

Rest in Christ

Restless and Rebellious

Lesson #2 for July 10, 2021

Scriptures: Numbers 11:1-33; 12:1-13; 13:27-23; 14:1-23,39-45; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11.

1. When the children of Israel left Egypt after those amazing displays of God's power in the 10 plagues, they thought that they would be in the land of Canaan within a short time. **Under normal circumstances and if they had taken the direct route to Canaan, they could have been there in about two weeks!**
2. What actually happened was that they lived in tents at the foot of Mount Sinai for a year. Natural human restlessness soon led to rebellion.
3. There at Mount Sinai, God spoke to them directly from the top of the mount, and they were directed by Moses under the guidance of God to build the tabernacle and begin their close relationship to God. There, God fed them every day, lighted their way, protected them from the sun's heat, etc. Then, they were finally ready to move on.

Numbers 11:1-3: The people began to complain to the LORD about their troubles.

When the LORD heard them, he was angry and sent fire on the people. It burnt among them and destroyed one end of the camp. ²The people cried out to Moses for help; he prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. ³So the place was named Taberah, because there the fire of the LORD burnt among them.—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Numbers 11:1–3). New York: American Bible Society.

4. What do you think was happening there? **Was God becoming irritated? Upset? And angry? Or, then as well as now, when people rebel against God in the context of the great controversy, is/was He forced to allow Satan to have access to them?**
5. But, they were not done complaining! The next complaint was about food.

Numbers 11:4-15: ⁴ There were some foreigners travelling with the Israelites. They had a strong craving for meat, and even the Israelites themselves began to complain: "If only we could have some meat! ⁵In Egypt we used to eat all the fish we wanted, and it cost us nothing. Remember the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic we had? ⁶But now our strength is gone. **There is nothing at all to eat—nothing but this manna day after day!**"

⁷ (Manna was like small seeds, whitish yellow in colour. ⁸⁻⁹It fell on the camp at night along with the dew. The next morning the people would go round and gather it, grind it or pound it into flour, and then boil it and make it into flat cakes. It tasted like bread baked with olive oil.)

¹⁰ Moses heard all the people complaining as they stood about in groups at the entrances of their tents. He was distressed because **the LORD was angry with them**, ¹¹and he said to the LORD, "Why have you treated me so badly? Why are you displeased with me? Why have you given me the responsibility for all these people? ¹²I didn't create them or bring them to birth! Why should you ask me to act like a nurse and carry them in my arms like babies all the way to the land you promised to their ancestors? ¹³Where could I get enough meat for all these people? They keep whining and asking for meat. ¹⁴I can't be responsible for all these people by myself; it's too much for me! ¹⁵If you are going to treat me like this, take pity on me and kill me, so that I won't have to endure your cruelty any longer."—*Good News Bible*.*†

6. **Could they really long for the lives they had been living back in Egypt?** Had they forgotten about their slavery? All they seemed to be able to think about was the good food that was available there.
7. So, how did God respond?

Numbers 11:16-33: ¹⁶ The LORD said to Moses, “Assemble seventy respected men who are recognized as leaders of the people, bring them to me at the Tent of my presence, and tell them to stand there beside you. ¹⁷I will come down and speak with you there, and **I will take some of the spirit I have given you and give it to them.** Then they can help you to bear the responsibility for these people, and you will not have to bear it alone. ¹⁸Now tell the people, ‘Purify yourselves for tomorrow; you will have meat to eat. The LORD has heard you whining and saying that you wished you had some meat and that you were better off in Egypt. Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will have to eat it. ¹⁹**You will have to eat it not just for one or two days, or five, or ten, or even twenty days,** ²⁰**but for a whole month, until it comes out of your ears, until you are sick of it. This will happen because you have rejected the LORD who is here among you and have complained to him that you should never have left Egypt.’ ”**

²¹ Moses said to the LORD, “Here I am leading 600,000 people, and you say that you will give them enough meat for a month? ²²Could enough cattle and sheep be killed to satisfy them? Are all the fish in the sea enough for them?”

²³ “Is there a limit to my power?” the LORD answered. “You will soon see whether what I have said will happen or not!”

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He assembled seventy of the leaders and placed them round the Tent. ²⁵Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit he had given to Moses and gave it to the seventy leaders. When the spirit came on them, they began to shout like prophets, but not for long.

²⁶ Two of the seventy leaders, Eldad and Medad, had stayed in the camp and had not gone out to the Tent. There in the camp the spirit came on them, and they too began to shout like prophets. ²⁷A young man ran out to tell Moses what Eldad and Medad were doing.

