" as that was a good place to live. By them complaining, they are saying in effect, "We don't believe this god is going to lead us into a better life, but we will be stuck in this wilderness forever". That is why they grumbled.
 - ii) Remember my big theme of the entire book of Numbers: "Just because we are going through a wilderness experience, does not mean that God wants us to be in this place forever." It is about trusting God to get us through such a place or time.
 - iii) As to what happens to this mixed multitude, the text is not specific. What the text does do is show that the grumbling is spreading. Even before we get into more grumbling, the text takes a few moments to talk about how manna was cooked.
4. Verse 7: The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin.⁸ The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a handmill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil.⁹ When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.
- a) The concept of "manna" was first introduced back in Chapter 16 of the book of Exodus. The word "manna" literally means, "What is it?" This is literally food that rained down from the sky that became the substance the Israelites lived upon while they were stuck out in the wilderness. It is God's way of saying, "I know you people are not crazy about the idea of being stuck out here. Until you get through this place, I will provide for you and here is the food you need. " You may find it interesting that whenever the bible talks about this food from God's perspective, it is never called manna. It is called "food from heaven" or some other positive term. It is in effect grumbling to call it manna.

- b) Speaking of complaining, that leads us perfectly back to these verses. These verses say in effect, "Here are 1001 ways to prepare manna". It is almost as if someone is quoting from a cookbook that somebody published out there about how to prepare and eat manna. With that said, let me give you a few specific's about "what is it" (manna):
- i) It is described as being like "coriander seed and looked like resin". For most of us, that description is useless. Let me try to help a little. It is said to be white or even light yellow in appearance and flaky to the touch. If one has ever seen the type of communion wafers used in Roman Catholic Church Services, that is how I picture this stuff looking like. Or think of tiny pieces of "flat bread" on the ground.
 - ii) Now imagine if this stuff rained from the sky every night. How would we have to gather it? Truthfully, we would have to be down on our hands and knees to pick it up off the ground. A wonderful visual picture of humility before God.
 - iii) Remember when Jesus was asked about giving food to His followers and was being compared Himself to manna, Jesus said, "I am the true bread that comes from heaven" (See John 6:32.) The point being that Jesus Himself provides what we need in order to have eternal life, just as God the Father provided this manna when these Israelites were out in the wilderness.
- c) Meanwhile, back to these Israelites and manna. The text describes various ways it was prepared as food. Notice that God does not strike them dead and say, "You must eat it raw." The point is this stuff was cooked lots of different ways. The text even says in effect that it was pleasant (think pastries) to eat. The text compared it to cakes and even the taste of olive oil (think biscuits). Whatever this stuff was, it had a nice taste to it.
- i) OK, so it tasted good. If I had to eat this stuff for 40 years, or even one week, I would be missing other foods too liked the mixed multitude did. Why was it so bad to complain about wanting variety? First of all, it is not a bad thing to want variety in our diet. God created us with that desire. The issue was the grumbling. Think about living in the wilderness. Sacrifices have to be made, including what one eats. The issue was about their lack of faith in God to get them through the wilderness. The complaint was in effect, "I don't trust God to lead me forward, I want to go back to the way things were."
 - ii) As I stated, our memories of the past are usually slanted to forget the bad parts and only the good parts. That is why this mixed multitude was considering going back to the life of slavery as long as they had a diet with greater variety. God is saying to us, "Go forward. Yes, life is difficult, but in effect, there is no turning back. Trust Me and I will provide for You through our own wilderness time."
 - iii) OK, enough description of manna. It is time for more complaining. ☺
5. Verse 10: Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.¹¹ He asked the LORD, "Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me?¹² 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 forefathers?¹³ Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' ¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me.¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now--if I have found favor in your eyes--and do not let me face my own ruin."
- a) The first thing to say here is simply that Moses joined in the grumbling. The good news here is that Moses took the problem to God in prayer. The bad news is that Moses lacked the faith that God could solve the problems that the Israelites grumbled at this time.
 - i) Moses said in effect, "How can I solve this problem? Can I get enough meat for all of these people? Are all of them my children? This burden is too big for me." Moses is right, the problem is too big for him, but not for God and that's the point.

