

THE MIXED MULTITUDE IN NUMBERS 11

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Numbers 11:1-9

Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the Lord; and when the Lord heard it, His anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the Lord and the fire died out. So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the Lord burned among them.

The rabble who were among them lusted exceedingly; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna.

Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. And the people would go about and gather it and grind it between two millstones or beat it in the mortar, and boil it in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil. When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it.

Numbers 11:4 says that “the mixed multitude that was among [the children of Israel] lusted exceedingly.” In the church life there is something called the mixed multitude, just as there was in Israel, and this is where many problems come from. What is the mixed multitude? It is made up of those who have never seen a vision, of those who never came out of Egypt for a particular goal, but rather just followed a trend. In Numbers 11 we see how

much damage the mixed multitude caused Israel. This means that the mixed multitude can cause the whole church to fail.

The principle of the mixed multitude shows us why we should be careful about movements. A movement in the church life will bring in a mixed multitude. God's calling to His people is individual. There is no movement or trend involved. But when something becomes a movement, a mixed multitude can come in who never received a direct calling from the Lord. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, to some people it became a movement. Many of the ones who came out may not even have been Jews. There may have been Egyptians among them, otherwise where did the mixed multitude come from? This mixed multitude became the source of causing all the Israelites to cry out for flesh to eat.

In the church life we must be very careful, because corruption or division can come from just a few who are not so pure. This does not mean that we should point the finger at anyone and say, "You are a mixed multitude, so get out!" No, but a good leading one is able to turn the mixed multitude into pure citizens. A good leading one in a local church must have the ability to work with those who are a mixed multitude and help them become God-loving Israelites. This is an art that is hard to learn. Even Moses wasn't able to do a good job with the mixed multitude. Because the movement was so powerful Moses lost his ability to lead.

Consider how glorious the Israelites were when they left Egypt. There were all those miracles God had performed on their behalf. How many Egyptians realized that they should go with the Israelites out of Egypt because God Himself was no doubt with them? When the Israelites left Egypt, they brought along a mixed multitude. Perhaps we could say that they were converted Israelites, but they never saw anything as a vision, and they never had a proper commitment. They just followed the trend. Their thought was, "Because everyone else is doing this, I will do it also."

The mixed multitude does not have the direct calling from the Lord nor the direct commitment, but they have the ability to cause a lot of problems. Eventually they caused all the Israelites to be very bothered, because the mixed multitude lusted after Egyptian food, which went against God Himself. The mixed multitude became the root of so many problems at that time, and this is still true with us today. We must be very careful. We must make sure that all the saints really know why they are here. They should not be following a trend, because if they are, sooner or later they will cry out, "Where is our Egyptian food?" Then there will be trouble. We must bring all the saints to have a direct and individual calling and commitment from the Lord.

Numbers 11:10-23

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. 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? 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'? 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!' I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. 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."

The Lord therefore said to Moses, “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear it all alone.”

“Say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the Lord, saying, “Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt.”’

Therefore the Lord will give you meat and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the Lord who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, “Why did we ever leave Egypt?”’“

But Moses said, “The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, so that they may eat for a whole month.’ Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?”

The Lord said to Moses, “Is the Lord’s power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not.”

In Numbers 11:10-23, Moses put God in a corner through his prayer. This prayer is a very good prayer, and God answered Him. God gave Moses seventy men to help bear his burdens. Yet the strange thing is that it didn't work. Moses asked God for something, he put God in a corner and forced His hand, but even though his prayer was answered, it was never honored. There is no record later that these seventy men operated in such a way as to help Moses. God answered his prayer, but it didn't really work. This principle deserves more study. You can force God to answer your prayer, but when He answers such a prayer, it won't work. Where is the operation of the seventy elders in the later chapters of Numbers? There is nothing. Moses' prayer never really worked.

Then why did God have to do all of these things? Why did He tell Moses to go get seventy men, and why did He give them the Spirit so that it looked like these seventy men would be the same as Moses? Eventually there was still only Moses. Why did God have to go through such a process? The answer is because of Moses' legal insisting. When our prayer is so legal, even God can be put on the spot. Moses prayed, "These are not my children, they are Your children! You had better do something!" So God said, "Okay, go get seventy men to bear the burden with you." And seventy is such a good number, but the good number didn't work. Even the Spirit came down and they all prophesied, but it still seems like it didn't work. After the seventy were chosen and the Spirit came down upon them, shouldn't the entire history of Israel have been different? Moses shouldn't have had to do anything else from then on. Later, instead of smiting the rock twice and offending God, he could have just gone to the seventy elders. He could have told them, "The people are complaining. Since you seventy all have the Spirit, you also must bear them with me." Instead, the seventy disappeared from the Bible's record. This shows that Moses' prayer was eventually ineffective.

