

Numbers 11-13

Numbers 11:1 when the people complained, it displeased the Lord

In this instance, as in so many others in the wilderness, the Lord is angry with the complaining Israelites. The biblical record fails to mention what the complaint was about, but it must have been different than their murmuring for meat (see v. 4). Apparently, it must have been offensive enough to the Lord that he would send a fire through the periphery of the camp to burn the complainers. Yet, even after burning the murmuring crowd, the murmuring pattern continues.

Numbers 11:4 Who shall give us flesh to eat?

Neal A. Maxwell

Murmuring seems to come so naturally to the natural man. It crosses the scriptural spectrum of recorded complaints. We need bread. We need water. (See Num. 21:5.) The needed military reinforcements did not arrive. (See Alma 60.) "Why did we ever leave Egypt?" (See Num. 11:20.) "Why did we ever leave Jerusalem?" (See 1 Ne. 2:11.)...

A basic cause of murmuring is that too many of us seem to expect that life will flow ever smoothly, featuring an unbroken chain of green lights with empty parking places just in front of our destinations!

...murmurers have short memories. Israel arrived in Sinai, then journeyed on to the Holy Land though they were sometimes hungry and thirsty. But the Lord rescued them, whether by the miraculous appearance by quail or by water struck from a rock. (See Num. 11:31; Ex. 17:6.) Strange, isn't it, brothers and sisters, how those with the shortest memories have the longest lists of demands! However, with no remembrance of past blessings, there is no perspective about what is really going on.

This powerful verse in the Old Testament reminds us of what is really going on:

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." (Deut. 8:2.) ("Murmur Not," *Ensign*, Nov. 1989, 82-83)

Wilford Woodruff

I want the Latter-day Saints to stop murmuring and complaining at the providence of God. Trust in God. Do your duty. Remember your prayers. Get faith in the Lord, and take hold and build up Zion. All will be right. (The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff, edited by G. Homer Durham [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969], 252)

Numbers 11:9 when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it

"It is in the great Bread of Life sermon of the Savior that we find the richness of the manna as a type unfolded. Having miraculously fed five thousand from five loaves of bread and two small fishes, he reminded them that Moses gave their fathers 'bread from heaven' while they were in the desert. But it was they who had been given the 'true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world I am the living bread which came down from heaven,' he testified, and then promised, 'If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' (John 6:31-58.)" (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999], 55)

Bruce R. McConkie

And so Israel ate and lived-temporally. Among them, from time to time, were those who understood that their diet of heaven-sent bread came in similitude of a greater food, a "hidden manna," (Rev. 2:17) an unseen heavenly bread, of which men must eat if they are to be fed spiritually. As men die temporally for want of temporal bread, so they die spiritually for want of spiritual food.

Israel's daily diet of manna-and they collected enough on the sixth day to satisfy their needs on the Sabbath-was given not alone to feed their bellies, but to test them spiritually. It came to the people, to all of them, from the Lord-to prove them, to signify what was in their hearts, to establish whether they would keep the commandments or continue to walk after the manner of the Egyptians whose fleshpots they had forsaken to eat the manna of the wilderness. "Man does not live by bread only," Moses proclaimed. Let there be temporal bread lest there be temporal death. But man lives-spiritually and eternally-only when he feasts upon "hidden manna," when he lives "by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord." (Deut. 8:2-3.) (*The Mortal Messiah: From Bethlehem to Calvary*, 4 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979-1981], 2: 366)

Numbers 11:16 Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel

The seventy elders of Israel were called to perform *administrative* duties. The Seventy sent by the Master were called to perform *missionary* duties. Today's quorums of the Seventy are tasked with *both* administrative and missionary duties.

The Seventy are to act in the name of the Lord, under the direction of the Twelve... in building up the church and regulating all the affairs of the same... The Seventy are also called to preach the gospel, and to be especial witnesses unto the Gentiles and in all the world... (D&C 107: 34, 25)

The thoughtful student asks, "Did these seventy men hold the priesthood? And if so, was it Aaronic or Melchizedek?" The answer is that they were not all Levites, so they could not hold the Aaronic—besides they were not ministering under Aaron's authority. Secondly, they couldn't possibly minister for Moses without Moses' priesthood. If the Lord took "of the spirit which is upon [Moses], and... put it upon them," they must have had the higher priesthood.