- b) Let me pause for a quick moment to notice how the complaining spread. The first to complain were the mixed multitude (that is, other people who came out of Egypt along with the Israelites). Then the Israelites themselves joined in the complaining. Now here in these verses, we have Moses saying in effect, I can't handle this. It is too much for me to deal with. Hey God, can You just kill me now and put me out of my misery? I wonder how many of us have yelled out that line at some point in our lives.
- i) If there is one thing I have learned in life it is that God does not put heavy burdens upon us, but we put them on ourselves. We can think we are in eternal trouble if we don't accomplish a thousand things every day. I'm not saying we have to be lazy, but at the same time, God never calls on us to literally work ourselves to death in order to accomplish what we believe He wants us to accomplish.
 - ii) Jesus said, "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:30). I have to admit when my life gets overwhelming, I like to recall that statement. When Jesus said His burden (our desire to please Him) should be light, the idea is that we seek His guidance about what to do at any given moment.
 - a) When one is overwhelmed, pray about priority, do what one can and then let go of what one cannot do. That is the lesson Jesus taught and the same lesson Moses needed to learn here.
 - iii) Speaking of Moses, let me get back to the verses here.
- c) The text then goes on to give some details about Moses' complaint to God. I do want you to notice something: In Verse 10 it states that God was angry at this point. My question is "How did Moses know God was angry?" Also, if God is perfect and knows all things, He would know when we grumble like at this point. Therefore, why does the text even say He was angry in the first place?
- i) As far as how did Moses know God was angry, I suspect that things just started going wrong and Moses figured, "OK, I can tell things are not going well so I suspect God must not be pleased with my grumbling at the moment."
 - ii) The other way Moses knew was simply that he understood that complaining to God is never good, and Moses logically figured out God was angry about it.
 - iii) As to "God getting angry", one has to accept the idea that He desires we live a life pleasing to Him. When we fail at times, it feels to us like He is angry, in that He wants us to live according to His word, and we do something sinful instead.
 - iv) What Moses was doing was complaining about how tough His life is. Specifically Moses was asking, "All these people want meat to eat. Even if we slaughter all of the herds or took every fish out of the sea, how could that be enough meat for all of them?" Moses problem was that he was trying to solve problems based on his own ability and not ask God how He (not us) is going to solve this problem.
 - a) Did Moses believe God could do anything? Yes he did. Did Moses trust God at this point to provide meat for them? No he didn't. If you ever want proof that Moses is human and makes mistakes, here is your text.
- d) This leads me back to grumbling and complaining. I've met people from all walks of life and all ages who complain. It is human nature. It is easy to say to God, "Take me home now, I can't handle this problem. Why did You put me in charge of all of these people anyway?" Dear God, I quit. You solve it. In effect, that is what Moses did. It was at the point when Moses said, "God this is Your problem." I believe God Himself was waiting for that moment when we let go of our problems to trust Him for the solution.
- i) We are about to read of Moses and the Israelites being both blessed and cursed by God for their grumbling. God is going to teach the Israelites, "I know you crave variety. However, grumbling won't help. I know what you people crave and I want to provide it for you all. However, you need to trust Me to provide it to you on My timing." With that said, we're ready for the next set of verses.

6. Verse 16: The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy 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. ¹⁷ I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.
- a) If you recall, the first thing that Moses complained about was that he could not handle being the leader of the Israelites all by himself. God answered that complaint here in these verses by saying in effect, "bring near to the tabernacle 70 elders". If you recall there are 12 tribes of Israel (not counting the "two for one spilt" from a few chapters back). That would be five leaders from each tribe. Back in Exodus Chapter 24, it mentioned that there were 70 leaders of the 12 tribes. Since that was less than a year earlier, I suspect, but can't prove it is same group of 70 people here.
 - b) What God is proposing is that so far only Moses himself has the ability to hear the voice of God speak to him. God wants seventy more people to hear that voice. This is a good point to talk about how God does actually speak to us today.