We must learn a principle from this. Anything that does not come from life, anything that is institutional, will not work. Even when it seems that God is so involved with certain principles or certain ways, if they are not from life, they will not work. Can anything be more involved with the living God than this particular case? God answered Moses' prayer, He gave Moses seventy elders whom he could trust, and then He even sent His Spirit upon them. But did that work? Eventually there was still only one Moses taking the lead. Why? Because only Moses had that ministry, and a ministry is what operates and leads.

How does this apply to us? We all have certain thoughts which are not so healthy. We all have certain weaknesses. But without the mixed multitude, those thoughts will not be triggered into action on a large scale. For example, no matter how good we are, there is always the thought, "Do I have to make all of the meetings?" Then the mixed multitude will come in and tell us, "We don't need to go to all the church meetings. Why can't we just stay at home?" This is the mixed multitude. They come with a good logic which seems very reasonable. In Numbers 11 to ask for meat was with good logic. Who can eat the same food every day? So the mixed multitude in the church may say, "Do we only have to listen to one man? Doesn't the Spirit work among all the Christian groups?" This is the mixed multitude speaking with good logic, because they are tired of manna.

The mixed multitude will trigger our logic, but they will take us away from God Himself. When logic comes in, the Lord's presence will leave. Good logic will replace the Lord's presence, and this becomes the source of all the problems. Brothers who rebel or cause divisions in the church do so with good logic. Many saints have left the church life because of their good logic. We must see that no matter how good the logic is, when the logic comes in, the Lord's presence disappears.

Numbers 11:24-35

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the Lord. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent.

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed Him upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do it again.

But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. So a young man ran and told Moses and said, “Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.”

Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, “Moses, my lord, restrain them.”

But Moses said to him, “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them!” Then Moses returned to the camp, both he and the elders of Israel.

Now there went forth a wind from the Lord and it brought quail from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits deep on the surface of the ground. The people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp.

While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against

the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very severe plague. So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy.

From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.

When Moses prayed, even the Lord was forced to do things according to logic. The complaint of the mixed multitude was logical. Moses' anger was logical, and his prayer to God was logical. So God first answered him in the way of logic. God took out seventy men, He gave them the Spirit, and they prophesied (Num. 11:24-29). Then God gave the people the meat that they wanted. He gave them quail. But while they were eating so much quail, fulfilling their lust, God sent a plague to kill them (Num. 11:30-35). Eventually a plague was the answer to their logic. God had given them the quail, so how could He kill them for eating it? Is this logical? Is this fair? The whole thing is illogical. Even though God first answered Moses' prayer logically, He handled the entire situation illogically. Whatever God does is eventually beyond human logic.

The logic of the mixed multitude, and then the children of Israel, was very simple. They came out of Egypt, and they had nothing to eat except for manna every day. They were tired of it, because they needed something with more taste, so they complained to Moses. Moses then prayed in a very logical way. "I can't handle these people. God, You must do something." But God was very illogical. "I will give you seventy men, and I will put the Spirit upon them. Then I will give the Israelites all the quail they can eat. But then I will judge them!" How can we understand this? We must fear God. We should not try to win with God. The mixed multitude won. The Israelites won. Even Moses won. The mixed multitude started it all by complaining. Then they caused all of Israel to join them. The Israelites forced Moses, and Moses gave in. Moses prayed, and God answered His prayer. But even though his prayer was answered, it was never honored. In the end, God came in to judge the situation.

For a prayer to be answered, and for a prayer to be honored, are two very different things. Many times when we pray God will answer, but there is no honor involved. God doesn't always honor our prayer, even when He answers. God answered Moses' prayer. God gave the Israelites all the quail they wanted. But while they were eating the quail, while the meat was still in their teeth, God sent a plague to kill them. This plague was a kind of judgment, and separated the ones who lusted from the ones who didn't. God answered Moses' prayer but didn't honor it, because God is not a God of logic.

This is a lesson that we must learn. We should be aware of the mixed multitude. When people are not really committed to the church life, but they do a lot of things because of the trend, then that is a mixed multitude. Their person is not truly involved, yet their deeds are involved. We also need to be careful for ourselves. We should not be those who lead the church, and do a lot of things for the church, yet never truly put ourselves in. Our person must be involved. We should not just attend the meetings and do the activities, and meanwhile have our own life. If we live our own life, pursuing our own ambition, and yet also live in the church life, it may all seem quite logical. That is when we should be careful. While we love the church and do things for the church, we should be careful that our person does not deviate and become the mixed multitude.

There is no way for us to understand God according to logic. We can only understand Him by taking His presence. The Israelites already had the tabernacle, with the living presence of God, when all of these things happened. The mixed multitude was logical, the Israelites were logical, and Moses was logical. The only one who was illogical was God. God was even forced to behave logically, but that did not mean He was happy. Eventually He judged the whole situation. We should keep ourselves and the saints we serve from becoming the mixed multitude who live according to logic. Instead, we should be those who have a direct calling and commitment from the Lord, who involve our very person in the church, and who seek to have

the Lord's living presence. Then this is how we must shepherd the saints. May the Lord have mercy.

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