"The Melchizedek Priesthood was never fully taken. The difficulty of untangling the pre-Mosaic ritual from that which was given as a part of the carnal law is further complicated by the fact that the Melchizedek Priesthood, though taken from the people generally, was always had in Old Testament times. **Joseph Smith** said, 'All the prophets had the Melchizedek Priesthood and were ordained by God himself' (Smith, Joseph. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*. Joseph F. Smith, comp. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976., p. 181). Moses, Aaron, and at least the quorum of the seventy all held that priesthood. Certainly Joshua held the Melchizedek Priesthood when he succeeded Moses as prophet, seer, and revelator." (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999], 79)

"The religious involvement of the seventy is... impressively documented. One must recall initially that the gathering of the seventy on the mountain with Moses and Aaron was specifically done to ratify the covenant made by Israel at Mt. Sinai, this in response to God's invitation (see Exodus 19:5-6). In this extremely important ceremony, the seventy-plus Moses and others—served not only as agents acting on behalf of the larger Israelite nation but also as the guarantors of the covenant by acting as witnesses of the Lord's ratifying presence. In the passage that concerns the appointment of the seventy to assist Moses with the affairs of the camp, the spiritual dimensions were

highlighted when the Lord both said to Moses, 'I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them [the seventy]' (Numbers 11:17) and then instructed the people to sanctify themselves in preparation for receiving this special spiritual endowment (Numbers 11:18). The entire event, of course, was set in its proper spiritual perspective when the spirit of prophecy fell upon them all 'and did not cease' (Numbers 11:25)." (John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday*, 27 March 1990, 2 vols. [Salt Lake City and Provo: Deseret Book Co., Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990], 1: 36)

Numbers 11:26 would God that all the Lord's people were prophets

"Indeed, 'would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!' When every man or woman-whether ancient or modern Israelite-has the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy burning within his or her soul, then the work of the Lord moves forward by leaps and bounds. The strength of the kingdom of God at any time is not to be found alone in the power and strength of its leaders, but more important in the individual testimonies of the members. Members who gain the witness and enjoy the gifts lift heavy burdens from the shoulders of the leaders, for they now perform their labors in the Church with intelligent obedience. They are more converted and more motivated. **President Brigham Young** observed: 'I am like Moses when a messenger came to him saying, `The people are prophesying in their tents.` Said Moses, Well, what of that? I would to God that the Lord's people were all prophets! I would to God that they all had revelation! When they receive revelation from heaven the story is told, they know for themselves.'" (Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture, Vol. 3: Genesis to 2 Samuel* [Salt Lake City: Randall Book, 1985], 203 - 204)

Dallin H. Oaks

When we hear the word *prophet* in our day, we are accustomed to thinking of *the* prophet. These words signify him who holds the prophetic office and is sustained as the prophet, seer, and revelator. The priesthood offices and powers exercised by the President of the Church are unique. As we learn in the Doctrine and Covenants, it is given to him to have "all the gifts of God which he bestows upon the head of the church." (D&C 107:92; see also D&C 46:29; D&C 50:26-28.)

The spiritual gift of prophecy is quite different. As we read in the Book of Revelation, "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. 19:10.) The Prophet Joseph Smith relied on this scripture in teaching that "every other man who has the testimony of Jesus" is a prophet. (*Teachings*, p. 119.) Similarly, the Apostle Paul states that "he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." (1 Cor. 14:3.) Thus, in the sense used in speaking of spiritual gifts, a prophet is one who testifies of Jesus Christ, teaches God's word, and exhorts God's people. In its scriptural sense, to prophesy means much more than to predict the future.

The scriptures often use the word prophet and its derivatives in the broad sense of one who teaches and testifies of God. When the prophet Moses was asked to forbid two men who "prophesied in the camp," he refused, expressing the wish "that all the Lord's people were prophets." (Num. 11:26, 29.) The Apostle Paul taught that Christians should "desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." (1 Cor. 14:1.) The Book of Mormon describes various times in which there were many prophets. (See 1 Ne. 1:4; W of M 1:16-18.) In our day, **Elder Joseph Fielding Smith** declared that "all members of the Church should seek for the gift of prophecy, for their own guidance, which is the spirit by which the word of the Lord is understood and his purpose made known." (*Church History and Modern Revelation*, 3 vols., Salt Lake City, Deseret Book Co., 1953, 1:201.)