²⁸ Then Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses’ helper since he was a young man, spoke up and said to Moses, “Stop them, sir!”

²⁹ Moses answered, “Are you concerned about my interests? I wish that the LORD would give his spirit to all his people and make all of them shout like prophets!” ³⁰Then Moses and the seventy leaders of Israel went back to camp.

³¹ Suddenly the LORD sent a wind that brought quails from the sea, flying less than a metre above the ground. They settled on the camp and all round it for many kilometres in every direction. ³²So all that day, all night, and all the next day, the people worked catching quails; no one gathered less than a thousand kilogrammes [2200 pounds]. They spread them out to dry all round the camp. ³³While there was still plenty of meat for them to eat, the LORD became angry with the people and caused an epidemic to break out among them.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [That was a normal migration route for birds from the north.][‡]

8. What do you think was happening in this passage? The miracle that took place in order to satisfy their desire for meat was incredible. If we understand the weights and measures that Moses uses, each person gathered enough quail to provide an enormous supply of meat for a long time. But, what was the problem? Of course, they had no refrigeration of any kind. Very

soon, the meat became bad; and **an epidemic broke out among them.**

9. The real issue for the children of Israel was not meat. They had their flocks and herds and could, at times, eat meat. But, they had been living in tents for over a year. They expected to be in the land flowing with “milk and honey” before that time. **They were really complaining about God’s leadership.**
10. It is so easy to forget the bad times and remember the good times in our past.
11. Overheard from a group of senior citizens: “The older we get, the better we were!”
12. But, it was not only the people who were complaining, but also Moses’s siblings.

Numbers 12:1-3: Moses had married a Cushite [Ethiopian] woman, and Miriam and Aaron criticized him for it. ²They said, “**Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?** Hasn’t he also spoken through us?” The LORD heard what they said. ³(Moses was a humble man, more humble than anyone else on earth.)—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡} [Who wrote these words?][‡]

13. Zipporah was a Midianite, also a descendent of Abraham. Who were the Midianites?

Genesis 25:1-2: [After Sarah’s death] ¹Abraham married another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, **Midian**, Ishbak, and Shuah.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

Exodus 3:1: One day while Moses was taking care of the sheep and goats of his father-in-law Jethro, the **priest of Midian**, he led the flock across the desert and came to Sinai, the holy mountain.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

14. The real issue was the fact that Moses had listened to his father-in-law and followed good advice to share his responsibilities with others **without consulting Miriam and Aaron.**
Review Numbers 11:16-17,24-25 as quoted in item #7 above.
15. What was supposed to be the role of Aaron and Miriam at that point?

Exodus 4:13-15: ¹³ But Moses answered, “No, Lord, please send someone else.”

¹⁴ At this the LORD became angry with Moses and said, “What about your brother **Aaron**, the Levite? I know that he can speak well. In fact, he is now coming to meet you and will be glad to see you. ¹⁵You can speak to him and tell him what to say. I will help both of you to speak, and I will tell you both what to do.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

Micah 6:4: [The LORD said:] “I brought you out of Egypt; I rescued you from slavery; I sent **Moses, Aaron, and Miriam** to lead you.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

16. So, how did God respond when Miriam and Aaron complained? Read Numbers 12:4-13, as follows. Note especially verses 8-10.

Numbers 12:4-13: ⁴ Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, “I want the three of you to come out to the Tent of my presence.” They went, ⁵and the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, stood at the entrance of the Tent, and called out, “Aaron! Miriam!” The two of them stepped forward, ⁶and the LORD said, “Now hear what I have to say! When there are prophets among you, I reveal myself to them in visions and speak to them in dreams. ⁷It is different when I speak with my servant Moses; I have put him in charge of all my people Israel. ⁸**So I speak to him face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he has even seen my form! How dare you speak against my servant Moses?**”

⁹ **The LORD was angry with them; and so as he departed ¹⁰and the cloud left the Tent, Miriam’s skin was suddenly covered with a dreaded disease and turned as white as snow.** When Aaron looked at her and saw that she

was covered with the disease, ¹¹he said to Moses, “Please, sir, do not make us suffer this punishment for our foolish sin. ¹²Don’t let her become like something born dead with half its flesh eaten away.”

