**Fire From the Lord**

Summer is here and it’s time for that family vacation. For those traveling with children, long car trips can be frightful. Most parents will go to great lengths to prepare their children for the journey. Snacks, drinks, games, videos and coloring books are all weapons to defend against the complaints that are sure to come from the rear of the car. Despite meticulous preparation, the intrepid couple is likely to hear the following before the car is out of the neighborhood “I’m hungry” “I’m bored” “I have to go to the bathroom” (despite assurances they went prior to leaving the house) and the dreaded “Are we there yet?” In our study of Numbers chapter 11 and indeed much of the rest of the book, we see the Israelites behaving as spoiled children. God had proven to make good on His promises by providing for them for a year as they traveled through the desert. He had protected them from the Egyptians who pursued them, guided them with His pillars of cloud and light and provided food and water for them. In addition to their physical needs, He had spent a month teaching them how to live righteous lives. No sooner had they left Mt. Sinai that the complaints began.

The chapter begins with the people complaining about their hardships within earshot of God (pro tip, you are never out of His earshot, or thoughtshot either). God responded by sending fire as a warning that burned part of the camp. The KJV says that the fire consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp indicating that some people perished in the fire. Rather than repenting before God, the people appealed to Moses who in turn prayed to God. It seems the people were much more comfortable in their relationship with Moses than God (see Ex. 20:19). The Bible offers no explanation of their specific complaint other than hardship. After being stationary at Mt. Sinai for a month, perhaps they were not pleased to be walking again.

What follows and takes up the remainder of the chapter is a very specific complaint; they had no meat to eat. The NIV refers to the grumblers as a rabble. The KJV refers to them as a mixt multitude which would include some who were not Israelites but had left Egypt with them. Worse yet, they created in their minds a false memory of a wide assortment of abundant foods they enjoyed in Egypt free of charge. I suppose slaves might view their meals as free since they are provided by their masters but food in such an arrangement is actually terribly expensive. The Israelites viewed the manna that God provided as inferior although it was nutritious and could be prepared in different ways.

The reaction of Moses tells us a few things about his level of maturity at this point. First he turned the focus on himself and how the situation affected him. He questioned why God had placed such a burden on him. He was also ready to just give up even asking God to take his life to avoid the responsibility of leading the people. Finally, he doubted God’s ability to provide food even after God said that He would give them enough meat to eat for a month (see Matt. 15:33). God’s first way of dealing with the people was to tell Moses to select 70 elders to help him deal with the people. David Guzik wrote “Before God provided the meat for Israel (which they asked for, but didn’t really need), He first provided them more leadership and oversight (which they didn't ask for, but really did need). God gave the elders a measure of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to prophesy. The NIV and KJV translate the last sentence in verse 25 in opposite fashion. The KJV says they prophesied without ceasing while the NIV says they did not do so again. There were 2 elders who stayed in the camp yet they were also given the Holy Spirit. Joshua objected to their prophesying but was overruled by Moses (see Luke 9:50).

As promised, God sent a wind to drive quail into the camp. God’s anger burned as He saw their gluttony while they ate the quail. The chapter ends with God sending a plague among them which killed those who had craved other food.

Reading this chapter I am reminded of something Steve said in his message on Sunday. He observed that people often long for what they don’t have rather than being thankful for what they do have (see James 1:17, Phil. 4:11 and 1st Tim. 6:6-8). Another thing we can learn from this chapter is that we should look for permanent rather than temporary solutions. The complaints of the people revealed a need for additional spiritual leadership. Rather than just sending food, God sent the Holy Spirit to 70 men in the camp who would relieve Moses of some of his burden (see Ex. 18:21).