

Numbers 11:4-35, Grace and Grumbling in the Desert

Notes:

- Here are a few tips to reading narratives
 - Think in terms of basic plot points, what is the problem, the rising action, what is the climax of the action, the falling action, and what is the resolution.
 - Pay attention to the dialogue
 - Sometimes comments from the narrator can be very instructive.
 - Notice word plays: this can be difficult without knowing Hebrew, but reading multiple translations, using a good study Bible, or the translator notes from the NET can help.
- Basic Outline
 - vv.4-6 The problem: Complaining about meat and longed to go back to Egypt
 - vv. 7-9 Explanation about manna
 - vv. 10-15 Rising action: Moses goes to God with the complain and the burden
 - vv. 16-20 Climax: God will help with the burden and will give people meat
 - vv. 21-23 Falling action: Moses questions God's solution
 - vv. 24-30 Resolution 1: God places his spirit on the elders to ease the burden
 - vv. 31-35 Resolution 2: The blessing of quail is also the judgment
- Other notes
 - Spirit and wind is the same Hebrew word *ruah*. (cf. v.29 & 31).
 - The giving of the Spirit to the Elders happens at the tent, symbolizing God's presence. But the sending of the quail with win happens outside the camp, symbolizing the absence of God's presence.
 - Exodus 16 recounts the same incident. Deuteronomy 8 recounts the lesson as testing to learn to depend on God (see also 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

Questions

1. What is different about the people's complaint and Moses' complaint?
2. Israel considers their days in slavery to Egypt, better than their hardships in God's presence in the wilderness. Have you sometimes thought times in your life apart from God are better than bad days with God? Why?
3. What does God say is the primary problem with the people's complaint? How is their cry for meat become both a source of grace and of judgment?
4. How do sometimes the very thing we desperately want, is also something that brings more pain into our lives? How can it be a "grace" for God to help us see this?
5. What is the significance of God sending his Spirit on the elders to ease Moses' burden? Why is the giving of his Spirit important for us in the burdens of our lives?
6. Think of hardships you have had in your life, or are having currently. How have they been, or how can they become, a source of deeper dependence on the Lord?