 - i) First, know that there was a prayer given by David in the psalms that Christians cannot pray. It is " Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." (Psalm 51:11, NIV). Christians can obviously recite those exact words, but the point is we as Christians have the Holy Spirit living "inside of us" to guide us how we live. My point is in the Old Testament, the Spirit of God can come and go from one person to another. One of the great promises to those who trust in Jesus to guide our lives is that we always have the Spirit of God to guide us as to how to live our lives. (See John 14:17 as an example.)
 - ii) OK then, so how do I tap in this voice? How do I know when God is speaking to me or through me? For starters, God never violates our free will. Another way we can tell is that God never commands us to do something that violates His word.
 - a) Does this mean God can give us verbal commands? Of course, but usually it is just a matter of doing what we believe is the right thing to do at that moment and we realize how He has been guiding us the whole time.
 - b) I have recently learned a little prayer I like. It is "Holy Spirit, guide my thoughts now". That is a way of reminding ourselves to ask God to guide what it is we say and think at that moment.
 - c) So is this voice audible? Do I have to strain to hear it? If "God is God" He can speak to us however He wants too and we don't have to strain to hear that voice. If God wants to get our attention, believe me, He is more than capable of getting that attention. I don't believe we have to strain, but I find it does help to invite Him to speak to us if He has something to say.
 - d) Also know that just because we ask Him to speak to us, does not mean that He is then obligated to do so. Sometimes I have to remind myself that God has nothing new to say to me because He is waiting for me to be obedient to what He has already asked me to do in the past.
 - iii) In summary, don't panic if one has never heard God audibly. I never have, but there have been times when I have been positive He has spoken to me. If one is trusting Jesus as complete payment for one's sins (past, present and future), then one has to accept the idea of the Spirit of God as being part of one's lives. One can invite Him to speak to us at any time, but He is not obligated to say something to us, just because we asked Him to. I also like the idea that when we are doing something that doesn't require a lot of mental thought (like taking a walk by ourselves), to invite the Spirit of God to join us and guide our thoughts.
 - c) Speaking of people talking to us, we last left Moses telling 70 elders in Israel to come near to the tabernacle so everyone would know God is speaking through all of them.

- d) The question I pondered as I read these verses is what did God say to these 70 people? Did they act really weird, or just start thinking biblical thoughts? What I suspect is these seventy men started prophesying about what God can and will do through their lives. I sort of picture them saying out loud, "God is going to lead all of us to the Promised Land" and "God is going to provide meat for all of us". It's just my thought, but I sort of picture these men having thoughts in their heads and speaking out loud what they were thinking. I could be totally wrong, but that's how I visually picture this.
 - e) Remember why God was doing this. Moses was complaining that his job was too hard all by himself to proclaim His will for what I believe was about two million people. The way God handled Moses complaint was in effect, "OK, Moses, if you can't handle doing all of this by yourself, I'll get seventy more men to proclaim out loud exactly what I have been telling you (Moses) what I (God) am going to do."
 - i) The point for you and me is that God is more than willing to guide our lives. If we aren't willing to listen to God ourselves, I find that He is more than willing to get His message out through others. The point is God wants His will done for our lives and He will make it obvious what is that will, even if it means getting others involved in communicating what that message is.
 - ii) Meanwhile, it's time for God to speak to Moses directly one more time.
7. Verse 18: "Tell the people: `Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. ¹⁹ You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, ²⁰ 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 leave Egypt?" ' "
- a) To appreciate these verses, you have to understand what a big risk Moses was taking here. He trusted that God would provide meat for them. Moses had no idea how He was going to do this, but he trusted God would provide it. Therefore, Moses got word out to those two million Israelites that He would provide enough meat not just for one day or twenty days, but for a whole month." Then Moses makes the proclamation that they will loathe (hate) all that meat because they have rejected Him.
 - b) Stop and think about this from the perspective of the average Israelite. First, they had to be in shock that they would get all of this meat. I'm sure many of them were thinking that they had to slaughter their flocks in order to have it. All they knew was that Moses made this proclamation about having a month's supply of meat. I'm sure the grumbling kept going at that point as they thought, "OK, let's see You pull this off".
