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Moses' Complaint about the People

11: 10-15

Moses' complaint about the People DIG: Why do you think the people's attitude changed between 9:15-23 and 10:11-36? Why do you think their attitude deteriorated so rapidly? Why did Moshe become discouraged? Did Moshe consider their complaints valid? Would you? Why or why not? How does Moses display lack of faith here? In his despair and frustration, what did he ask ADONAI to do?

REFLECT: When are you, like Moshe, most likely to become discouraged with your lot in life? When discouraged, do you listen more to people's complaints, to God's provision, or inner doubts? Ask the LORD to forgive you for the times when you have complained about His purpose for your life. Ask God to teach you to be more content with what He has provided. What complaints damage your fellowship with God?

The burden of leadership.



Anyone who has served any length of time leading a congregation of **God's people** is familiar with the frustration **Moshe** feels as **he** cries out to **ADONAI**. Even when things are going well, and there are no real crisis situations, and the leadership is well-liked, discontentment can begin to seep in and spread throughout the

congregation. It is the way of human beings born with the disease of sin. We do not need legitimate complaints; we will always find something to complain about. This is true for any leader in a position of responsibility over a business, political, or social organization. But it is far more stressful and painful for leaders placed over a congregation because issues of spirituality, faith and relationship inevitably become entangled with discord.

As people of the Torah, we should learn from the book of **Numbers**. If Moshe was so distressed with leadership responsibilities that he felt suicidal, how much more so our congregational leaders. We need to take a cue from this. We need to become proactive about defending our leadership and silencing the voices of discontentment and antagonism which so quickly spread throughout the congregation. We need to encourage our congregational leaders and stand by them, even if they do turn out to be merely human beings and make mistakes like the rest of us.¹⁸⁸ **Moshe heard the people crying, family after family, each person at the entrance to his tent** (see the commentary on **Exodus, to see link click Gy - Moses and the Tent of Meeting**); **the anger of ADONAI flared up violently; and in mirroring the feelings of YHVH, in the eyes of Moses it was evil (11:10)**. This brought pressure on **Moshe**, and depressed, **he asked God:**

Here is an example of introversion in a speech (see **Ac - Numbers from a Messianic Jewish Perspective: Chiasm and introversion**). This structure clearly shows that although **Moses'** complaint seemingly stresses **his** need for assistance in administration (**ABC** and **CBA**), **his main concern is expressed in the pivot (D), where his whining discloses his questioning whether God will enable him to provide Isra'el with meat.**¹⁸⁹

A. Why are you treating your servant so badly (11:11a)? Moshe's selfless concern for **his people** had apparently evaporated. Instead of turning to **the LORD** to ask that **he** might understand the substance of **their** complaint, **Moses** turned to **the LORD** to ask why **he** was given such an ungrateful **people** to lead. There is a human touch in all of this; **Moshe** is caught off guard, as it were – ill-prepared for the magnitude of the problem **he** faced in leading such a sinful group of **people**.¹⁹⁰

B. Why haven't I found favor in your sight, so that you put the burden of this entire people (rather than **my people**) **on me (11:11b)?** In other words, if **You** really love **me**, **You** wouldn't burden me with **these people**. Knowing, as we do, how ungrateful and hardheaded **the people** of **Isra'el**

were, it is amazing that **Moses** wasn't discouraged more often!¹⁹¹

C. Did I conceive all these people (12:a)? Was I their father, so that You should say to me, "Carry them in your arms, like a nurse carrying a baby, to the land you swore to their ancestors?" The Hebrew emphasizes the "I," that is, "I am not **the father of these people** – but, **God, You** are! After all, it is **YHVH** who has conceived **these people**. It was **He** who gave **them** birth. **He** was **their** nurse, **their** mother in the wilderness. **He** has promised **them their** Land. **The people** were screaming at **Moses**; but, ultimately, **they** were ranting against **God**.¹⁹²

D. Where am I going to get meat to give to all the people? Because they keep pestering me with their crying and saying, "Give us meat to eat" (11:13)! Moses does not justify the murmuring of **the people**, and was doubtless conscious of **their** sinfulness. At the same time, however, **he** displays a spirit of discouragement to the point of despair, at **God's** dealings with **himself**; and appears to treat the demand of **the Israelites** for **meat** as not being altogether unreasonable.

C. I can't carry this entire people by myself alone - it's too much for me (11:14)! The problem is that Moses feels alone in **his** responsibility, which weighs heavily on **his** shoulders. The stress pushes **him** over the edge. **Moses** lost **his** perspective and got **his** eyes off **the LORD** and onto **himself**, something that's easy to do in the difficult experiences in life.¹⁹³

B. Finally, in resignation, he declares: If you are going to treat me this way, then just kill me outright (11:15a)! Moses' despair concerning **his** life's lot parallels those of other notables in **Isra'el's** history. **Job** cursed the very day of **his birth** in the midst of **his** season of suffering (**Job 3:1-4**); after **Elijah** put the prophets of Ba'al to the sword, **he** became very depressed and wanted **ADONAI to take his life (First Kings 19:3-4)**; and **Jeremiah** likewise bemoaned **his birth** in the midst of the shame **he** experienced in being beaten and imprisoned by **Pashur in Jerusalem (20:14-18)**! At this point in his leadership ministry, **Moshe** faced a crisis of faith and dependency, preferring **death** as a favor from **God** rather than continue to have the responsibility of directing such a rebellious **people**.

Notice how **Moses** argues with **YHVH**. You will recall that, after **the golden calf** incident (see the commentary on **Exodus Gq - The Golden Calf Incident**), **Moshe** argued for covenant renewal on the basis of **the favor he** had found with **YHVH**. **Moses** had prayed: **Now if I have found favor in Your sight, ADONAI, I pray, let the LORD go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your possession (Exodus 34:9)**. Now, however, in **his** despair, **he** argues against having to lead **the people** any further, and distances **himself** from **the Israelites**.

A. Please, if you have any mercy toward me! - and don't let me go on being this miserable (11:15b)! This makes this whole passage an outpouring of **Moshe's** self-pity, climaxed by this final remark. Since **Ha'Shem** is the author of **Moses' wretchedness**, **He** might as well finish the job - and take **his** life. **ADONAI** responded with grace and yet also with judgment (see **Bt - ADONAI's Response**). **Moses** would get some relief, but in the long run this was just the beginning of troublesome years to come.¹⁹⁴

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Praise **You** that the number of troublesome years on earth will soon be over and there will be an eternity of peace and joy for all who love **You**. We all long for good times with family and respect from our work, but sometimes that does not happen. We need to keep in mind that a relationship of love with **You** is so much better than anything life can offer and your love lasts for all eternity. Day to day problems and personal conflicts sometimes seem to weigh us down, but there is way so much better than complaining to solve the problems. I thank **You** that as I pray, asking **You** to give me wisdom, my heart is lifted. I praise **You** for **Your** loving care in my life. It is so much better for me to appreciate **You** than to complain. Prayer is the first thing to do when a problem comes. How wonderful that **You** listen to my prayers and promise to answer me (**John 5:14-15**)! I love **You Father God** and delight in praising **You** for **Your** awesome love and indwelling presence in my life (**John 14:23**) - even when times are hard. **You** are worthy of all our love and praise! I look forward to praising **You** thru All eternity! In **Messiah Yeshua's** holy **Name** and power of **His** resurrection. Amen*