¹³ So Moses cried out to the LORD, “O God, heal her!”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

17. This is one of the earliest verses in the Bible to show that when God is “angry,” He steps back and leaves us to the consequences of our own behavior. Or, if we insist, He even leaves us in the hands of the Devil.
18. It is interesting to notice in this passage that Miriam’s name is mentioned before Aaron’s. Why do you think that was? In the ancient patriarchal system, it was common to mention the male’s name first. But, Miriam was probably the one complaining about Zipporah first. Furthermore, if Aaron had been struck with leprosy, he would not have been able to serve as high priest until he was fully recovered.
19. In our day, we hear many people complaining about church leadership. Instead, shouldn’t we be praying for them? Should we do that even when we disagree with them?
20. A more important question is: Why can’t God speak to all His people as He did to Moses, clearly, and face-to-face instead of in riddles? It is important to notice in 1 Kings 19:11-13, that Elijah, one of God’s most faithful servants, finally got the message when God spoke to him in “a still, small voice.” It was not the wind, the earthquake, or the fire that Elijah needed to listen to. Why is it that many of us think that God needs to appear in power before we are ready to respond to Him, and thus, we are prevented from having the relationship that He wants with us? Why do others simply ignore every effort God makes to communicate with them?
21. The children of Israel soon arrived on the border of the land of Canaan. Their hopes were high! It seemed that God was ready to lead them into the promised land. But, there was a delay. Spies were selected. Why were the spies sent to check out the land?
22. Compare the following two passages:

Numbers 13:1-2: ¹The LORD said to Moses, ²“Choose one of the leaders from each of the twelve tribes and send them as spies to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Deuteronomy 1:19b-23: “When we reached Kadesh Barnea, ²⁰⁻²¹I said, ‘You have now come to the hill country of the Amorites, which the LORD our God, the God of our ancestors, is giving us. Look, there it is. Go and occupy it as he commanded. Do not hesitate or be afraid.’

²² **“But you came to me and said, ‘Let’s send men ahead of us to spy out the land, so that they can tell us the best route to take and what kind of cities are there.’**

²³ “That seemed a good thing to do, so I selected twelve men, one from each tribe.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†} [Was God consulted at that point?][‡]

23. Who was it that decided that they needed a report from spies before they entered the land? After 40 days observing the land and people, what was the report of the spies?

Numbers 13:27-33: ²⁷They said to Moses, “We explored the land and found it to be rich and fertile; and here is some of its fruit. ²⁸But the people who live there are powerful, and their cities are very large and well fortified. Even worse, we saw the descendants of the giants there. ²⁹Amalekites live in the southern part of the land; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and Canaanites live by the Mediterranean Sea and along the River Jordan.”

³⁰ Caleb silenced the people who were complaining against Moses, and said,

“We should attack now and take the land; we are strong enough to conquer it.”

³¹ But the men who had gone with Caleb said, “No, we are not strong enough to attack them; the people there are more powerful than we are.” ³² So they spread a false report among the Israelites about the land they had explored. They said, “That land doesn’t even produce enough to feed the people who live there. Everyone we saw was very tall, ³³ and we even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak. We felt as small as grasshoppers, and that is how we must have looked to them.”—*Good News Bible*.* [This report was completely contradictory. Think about Goliath who fought against David years later.][†]

24. At first, it seemed like the spies report was an excellent one. But, then 10 of the spies began to complain. So, what happened next?

Numbers 14:1-10: All night long the people cried out in distress. ² They complained against Moses and Aaron, and said, “It would have been better to die in Egypt or even here in the wilderness! ³ Why is the LORD taking us into that land? We will be killed in battle, and our wives and children will be captured. **Wouldn’t it be better to go back to Egypt?**” ⁴ So they said to one another, “Let’s choose a leader and go back to Egypt!”

⁵ Then Moses and Aaron bowed to the ground in front of all the people. ⁶ And Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, two of the spies, tore their clothes in sorrow ⁷ and said to the people, “The land we explored is an excellent land. ⁸ If the LORD is pleased with us, he will take us there and give us that rich and fertile land. ⁹ Do not rebel against the LORD and don’t be afraid of the people who live there. We will conquer them easily. The LORD is with us and has defeated the gods who protected them; so don’t be afraid.” ¹⁰ The whole community was threatening to stone them to death, but suddenly the people saw **the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence appear over the tent.**—*Good News Bible*.*[†]

The unfaithful spies were loud in denunciation of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry was raised to stone them. The insane mob seized missiles with which to slay those faithful men. **They rushed forward with yells of madness, when suddenly the stones dropped from their hands, a hush fell upon them, and they shook with fear. God had interposed to check their murderous design.** The glory of His presence, like a flaming light, illuminated the tabernacle. All the people beheld the signal of the Lord. A mightier one than they had revealed Himself, and none dared continue their resistance. The spies who brought the evil report crouched terror-stricken, and with bated breath sought their tents.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 390.2.[†]

25. It is clear that **even though they were ready to stone Moses, Caleb, and Joshua, the people were really rebelling against God Himself!** The story goes on.