It is important for us to understand the distinction between a prophet, who has the *spiritual gift of prophecy*, and the prophet, who has the *prophetic office*. ("Spiritual Gifts," *Ensign*, Sept. 1986, 7)

Bruce R. McConkie

Truly this is that promised day when "every man might speak in the name of God the Lord, even the Savior of the world" (D&C 1:20).

If all of the Latter-day Saints lived as they should, then Moses' petition would be granted: "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29). ("Thou Shalt Receive Revelation," *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 61)

Bruce R. McConkie

Now I say that we are *entitled* to revelation. I say that every member of the Church, independent and irrespective of any position that he may hold, is entitled to get revelation from the Holy Ghost; he is entitled to entertain angels; he is entitled to view the visions of eternity; and if we would like to go

the full measure, he is entitled to see God the same way that any prophet in literal and actual reality has seen the face of Deity.

We talk about latter-day prophets; we think in terms of prophets who tell the future destiny of the Church and the world. But, in addition to that, the fact is that *every person should be a prophet for himself and in his own concerns and in his own affairs*. It was Moses who said, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29). ("How to Get Personal Revelation," *New Era*, June 1980, 48)

Numbers 12:1 Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses

Spencer W. Kimball

Among Church members rebellion frequently takes the form of criticism of authorities and leaders. They "speak evil of dignities" and "of the things that they understand not," says Peter. (2 Pet. 2:10, 12.) They complain of the programs, belittle the constituted authorities, and generally set themselves up as judges. After a while they absent themselves from Church meetings for imagined offenses, and fail to pay their tithes and meet their other Church obligations. In a word, they have the spirit of apostasy, which is almost always the harvest of the seeds of criticism. Unless they repent they shrivel in the destructive element they have themselves prepared, poison themselves with mixtures of their own concocting; or as Peter puts it, they "perish in their own corruption." Not only do they suffer but their posterity also. In modern times the Lord has described their fate in these words:

Cursed are all those that shall lift up the heel against mine anointed, saith the Lord, and cry they have sinned when they have not sinned before me, saith the Lord.

But those who cry transgression do it because they are the servants of sin, and are the children of disobedience themselves.

And those who swear falsely against my servants.

Their basket shall not be full, their houses and their barns shall perish, and they themselves shall be despised by those that flattered them.

They shall not have right to the priesthood, nor their posterity after them from generation to generation. (D&C 121:16-18, 20-21.)

Dallin H. Oaks

Evil speaking of the Lord's anointed is in a class by itself. It is one thing to depreciate a person who exercises corporate power or even government power. It is quite another thing to criticize or depreciate a person for the

performance of an office to which he or she has been called of God.
("Criticism," *Ensign*, Feb. 1987, 70)

Numbers 12:3 Moses was very meek

Neal A. Maxwell

Meekness, however, is more than self-restraint; it is the presentation of self in a posture of kindness and gentleness, reflecting certitude, strength, serenity, and a healthy self-esteem and self-control.

Without meekness, the conversational points we insist on making often take the form of "I"-that spearlike, vertical pronoun.

So, in matters little or large, if our emulation of the Lord is to be serious, we must do more than note and passively admire Jesus' meekness. We must simulate his meekness, remembering that he passed through "all these things," which gave Him, too, needed experiences. (See D&C 122:7.)

Meekness is one of those attributes acquired only by experience, some of it painful, for it is developed "according to the flesh." (Alma 7:11-12.) It is not an attribute achieved overnight, nor is it certified to in only one exam-but, rather, "in process of time." (Moses 7:21, 68-69.) The Savior said we are to "take up [the] cross daily"-not just once or occasionally. (Luke 9:23.) His rigorous requirement places a premium upon our having meekness.

There is, of course, much accumulated stereotyping surrounding this virtue. We even make nervous jokes about meekness, such as, "If the meek intend to inherit the earth, they are going to have to be more aggressive about it!" We even tend to think of a meek individual as being used and abused-as being a doormat for others. However, Moses was once described as being the most meek man on the face of the earth (see Num. 12:3), yet we recall his impressive boldness in the courts of Pharaoh and his scalding indignation following his descent from Sinai. ("Meekness-A Dimension of True Discipleship," *Ensign*, Mar. 1983, 71)