 - c) The underlying issue was about not trusting God to provide for them. The reason Moses made the statement that they would loathe the meat had nothing to do with wanting some variety in their diet. The issue was about not trusting God. Let me explain:
 - i) Remember that the Israelites were grumbling about how rough life was out in the wilderness and they even missed the slavery of Egypt because even back then they had variety in their diet. The real issue was not variety, but not trusting that God would actually provide what they need as He lead them to the Promised Land.
 - ii) This leads us back to the main theme of Numbers. God never promises us that life will be pain free. He never promises us that we avoid hardships in our lives. He does promise that if we trust Him, He will guide us into a wonderful life where He will take care of us if we trust Him with every aspect of our lives. In effect, that is what the "Promised Land" is. It is not a physical place, or even heaven. It is describing living a life where one is trusting God with every aspect of our lives.
 - iii) There is far more joy in that lifestyle than anything else one can imagine. In order to get to that lifestyle, we have to let go of wanting to do things our way. That is what the wilderness is all about. Speaking of the wilderness, let's get back there.

8. Verse 21: But Moses said, "Here I am among six hundred thousand men on foot, and you say, 'I will give them meat to eat for a whole month!' ²² Would they have enough if flocks and herds were slaughtered for them? Would they have enough if all the fish in the sea were caught for them?" ²³ The LORD answered Moses, "Is the LORD's arm too short? You will now see whether or not what I say will come true for you."
- a) It appears that the grumbling continues here in these verses. You would think the first thing Moses remembered was how God parted the Red Sea and then thought, "Hey, if God can do that, He could provide meat for all of these people". Instead, Moses reminds God (as if God doesn't know this) that there are over 600,000 fighting men (the number that was counted in the first chapter of this book) out there. That is why I have been saying there are over 2,000,000 Israelites in the desert. (Double the men figure for all of the women and then add for children and those who can't fight, and there is my figure).
 - b) My point is Moses was looking at his (not God's) resources. Moses did look at how many herds of animals were out there. If they slaughtered the animals, it may be enough, but then how do we feed and clothe everyone if we kill all of them? Moses then rationally thinks if we fish out every fish in the sea, is that enough for this group?
 - i) Apparently what God is waiting for is for Moses to give up and say in effect, "I know you don't have the resources to pull this off. But watch Me". Since Moses didn't trust in the miraculous at this moment, God in effect says, "Hey if I am God I can do anything and I can make this possible."
 - ii) OK John, this is a neat story. What does it have to do with me? Does this mean I should completely give up in every situation and wait for God to do a miracle? The answer is we leave the possibility open. It would be like praying, "Dear God, here are my resources at hand. Do You want me to use those resources or do You have something else in mind?" We then give God a chance to answer. Often the answer is simply, "Hey, who gave you those resources, (or the brains to figure it out), now go use them." It is in situations where we don't have resources like Moses here and then we should ask God, "OK then, what is the plan then?"
 - iii) The good news for Moses is he then trusted God to do something. Based on that trust, he did as God commanded him to do and brought seventy elders right next to the tabernacle structure.
9. Verse 24: So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again.
- a) First notice at the end of Verse 25, this was a temporary thing. Apparently these 70 men did prophesy for a while, and then stopped. I think this is God's way of saying to Moses, "If I (God) didn't think you (Moses) could handle being the leader, I would have not made you the leader in the first place".
 - b) Meanwhile these 70 men started prophesying. Although I can't prove it, I suspect it just meant they started speaking out loud what God was telling them. If I had to guess some more, I suspect they were preaching how God was going to feed all of them meat." The point for Moses is he saw how God was capable of speaking to as few or as many people as He desired. Therefore, even though he didn't want to lead these people, Moses was getting the idea that being in charge was "God ordained" and Moses has to accept it.
 - c) For you and me, this is all about learning to accept God's will for our lives. What we have to remember is that if God desires us to do something, then we have to trust that He will provide the power and means for us to accomplish what it is He wants us to accomplish.
 - i) So how do I know what is His will for me? Start with praying about it. Start with doing things for God one knows one can do. To take a bigger step in faith, then try doing bigger things and see if God is making it possible to accomplish it.

10. Verse 26: However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the Tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' aide since youth, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, stop them!"