Numbers 14:11-12: ¹¹ The LORD said to Moses, “How much longer will these people reject me? How much longer will they refuse to trust in me, even though I have performed so many miracles among them? ¹² I will send an epidemic and destroy them, but I will make you the father of a nation that is larger and more powerful than they are!”—*Good News Bible*.*

26. Remember that God already knew that soon, He would be taking Moses up to heaven to live there forever. So, **He was testing Moses to demonstrate to the universe what kind of person Moses really was.**
27. Why didn’t Moses jump at the opportunity to be the father of a new nation? Wasn’t that what he was trained for in Egypt? This is a very important response on the part of Moses.

Numbers 14:13-19: ¹³ But Moses said to the LORD, “You brought these people out of Egypt by your power. When the Egyptians hear what you have done to your people, ¹⁴they will tell it to the people who live in this land. These people have already heard that you, LORD, are with us, that you are plainly seen when your cloud stops over us, and that you go before us in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵**Now if you kill all your people, the nations who have heard of your fame will say ¹⁶that you killed your people in the wilderness because you were not able to bring them into the land you promised to give them. ¹⁷So now LORD, I pray, show us your power and do what you promised when you said,** ¹⁸ ‘I, the LORD, am not easily angered, and I show great love and faithfulness and forgive sin and rebellion. Yet I will not fail to punish children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation for the sins of their parents.’ ¹⁹And now, LORD, according to the greatness of your unchanging love, forgive, I pray, the sin of these people, just as you have forgiven them ever since they left Egypt.”—*Good News Bible*.*†

28. **Moses was concerned about God’s reputation!** How often are we concerned about God’s reputation? This is the whole issue in the great controversy! Moses proved himself to be a true friend of God. And the onlooking universe rejoiced.
29. It is interesting to note in this context that Moses interceded for the people, just as Jesus intercedes for us every day. When an intercessor prays for someone, God can step in and do things that He “could not do” in the face of Satan’s opposition if no one were praying for them.
30. God is forgiveness personified. He promised to forgive the children of Israel; but, forgiveness would not have solved the problem. They had to live with the consequences of their rebellion. That is always true. Sinning leaves scars. God may forgive us; but, the scars are still there.

Numbers 14:20-23: ²⁰ The LORD answered, “**I will forgive them, as you have asked. ²¹But I promise that as surely as I live and as surely as my presence fills the earth, ²²none of these people will live to enter that land.** They have seen the dazzling light of my presence and the miracles that I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, but they have tried my patience over and over again and have refused to obey me. ²³**They will never enter the land which I promised to their ancestors. None of those who have rejected me will ever enter it.**”—*Good News Bible*.*†

31. God continued to support them and care for them for 38 more years, protecting them from snakes, etc.; but, the real problem was that they did not have enough faith to enter the land of Canaan and allow God to conquer the land for them. So, God “could not” take them in.
32. What should we learn from these lessons? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 that all this is an example for us to warn us not to desire evil things as they did. Then, he went on to say that all these things happened to them as examples for others and that they were written down as a warning for us who live in the time of the end.
33. All through history, Satan has been throwing his temptations at God’s people from every direction. In the ancient wilderness, it was a lack of water or, on other occasions, a lack of meat to eat. In our day, it is a barrage of media. Evil forms of entertainment thrust themselves at us from every direction. Satan tries to sell us pornography as love and materialism as the answer to our problems. Do we need more of God’s influence in our lives? Or, do we just need to be a bit fitter, and younger, more affluent, and a bit sexier? Would that take care of all of our problems?
34. Then, the Israelites made a terrible mistake.

Numbers 14:39-45: ³⁹ When Moses told the Israelites what the LORD had said, they

mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰Early the next morning they started out to invade the hill country, saying, “**Now we are ready to go to the place which the LORD told us about. We admit that we have sinned.**”

⁴¹ But Moses said, “Then why are you disobeying the LORD now? You will not succeed! ⁴²Don’t go. **The LORD is not with you**, and your enemies will defeat you. ⁴³When you face the Amalekites and the Canaanites, you will die in battle; the LORD will not be with you, because you have refused to follow him.”