Neal A. Maxwell

In our time, people are slow to see the significant parallels between Jesus' two meek servants-two meek men-Moses and Joseph Smith, Jr. The Lord declared that the restoring, latter-day prophet would be "like unto" Moses: "And in a day when the children of men shall esteem my words as naught and take many of them from the book which thou shalt write, behold, I will raise up

another *like unto thee*; and they shall be had again among the children of men-among as many as shall believe." (Moses 1:41; italics added. See also 2 Nephi 3:9.) Thus, when certain truths of the gospel were to be "had again among the children of men," it would be through a meek one whom God would raise up and who would be like unto meek Moses. (*Meek and Lowly* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987], 77)

Joseph Smith

Some of the company thought I was not a very meek Prophet; so I told them: "I am meek and lowly in heart," and will personify Jesus for a moment, to illustrate the principle, and cried out with a loud voice, "Woe unto you, ye doctors; woe unto you, ye lawyers; woe unto you, ye scribes, Pharisees, and hypocrites!" *But you cannot find the place where I ever went that I found fault with their food, their drink, their house, their lodgings; no, never; and this is what is meant by the meekness and lowliness of Jesus.* (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 270, italics added)

Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner

One morning Joseph [Smith] came while we were eating breakfast of cold mush. My stepfather liked cold mush, so had told Mother not to fix anything else. When Joseph came in, Mother and I looked at each other and must have shown it, for he asked for some, first saying, "Brother Burk, that mush looks good. I like mush."

Of course he was asked to have some. He ate heartily, but we thought he did it to lessen our embarrassment. (Hyrum L. Andrus and Helen Mae Andrus, comps., *They Knew the Prophet* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974], 24)

Numbers 12:8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth... and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold

Moses was greater than a prophet. He was a seer. What kind of seer was he? He was the kind of seer who saw the Lord Jehovah on a regular basis. He wasn't just the kind of prophet who saw visions and dreams; he saw the Lord as did the brother of Jared (Ether 3:10-16). He stood with him face to face (Ex. 33:11); he spoke with him mouth to mouth; he saw more-much more than the finger of the Lord (Dan. 5:5). No more direct means of revelation can be imagined. As **Spencer W. Kimball** noted, "These tremendously important experiences are so uncommon that in all of recorded history there is only a small number that are comparable. Few revelations, whether to Moses or Abraham or Joseph Smith, were so spectacular." (*Faith Precedes the*

Miracle [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1972], 24) Based on available evidence, Moses may have had more personal interviews with the Lord than the Prophet Joseph Smith.

Hence, the Lord asks murmuring Miriam and Aaron the stinging rhetorical question, "Why weren't you 'afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" This fear to speak against the Lord's anointed is often lacking in the church today. Unfortunately, Miriam and Aaron have their latter-day counterparts.

Numbers 12:10 Miriam became leprous, white as snow

"Leprosy was a symbol to ancient Israel of the corruption of sin. Because it was contagious, lepers were banished from the camp of Israel. The afflicted were thought of as dead. Thus this loathsome and dreaded disease provided the perfect type to represent spiritual death. Dramatically, Miriam and those of all future generations were here warned that jealousy and evil speaking of those the Lord has called place the accuser in jeopardy of contracting the most loathsome of spiritual diseases, banishment from the society of his people, and ultimate spiritual death." (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Gospel Symbolism* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999], 70)

"It may seem to some that Jehovah treated Miriam and Aaron harshly by using a temporary case of leprosy in making his point. They were not blatantly wicked or rebellious. They felt justified in their criticism and attempted correction of the prophet. From this episode we see that criticizing the prophets of God, whatever the issue, is no light matter to the Lord-even if one feels right or justified in the criticism. Today some murmur against, criticize, and/or reject living prophets by virtue of some similarly misconceived justification-the obscurity of the prophets' background, their lack of academic credentials or professional training, a familiarity with their failings, or any other supposed deficiency." (Brent L. Top, Larry E. Dahl, and Walter D. Bowen, *Follow the Living Prophets* [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993], 166)

Numbers 13:28 the people be strong that dwell in the land

Gordon B. Hinckley

The story of Caleb and Joshua and the other spies of Israel has always intrigued me. Moses led the children of Israel into the wilderness. In the second year of their wandering, he chose a representative from each of the twelve tribes to search the land of Canaan and bring back a report concerning its resources and its people. Caleb represented the tribe of Judah, Joshua the

tribe of Ephraim. The twelve of them went into the land of Canaan. They found it to be fruitful. They were gone forty days. They brought back with them some of "the firstripe grapes" as evidence of the productivity of the land (Num. 13:20).

