

Numbers 11:1-9

1 Now when the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, the LORD heard it and his anger was kindled. Then the fire of the LORD burned against them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp. 2 But the people cried out to Moses; and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire abated. 3 So that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned against them. 4 The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, "If only we had meat to eat! 5 We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at." 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like the color of gum resin. 8 The people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9 When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it" (NRSV).

The Bible story is this. There is one God that is the creator of heaven and earth. God is alive and has a covenant relationship with humans. The Bible reveals on several different occasions God engaging in a covenant with humanity. A covenant is a promise, like a contract, that is based on relationships. The 1st covenant was with Noah. In the Bible there is a big problem. I emphasize it was a very big problem. It starts back in Genesis chapter 6. The wickedness of humankind was great on the earth; every thought was evil and continuously evil. It was so bad that God was sorry for ever making humankind. That is some harsh and strong language. It grieved God's heart that earth was corrupt and filled with violence.

There was one (only one) righteous man. So, God engages in a covenant with Noah. Creation starts all over again. The Bible lessons repeat over and over with different setting, time, people, places, and events. The stories don't repeat, the scenarios don't repeat, but the lessons do. In the Garden of Eden they were bad so they got kicked out. When the whole world had gone bad it was flooded. Bad things happen when people stray from God. God is the creator and giver of life. God is the one that blesses people with abundant resources. God deserves our appreciation as expressed through reverence, worship, praise, and obedience.

The problem repeats. While some people honor and praise God most people go astray. Again there is one man that is righteous. So, God engages in a covenant with Abraham. "I will be your God and you will be my people." You know the story. Abraham 1st son is Ishmael these people become Arab tribes. Abraham's 2nd son is Isaac. His oldest son is Esau, the father of the Edomites, and his 2nd son Jacob has 12 sons that are the tribes of Israel. During a period of famine and starvation the nation of Israel found refuge in Egypt. Over centuries they became a large nation and were enslaved. So, God engages in a covenant with Moses. The people are freed from slavery and the law is established. The condition of this covenant is a promised land flowing with milk and honey and all the people have to do is remain faithful.

This brings us to today's Scripture. It is a good lesson on the vice of complaining. What happened in the Scripture is absolutely amazing. The people who have escaped from slavery should be thankful to God for freeing them. As long as they are alive, for the rest of their lives and the lives of all of their descendants, they should be always praising God for life, freedom, and provisional care. Notice what they actually do is very different from what they should be doing. They long for comfort. Now here's the part that really upsets God. They bow down to idol

worship. I want to make sure we get this. In spite of all that God has done for the people. Very few stay loyal to God. The overwhelming majority transgress from the will of God. People freed by God who suffered in slavery and are no longer suffering, people who now receive God's provisional care, these are the people that complain against God. This is the human nature that God has to contend with. People saved, blessed, and cared for by God, lapse into discontentment. Over and over again we see in the Bible people, who are given life and freedom, seek their own stuff instead of seeking God. Notice God's response to this complaining is "The fire of the Lord burned against them."

It seems like the people never learn. The same fundamental problem continues to repeat throughout history; the judges, the monarchy, and the exile. God continues with provisional care while some appreciate it and offer praise and worship, the overwhelming majority is self indulging and transgresses. Then something truly amazing happens. God offers grace. God gives us a new covenant. The old covenant was based on law and obedience. The new covenant is based on love and grace. This is a truly amazing gift of love. The people did not even ask for it. It is a free gift. It is out of love God gives to us the Son of God. Notice that within this repetitive pattern God is the first one to give to the relationship and God upholds covenant while humans violate covenant. The least we can do for the one that created the heavens and earth, for the one that loves us and provides provisional care, for the one who supplies us with more than enough, is show our thanks, have sincere appreciation, stand fast in faith, maintain reverence, and worship in spirit and truth.

The point I want to make is that the Bible story continues today. The people, places, and events are different but human nature does not change. God desires people to live God's way, to care for God's creation; the people, animals, and earth. Loving God requires loving all of God's creation. The Bible stories, from beginning to end, are applicable to us because they deal with the relationship between God and humanity. I look around at the world today and I see a biblical world. Wickedness of humankind is great on the earth. While some honor and praise God, most choose to go astray. What amazes me is that after God has done so much for all of us there are a lot of people today that have an apathetic attitude towards God. The Bible lessons repeat because they deal with loving God and fallen humanity. The Bible story continues today with us.