⁴⁴ **Yet they still dared to go up into the hill country, even though neither the LORD’s Covenant Box nor Moses left the camp.** ⁴⁵Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived there attacked and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hormah.—*Good News Bible*.[†]

35. This terrible presumption ended up being very costly. **Up to that point, the nations around had looked upon the children of Israel as being divinely guided and invincible.** They had conquered the powerful Amalekites with almost no effort. The tribes in Canaan were very worried. Compare the testimony of Rahab from 40 years later. But, **when they tried to attack the southern flanks of Canaan without God’s help, they lost terribly.** And suddenly, the peoples in Canaan lost their fear of God’s direction of the Israelites.

36. God had forgiven the Israelites. Wasn’t that enough?

Now they seemed sincerely to repent of their sinful conduct; but they sorrowed because of the result of their evil course rather than from a sense of their ingratitude and disobedience. When they found that the Lord did not relent in His decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness. In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, **God tested their apparent submission and proved that it was not real.** They knew that they had deeply sinned in allowing their rash feelings to control them and in seeking to slay the spies who had urged them to obey God; but they were only terrified to find that they had made a fearful mistake, the consequences of which would prove disastrous to themselves. **Their hearts were unchanged, and they only needed an excuse to occasion a similar outbreak.** This presented itself when Moses, by the authority of God, commanded them to go back into the wilderness.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 391.4.[†]

But faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. **For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith.** Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. Faith would have led our first parents to trust the love of God, and to obey His commands. **Presumption led them to transgress His law, believing that His great love would save them from the consequence of their sin.** It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 126.1.[†]

37. A very important lesson that we need to learn from the experience of the Israelites is that when they went to war *with God’s guidance*, they were incredibly successful. However, **when they went to war without God’s guidance, they suffered disastrous defeats.** This experience was just the beginning of a long history.

38. It is important for us to remember that **even when experiencing God’s forgiveness, we must often still live with the consequences of our sins.** We need complete healing!

39. How many of us become restless because things are not moving in the right direction or as fast as we think they should? Is God the one at fault? After leaving Egypt and before the children of Israael had gotten to Mount Sinai, they were already complaining.

Exodus 16:3: And [the Israelite community] said to them, “We wish that the LORD had killed us in Egypt. There we could at least sit down and eat meat and as much other food as we wanted. But you have brought us out into this desert to starve us all to death.”—*Good News Bible*.^{*†}

40. Considering everything that God was doing and had done for them, why couldn't they trust Him? Are we prone to forget all that God has done for us in the past? Is doing for us in the present? And will do for us in the future?

They *forgot* their bitter service in Egypt. They *forgot* the goodness and power of God displayed in their behalf in their deliverance from bondage. They *forgot* how their children had been spared when the destroying angel slew all the first-born of Egypt. They *forgot* the grand exhibition of divine power at the Red Sea. They *forgot* that while they had crossed safely in the path that had been opened for them, the armies of their enemies, attempting to follow them, had been overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. They saw and felt only their present inconveniences and trials; and instead of saying, “God has done great things for us; whereas we were slaves, He is making of us a great nation,” they talked of the hardness of the way, and wondered when their weary pilgrimage would end.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 292.3. [Italic type is added for emphasis.][‡]

41. The Israelites were acting like little children who demanded to have their wants and needs met immediately. They could not seem to look beyond the end of their noses!
42. Every day the children of Israel were eating the manna provided by God. Didn't at least some of them recognize that incredible miracle for all that it should have meant to them? Didn't they realize that if God could meet their physical needs with bread from heaven that He could take care of them, even in conquering the land? Why was it so easy for them to become restless and rebellious? Why were they so ungrateful? Try to place yourself among the people who received the report of the spies coming back from Canaan. How do you think you would have responded? God through Moses had led them up to that point. And they had repeated evidences that God was the One leading them and not Moses. Why couldn't they learn from that fact?

Do we well to be thus unbelieving? Why should we be ungrateful and distrustful? Jesus is our friend; all heaven is interested in our welfare; and our anxiety and fear grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We should not indulge in a solicitude that only frets and wears us, but does not help us to bear trials. No place should be given to that distrust of God which leads us to make a preparation against future want the chief pursuit of life, as though our happiness consisted in these earthly things. It is not the will of God that His people should be weighed down with care.—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets** 294.1.

43. Are we prepared to trust God, considering all the evidence we have laid out before us in Scripture and the writings of Ellen White and our own personal experiences with His care?

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Info@theox.org

Last Modified: June 5, 2021

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