

Numbers 11:10-15

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/num/num-11/numbers-1110-15/>

Verses 10 – 15 contain what some have called “Moses’ Lament.” Moses heard, and probably was the recipient of, the never-ending griping of the people in the camp about having only manna to eat. In verses 11 – 15, Moses took his impassioned complaint to the LORD. Moses’ issue with the LORD involved him being chosen by the LORD to be the leader of these miserable, ungrateful, and demanding people.

Moses became aware of the people’s complaining when he *heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent* (v. 10). It does not appear that the people went to the LORD about their complaints. Instead, they simply sat down at the door of their tent and kept on complaining. Also, Moses knew that *the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly* (or “was burning intensely”) at the people for their lack of gratitude for the LORD’s gracious provision of manna. And when he saw all of this, *Moses was displeased*.

Apparently, the constant complaining of the people made Moses extremely upset. So, *Moses said to the Lord* (v. 11) many things in the form of questions. The first question was *why have You been so hard on Your servant?* The phrase translated “been so hard” is the Hebrew verb “ra’a’,” which means “to be evil.” Moses seemed to be asking the LORD why it appeared that He was causing him evil by appointing him to lead such an obstinate people.

In the second question, Moses asked *why have I not found favor in Your sight?* Because of the present trouble, Moses thought that he lost the *favor* (Heb. “khen,” “grace”) of the LORD that he received earlier (Exodus 33:17). The evidence, at least in Moses’ mind, for this lost favor was that the LORD had *laid the burden of all this people on him*. The people, the same ones who worshipped the golden calf (Exodus 32 – 34), were now endlessly complaining about their bland diet, and it was a huge burden to Moses.

The questions in verse 12 seem almost sarcastic. Moses asked the LORD *was it I who conceived all this people?* (v.12). The *I* in Hebrew (“anoki”) is emphatic. Moses was saying to the LORD that he was not responsible for the creation of the Israelites and should not be held responsible for meeting all their needs. It seems here that Moses is somewhat reverting to his reluctance to lead, which we saw when God first called him from the burning bush (Exodus 3:11).

Moses then asked the same question in a different way. He asked *was it I who brought them forth*. Again, the *I* is emphatic. Moses is asking God sarcastically if he is Israel’s mother or a midwife, *that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers’?* Though the LORD did say that Moses brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 33:1), Moses takes it further, saying that the LORD expected him to be, in effect, a “surrogate father” to the people.

By using the image of a nursing mother (*carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant*), Moses was telling the LORD that what He was asking of him was impossible. He simply was not equipped to care for these people. It is as if Moses was saying, “LORD, You created these people, so they are Your responsibility, not mine. It is not fair to burden me with them since I am inadequate to meet their needs.”

Thinking that he has been given an impossible task, Moses then asked the LORD, *Where am I to get meat to give to all this people?* (v. 13). He reminded the LORD that *they weep before me, saying, ‘Give us meat that we may eat!’* The LORD already knew all of this (see v. 1 of this chapter). Exasperated, Moses then concludes that he cannot do anything about this issue. He told the LORD that he *alone was not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome* (v. 14).

Moses seemed to think that the LORD’s burdening him this way was an act of judgment upon him. He said this in light of the LORD *going to deal thus with me*, Moses asked Him to *please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness* (v. 15). Moses was so upset about the situation that He thought that for the LORD to kill him would be ironically an act of grace.

Moses apparently thought that he was not qualified to deal with the people about this matter and that the LORD was not fair to place this burden on him. This is not the first time Moses argues with the LORD. In Exodus 4, the LORD commissioned Moses to lead the people out of Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land, Canaan. Moses, instead of accepting the LORD’s will for him, argues with Him, stating that he was not equipped to be a leader. As what happened here, the LORD became angry with Moses (Exodus 4:14). So, thinking that the LORD was cruel because He expected Moses to carry out impossible tasks seemed to be a pattern for him.

However, God did put the burden on Moses to lead the people, although He gave Moses Aaron as an aide (Exodus 6:13). God meets Moses here at his point of need, and provides a solution. God does not react to Moses’s distress. He simply provides a plan, and asks Moses to follow it. Moses stated he could not bear this burden alone (Numbers 11:14) and now God will give him seventy men to help carry his responsibility.

Biblical Text

¹⁰ Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. ¹¹ So Moses said to the Lord, “Why have You been so hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? ¹² Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers’? ¹³ Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, ‘Give us meat that we may eat!’ ¹⁴ I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. ¹⁵ So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness.”