They came before Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the children of Israel, and they said concerning the land of Canaan, "Surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it" (Num. 13:27).

But ten of the spies were victims of their own doubts and fears. They gave a negative report of the numbers and stature of the Canaanites. They concluded that "they are stronger than we" (Num. 13:31). They compared themselves as grasshoppers to the giants they had seen in the land. They were the victims of their own timidity.

Then Joshua and Caleb stood before the people and said,

The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.

Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us: fear them not (Num. 14:7-9).

But the people were more willing to believe the ten doubters than to believe Caleb and Joshua.

Then it was that the Lord declared that the children of Israel should wander in the wilderness forty years until the generation of those who had walked with doubt and fear should pass away. The scripture records that "those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

"But Joshua ... and Caleb ... , which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still" (Num. 14:37-38). They were the only ones of that group who survived through those four decades of wandering and who had the privilege of entering the promised land concerning which they had reported in a positive manner.

We see some around us who are indifferent concerning the future of this work, who are apathetic, who speak of limitations, who express fears, who spend their time digging out and writing about what they regard to be weaknesses

which really are of no consequence. With doubt concerning its past, they have no vision concerning its future.

Well was it said of old, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). There is no place in this work for those who believe only in the gospel of doom and gloom. The gospel is good news. It is a message of triumph. It is a cause to be embraced with enthusiasm.

The Lord never said that there would not be troubles. Our people have known afflictions of every sort as those who have opposed this work have come upon them. But faith has shown through all their sorrows. This work has consistently moved forward and has never taken a backward step since its inception. ("Stay the Course-Keep the Faith," *Ensign*, Nov. 1995, 71)

Numbers 13:30 Caleb... said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it

Spencer W. Kimball

The majority of the search party gave a very discouraging report on the promised land and its inhabitants. Although they found a land that was beautiful and desirable and flowing with milk and honey, they also found that the cities were walled and formidable and that the people, the "sons of Anak," looked like giants. The Israelite scouts said that they felt like grasshoppers in comparison. Caleb, however, saw things a little differently, with what the Lord called "another spirit," and his account of the journey and their challenges was quite different. He said, "Let us go up at once, and possess [their land]; for we are well able to overcome it" (Num. 13:30).

Joshua and Caleb were men of great faith, and they joined in urging that the Israelites go immediately, to the promised land...

The Lord decreed that before Israel could enter the land of Canaan, all of the faithless generation who had been freed from bondage must pass away—all go into eternity—all except Joshua and Caleb. For their faith, they were promised that they and their children would live to inhabit the promised land.

Forty-five years after the twelve men returned from their exploration of the land of promise, when the new generation of Israel, under the leadership of Joshua, was completing its conquest of Canaan, Caleb spoke to Joshua:

Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me ... to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in mine heart.

Nevertheless my brethren that went up with me made the heart of the people melt: but I wholly followed the Lord my God.

And now, behold, the Lord hath kept me alive, as he said, these forty and five years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses, while the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness: and now, lo, I am this day fourscore and five years old.

As yet I am as strong this day as I was in the day that Moses sent me [at least in the spirit of the gospel and its call and needs]: as my strength was then, even so is my strength now, ... both to go out, and to come in (Josh. 14:7-8, 10-11).

From Caleb's example we learn very important lessons. Just as Caleb had to struggle and remain true and faithful to gain his inheritance, so we must remember that, while the Lord has promised us a place in his kingdom, we must ever strive constantly and faithfully so as to be worthy to receive the reward.

Caleb concluded his moving declaration with a request and a challenge with which my heart finds full sympathy. The Anakims, the giants, were still inhabiting the promised land, and they had to be overcome. Said Caleb, now at 85 years, "Give me this mountain" (Josh. 14:12).

This is my feeling for the work at this moment. There are great challenges ahead of us, giant opportunities to be met. I welcome that exciting prospect and feel to say to the Lord, humbly, "Give me this mountain," give me these challenges.

Humbly, I give this pledge to the Lord and to you, my beloved brothers and sisters, fellow workers in this sacred cause of Christ: I will go forward, with faith in the God of Israel, knowing that he will guide and direct us, and lead us, finally, to the accomplishment of his purposes and to our promised land and our promised blessings. ("Give Me This Mountain," *Ensign*, Nov. 1979, 79)