- a) While all of that prophesying is going on, the story gets interrupted to mention that two men were prophesying who were not standing the others. These two men were not next to the tabernacle structure, but were prophesying elsewhere in the camp. Personally I picture these guys walking around the campground saying something like, "Get ready, God is going to do another great miracle and provide meat for everyone."
 - b) In Verses 27 and 28 we get a mention of Joshua, Moses' assistant, who will go on to be the next leader of the Israelites after Moses died. It bothered Joshua that these two men were not standing by the tabernacle but were prophesying in the camp. Since the pattern of these chapters is for everyone is complaining, it is now Joshua's turn. ☺
 - c) Here is one of those cases where one has to read the "fine print" of what God commanded Moses to do. God told Moses to get 70 men and bring them to the tabernacle for to hear God's word. God never said they had to stay there and preach, just be gathered to that spot as to show everyone that God has picked these 70 men to prophesy. It is a subtle reminder to us that we have to be specific where God says to be specific and then we are free to improvise where specifics are not given.
 - i) I don't know why I thought of what I'm about to say here, but I'll take what I'm about to say as possibly being "God Inspired". Today in Israel, there have been plans made up to build a new Temple once it is allowed. It is to be built to the exact specifications as the original tabernacle (and temple) except the plans include electricity and even plumbing. It is another example of being specific where God says to be specific and then improvising where God is silent on that matter.
 - d) Meanwhile, back to Moses, Joshua and two men prophesying in the camp:
11. Verse 29: But Moses replied, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" ³⁰ Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.
- a) Moses response to Joshua: I wish everyone and not just this group spoke up. My job of discerning God's will is hard enough as it is. The more people who understand what is His will, the better life will be. In effect, this is another reminder to us Christians of the great power that we have to discern God's will that is not part of the Old Testament.
 - i) Let me explain this concept another way. Jesus once said that John the Baptist was the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, probably because he had the privilege of introducing Jesus to the world. Jesus then said that whoever was least in the kingdom of God (Christian believers) is greater than John. What Jesus meant by that, is the fact that all Christians have the power of the Holy Spirit within is to be able to get God's will for our lives. Again, that was not a privilege given to every Old Testament believer. (Text from Matthew 11:11 or Luke 7:28.)
 - ii) This also reminds me of a conversation I had with some religious Jewish clients of mine. They could understand every concept I could explain as a Christian, except the idea of the spirit of God within me. That is unique for the Christian believer.
 - b) Meanwhile, Moses is chewing out Joshua. ☺ (Ok, Moses was just telling Joshua). Moses was hoping that more people could prophesy so that more people knew God's will.
 - c) Verse 30 reminds us once again, that this is temporary. If I had to say why this was not a permanent thing for these other men, it is because God wanted to teach Moses to be fully dependant upon Him for guidance even if that other information was true. The point for us is that other Christians do have the ability to discern God's will, but that discernment is for them and not us. God wants each of us to seek Him directly for His will for our lives.

12. Verse 31: Now a wind went out from the LORD and drove quail in from the sea. It brought them down all around the camp to about three feet above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction.³² 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 out all around the camp.
- a) Let me give you the short version of this miracle: The good news is they got the meat they wanted in these two verses. The bad news is they didn't trust God to provide it for them and we will read of punishment coming up in the next two verses.
 - b) With that said, it is time for a little bit of "how" this miracle happened. I have read that quail migrate through this area every year. Apparently God made the wind blow so that this large flock of quail flew right past the Israelite camp. These birds also flew low to the ground. I don't know if that was natural or that was the way the wind blew them.
 - i) With that said, picture lots of men holding sticks (say their walking sticks or sticks they use to hold up their tents). Here comes this big flock of birds about three feet off the ground. For you baseball fans, that is right in the strike zone. The point is they flew at a height where it was easy to hit them and knock them down.
 - ii) We also get a quick comment about how much quail. The text says no one got less than "10 homers". (I'll pass on the obvious baseball reference here.) To visualize a homer, picture a one-gallon container (like a one gallon milk container). The idea of "10 homers" is close to about 500 gallons per person.
