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Complaining at Tav'erah

11: 1-3

Complaining at Tav'erah DIG: Why are the Israelites complaining here such a shock? How had it become a pattern of destruction? What was the spark that lit the fire? Who were the mixed-multitude? What did they have to complain about? What does the B'rit Chadashah have to say about complaining? What six things does the LORD hate?

REFLECT: What struggles have you had to face in your life since you were saved? What was your response to those struggles? How does complaining show your lack of trust in God and His purposes for your life? Do you think that your complaining stumbles unbelievers who know about your faith? Why? Why not? Who puts out your fires today?

The first rebellion became a pattern of destruction.



There is a cyclical nature to **Isra'el's** rebellions against **God** – stubborn **people** tend to repeat the sins of the past. The first rebellion of **the** redeemed **people** came on the third day of the march from Egypt to Mount Sinai after **their** miraculous crossing of the Sea of Reeds (see the commentary on **Exodus**, **to see link click [Cn](#) - When They Came to Marah the Water was Bitter**). Now, three days out on their triumphal march to Canaan from **Mount Sinai**, they fell back into **their complaining** behavior. Nothing in the first ten

chapters of **Numbers** has prepared us for this verse; rather, those chapters have emphasized over and over again the complete obedience of **Moses** and **the people** to the dictates of **YHVH**. Moses, the narrator of **Numbers**, has arranged his materials so carefully that this sudden outbreak of renewed pettiness against **God** seems unprecedented, unexpected - unbelievable. How, we wonder, with all the preparation for a holy walk, could there come such stumbling so soon?¹⁷⁴

Now the people became like those who complain of adversity (Hebrew: *ra*, meaning *evil, distress, misery or calamity*) **in the hearing of ADONAI (11:1a)**. Here we have the first act of rebellion on the journey from **Mount Sinai**. **God's Word** tells us that there was a group of **complainers on the outskirts of the camp**, and this revolt took little to reveal itself. And **the complainers, Egyptians** who left with the Israelites, were **mixed** in among **the people**. **Complaining** was, and is, contagious and **the Israelites** fell into that trap. Only a spark is needed to start a **fire**, you need only a few **people** to start **complaining** to start a rebellion.

God's people had lost sight of what **He** had done for **them** already. **He** had set **them** free from the bondage of Egypt and the cruelties of that nation toward **them**. **He** had opened the hearts and hands of **the people** of Egypt to bless **them** with much wealth as they left, so **they** could build the Tabernacle at Sinai. **He** had given **them** victory over Pharaoh's army. **He** had opened the Sea of Reeds for **them** so **they** could walk across on dry ground. **He** had placed **His Presence** among **them** and led **them** personally, step-by-step, through the desert. **He** provided **them** with food to eat every day so that **they** were not hungry. But now, **Isra'el** was **complaining** about **ADONAI**. **They** had failed to appreciate what **He** had already done for **them**.¹⁷⁵

The B'rit Chadashah has much to say about this problem for it never disappeared. The heart of mankind has not changed since the time of **Adam** (see the commentary on **Romans Bm - The Consequences of Adam**). For this reason, **Paul** urges us not to **complain, as some did, and they were destroyed by the Destroying Angel. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come (First Corinthians 10:10-11)**. **Paul** learned to find contentment and joy in **the Lord** rather than in **his** external circumstances. **I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am (Philippians 4:11)**. **That is why, for Messiah's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong (Second Corinthians 12:10)**. To **Timothy**, he confided that **godliness with contentment is great gain (First Timothy 6:6)**. As **the people of God**, we must learn from the mistakes of the generation in the

wilderness and commit ourselves not to repeat them. We must put aside our **complaining** spirits and learn the art of gratitude.¹⁷⁶

Based upon the stories of the book of **Numbers**, it would appear that few things irritate **Ha'Shem** more than a negative attitude. **There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict among brothers (Proverbs 6:16-19).** Thus, **when ADONAI heard it, His anger flared up, so that fire from ADONAI broke out against them and consumed the outskirts of the camp (11:1b).** In **God's** mercy, it did not affect **Moses, Aaron, the priests, the Levites, nor the Tabernacle.** Now the exact nature of the judgment is unclear, but it obviously caused a severe **burning** of some kind.

In the midst of **His** wrath **YHVH** remembered **His** mercy. **Then the people cried out to Moshe, Moshe prayed to ADONAI, and the fire stopped (11:2).** This is one of the ongoing themes of Scripture and thus emphasized in **Numbers.** **The people** truly deserved **God's** considerable wrath. But **the survivors** of this outburst of **His anger** cried out to **Moses** for help on **their** behalf before **the LORD.** **Moshe** prayed and **the fire** subsequently subsided.¹⁷⁷ If **Moshe** had not been there, **the fire** would not have **stopped.** And **Moshe** is not here today, so how are our **fires stopped?** This is the type of question this chapter will ask of us, and it will point to **the One Mediator** who speaks to **God** on our behalf: **Yeshua Messiah.**

Because of the raging **fire** of **Ha'Shem,** **the people** named that **place** of awful memory **Tav'erah [burning, like hell] because ADONAI's fire broke out against them (11:3).** Two similar stories immediately follow this parashah (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Af - Parashah**). The rejection of the Promised Land (see **By - The Report of the Spies**), and **Korah's rebellion** (see **Co - The Rebellion of Korah**) are also based upon the same pattern as we see here.¹⁷⁸

Therefore, the unspecified **complaint** in **Numbers 11:1-3** becomes a basic outline for the **complaint** stories that follow: **The people** complain; **God's anger** is kindled; **Moses** intercedes; and the punishment is stopped. **Ha'Shem's anger** here is hot, and the punishment was in the form of **fire that broke out against them (11:1).** But **the fire** only **consumed the outskirts of the camp.** **Moshe prayed to ADONAI** on behalf of **the people** and **the fire stopped.** The name of the place was then called **Tav'erah,** which in Hebrew means *burning*. At this point in the narrative the reader may wonder if this is only a

minor, temporary, setback, since **the fire** only torches the fringes of **the camp**. Perhaps there will be a return to the blissful obedience that was the theme in **Numbers 1-10**. Well, we do not have to wait long to find out that such an optimistic scenario is not in the works; we quickly arrive on the heels of another story of rebellion (see **Br - Quail and Manna from ADONAI**).¹⁷⁹

*Even when life seems all messed up and not going the way we had hoped, **You** are still the wise and loving **Almighty Sovereign** of the world who holds the keys to eternal life in heaven. We need to remember that our time on this earth is actually only for a blink of time compared to eternity. When we leave earth, all will have an eternal existence, because of our faith in **You**. We praise **You** for opening heaven's door to those who love **You** by **Your** gift of **Messiah's righteousness (Second Corinthians 5:21)**. There are never any complaints in heaven; and on earth, we choose to praise **You** - even when it is hard for **You** are worthy. This life will be over soon and then heaven will be for all eternity! I will love **You** forever in **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*