 - iii) The point is Moses doubted God's ability to bring meat. Now here was God, by way of the wind and the birds providing enough meat for everyone for a month.
 - a) Personally, I see Moses on his knees at this point, apologizing to God for doubting His ability to provide for everyone.
 - iv) OK enough good news. It is time for the bad news.
13. Verse 33: But 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.³⁴ Therefore the place was named Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had craved other food.³⁵ From Kibroth Hattaavah the people traveled to Hazeroth and stayed there.
- a) OK, if everyone craves variety in diet, and God provided this meat, why kill people? Why did a plague break out here? The text doesn't say, so we are free to speculate. I suspect the issue again, is a lack of trust in God. The plague was God's way of getting everyone's attention and saying, "Trust Me? Promised Land. Don't trust Me? Death."
 - i) An alternative explanation is that these people ate the birds' blood and all, and because they violated God's laws by the way they ate the birds, they suffered.
 - ii) The point is God punished these specific people for their grumbling about their living conditions and not trusting that He can and will get them to the Promised Land as He said they would.
 - iii) Obviously, the entire nation didn't die, but only those who well, "played baseball" using the birds as the balls. (OK, I had to sneak in one baseball joke here. ☺)
 - b) The last thing the chapter says is that the Israelites named the place they were at based on this incident and moved on to the next stop. The naming of this place was a reminder that, "To not trust God with one's life and turning back to trying to live on our own is in effect giving in to sin and here is the consequences of those sins." Where those people who died here saved? I don't know. That is up to God to judge. The point here is that God can and does allow people to die in order to make the point about obedience. That is true in both the Old and the New Testament.
 - c) With that said, believe it or not, I have one more chapter to go in this lesson. This is a short chapter of 16 verses, and it fits well with the theme of "grumbling". Therefore I'm going to sneak in this chapter here at the end of the lesson. To set the scene, we now move from the whole camp of Israel and focus in on the leader's tent. In this scene we have Moses, his brother Aaron (spiritual leader) and his sister Miriam (woman's leader).

14. Chapter 12, Verse 1: Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.
- a) The first thing we read here is that Moses got a new wife. Nobody knows what happened to the first wife that was mentioned back in Exodus Chapter 2. The most likely thing is either that she died or left him. Anyway the text says here Moses married a Cushite.
 - i) When did that happen? The text does not say. "Cush" is essentially Ethiopia. Most speculate that she was black. Since the text never condemns Moses for this marriage, most believe that it was "God allowed and Moses' first wife died". Some argue that this is still wife number one, but that is a minority opinion.
 - ii) Anyway, we read is that Moses sister and brother don't like the new girl. Maybe it was because she was not Jewish or maybe it was because she was black. Jewish tradition is that this woman was a Cushite princess. Whoever she was, I suspect the issue is that Miriam was the implied leader of the women (See Exodus 15:20) and here was this new woman who was on the scene.
 - b) Most commentators suspect that Miriam was the leader of these two people bringing the complaint to Moses. That is based on Aaron's record of going along with whatever Moses said and also because he helped the Israelites make the Golden Calf. That is why I picture Miriam making the complaints and Aaron just standing there nodding his head. We don't know for sure, but given the fact her name is listed first, that is a most likely situation.
15. Verse 3: (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)
- a) So why is this here? Was Moses humble to write that? ☺ What I suspect is that instead of Moses claiming, "I am in charge", Moses took the matter in prayer to God.
16. Verse 4: At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. ⁵ Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, ⁶ he said, Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.
- a) John's loose translation: I (God) will decide who is and who is not a prophet. You people will know who has the gift of prophecy, as I will reveal my will to them through visions and dreams. This does not mean that is the only way God works. It also does not mean that He will only speak to those people that way. The reason this statement is made is Miriam and Aaron were saying in effect, "Didn't God choose also us for our roles?" The answer is yes, but as far as when and how God wants to speak to us, that is His business and not ours, and we have to respect His authority in this manner.
 - b) Notice that God had the pillar of cloud come down and had the three of them stand next to the tabernacle. This demonstration is to prove that God Himself was talking to them.
 - c) This leads me back to my theme about complaining. The latest to complain is in effect, Miriam. She probably felt threatened by Moses new wife. Moses humbled himself instead of just saying "I can marry who I want", by bring the problem to God in prayer.
 - i) But John, God doesn't solve our problems by a visual appearance. However, after hearing all sides of the argument we can and should use prayer as well as God's word to help solve issues of disagreements as well as complaints.
 - d) One more quick question: Are all of our dreams and visions then God inspired? First, never rule out the fact we ate some bad food or just had something else on our mind. The point is not that all of our dreams are God trying to speak to us. This is just one method that God can use to get our attention. The reason that God likes that method is simply because when we are sleeping or having a vision we are not distracted with other things. Like I said, if God wants to get our attention, He is powerful enough to tell us anyway He wants to what it is He wants to say.

17. Verse 7: But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" ⁹ The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them.
- a) Meanwhile God is still lecturing Miriam and Aaron and apparently God is not happy. ☺
 - i) So why did Miriam's grumble get God to give this message? The point is God is in charge and we have to accept that fact. This is why for example, we have to accept election results and accept He has chosen as our church leaders.
 - b) So how did God speak "face to face" with Moses? I suspect it just means that God made it very clear to Moses what it was that He wanted to say. I also wonder if God spoke that clearly when he spoke to other prophets. I also suspect that He spoke in a way to Moses, that it was obvious by the results to those that were close to him, which would include his brother and sister. God is holding Miriam and Aaron accountable for knowing how He has worked in the recent past. Apparently God was angry enough that the cloud lifted to make the point about His anger.
18. Verse 10: When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam--leprosy, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; ¹¹ and he said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. ¹² Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."
- a) My first thought as I read this was, why did God punish Miriam but not Aaron? That is why I suspect Miriam was the leader of these two. I have also read it is possibly because Aaron was the high priest and a high priest can't have leprosy and still does his job.
 - b) Notice that Aaron humbles himself and asks Moses to forgive them of their sins. Aaron knows that Moses speaks to God "face to face" and asks Moses to intercede. Does that mean we should have our church leaders pray for us? That's not the point. The point is Aaron sinned by not recognizing Moses leadership, so Aaron confessed that sin and after that, he asked Moses to plead to God as Aaron recognized Moses is the leader.
19. Verse 13: So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!"
- a) Notice Moses didn't say "Serves you right" or something like that. God was punishing his sister, and Moses was praying in effect, "Hey, God, are you sure this is right?"
20. Verse 14: The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." ¹⁵ So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.
- a) God replied in effect, "I am God and what I decide as punishment is fair". At this point, He explains His punishment. Note that nowhere in the bible is there any reference that spitting on someone's face is a seven-day punishment outside of the camp. It is just an interpretation based on the idea of a father insulting his child (by spitting on him or her) probably for being disobedient. As I explained in the last lesson, the number seven represents a complete period of time just as God rested on the seventh day.
 - b) The point is this punishment for disobeying Moses' command was not a death sentence, but it did warrant separation for a specified period of time. Remember that the crime was not questioning Moses' leadership, but his choice in marriage. The idea of separation due to leprosy (a picture of sin) was to remind Miriam that God decisions are fair.
21. Verse 16: After that, the people left Hazeroth and encamped in the Desert of Paran.
- a) Remember that Miriam was the leader of the women. Therefore, the entire camp had to wait for this seven-day period to end, before the camp moved on.
 - b) The sad part of this entire lesson is that the grumbling didn't end. One would think the miracle of the birds flying overhead or the miracle of Miriam being cured of leprosy and then miraculously getting healed would get the Israelites to fully trust God. As we will read in the next lesson, miracles are not enough to get us to trust Him.

22. With that said, I figure 12 pages of grumbling and complaining is enough for one week. Let me wrap up what we should learn here in my closing prayer. Father, help us to learn that grumbling never makes our situation better. Help us to have a good attitude through our lives. Help us to realize that You are guiding our lives for Your glory. Help us to realize in difficult times, that You are there, You want to see us through whatever we are dealing with and guide us to be more in conformity with Your Son, Jesus. Instead of grumbling about our situation, help us to use our time, to make a difference for You and see You in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.