

CHAPTER 11

Hitherto things had gone pretty well in Israel; little interruption had been given to the methods of God's favour to them since the matter of the golden calf; the people seemed teachable in marshalling and purifying the camp, the princes devout and generous in dedicating the altar, and there was good hope that they would be in Canaan presently. But at this chapter begins a melancholy scene; the measures are all broken, God has turned to be their enemy, and fights against them — and it is sin that makes all this mischief.

I. Their murmurings kindled a fire among them, which yet was soon quenched by the prayer of Moses (v. 1-3).

II. No sooner was the fire of judgment quenched than the fire of sin breaks out again, and God takes occasion from it to magnify both his mercy and his justice.

1. The people fret for want of flesh (v. 4-9).

2. Moses frets for want of help (v. 10-15). Now,

(1.) God promises to gratify them both, to appoint help for Moses (v. 16, 17), and to give the people flesh (v. 18-23).

And,

(2.) He presently makes good both these promises. For,

[1.] The Spirit of God qualifies the seventy elders for the government (v. 24-30).

[2.] The power of God brings quails to feast the people (v. 31, 32). Yet

[3.] The justice of God plagued them for their murmurings (v. 33, etc.).

~~CH11~~ NUMBERS 11:1-3

THE MURMURINGS OF THE ISRAELITES

Here is,

I. The people's sin. They *complained*, v. 1. *They were, as it were, complainers*. So it is in the margin. There were some secret grudgings and

discontents among them, which as yet did not break out in an open mutiny. But how great a matter did this little fire kindle! They had received from God excellent laws and ordinances, and yet no sooner had they departed from the mount of the Lord than they began to quarrel with God himself. See in this,

I. The sinfulness of sin, which takes occasion from the commandment to be the more provoking.

2. The weakness of the law through the flesh, ^{}Romans 8:3. The law discovered sin, but could not destroy it; checked it, but could not conquer it. They *complained*. Interpreters enquire what they complained of; and truly, when they were furnished with so much matter for thanksgiving, one may justly wonder where they found any matter for complaint; it is probable that those who complained did not all agree in the cause. Some perhaps complained that they were removed from Mount Sinai, where they had been at rest so long, others that they did not remove sooner: some complained of the weather, others of the ways: some perhaps thought three days' journey was too long a march, others thought it not long enough, because it did not bring them into Canaan. When we consider how their camp was guided, guarded, graced, what good victuals they had and good company, and what care was taken of them in their marches that their feet should not swell nor their clothes wear (^{}Deuteronomy 8:4), we may ask, "What could have been done more for a people to make them easy?" And yet they complained. Note, Those that are of a fretful discontented spirit will always find something or other to quarrel with, though the circumstances of their outward condition be ever so favourable.

II. God's just resentment of the affront given to him by this sin: *The Lord heard it*, though it does not appear that Moses did. Note, God is acquainted with the secret frettings and murmurings of the heart, though they are industriously concealed from men. What he took notice of his was much displeased with, and his *anger was kindled*. Note, Though God graciously gives us leave to complain to him when there is cause (^{}Psalm 142:2), yet he is justly provoked, and takes it very ill, if we complain of him when there is no cause: such conduct in our inferiors provokes us.

III. The judgment wherewith God chastised them for this sin: *The fire of the Lord burnt among them*, such flashes of fire from the cloud as had

consumed Nadab and Abihu. The fire of their wrath against God burned in their minds (~~39:3~~ Psalm 39:3), and justly does the fire of God's wrath fasten upon their bodies. We read of their murmurings several times, when they came first out of Egypt, Exodus 15, 16, and 17. But we do not read of any plagues inflicted on them for their murmurings, as there were now; for now they had had great experience of God's care of them, and therefore now to distrust him was so much the more inexcusable. Now a *fire was kindled against Jacob* (~~78:21~~ Psalm 78:21), but, to show how unwilling God was to contend with them, it fastened on those only that were *in the uttermost parts of the camp*. Thus God's judgments came upon them gradually, that they might take warning.

IV. Their cry to Moses, who was their tried intercessor, v. 2. *When he slew them, then they sought him*, and made their application to Moses to stand their friend. Note,

1. When we complain without cause, it is just with God to give us cause to complain.

2. Those that slight God's friends when they are in prosperity would be glad to make them their friends when they are in distress. *Father Abraham, send Lazarus.*

V. The prevalency of Moses's intercession for them: *When Moses prayed unto the Lord* (he was always ready to stand in the gap to turn away the wrath of God) God had respect to him and his offering, and *the fire was quenched*. By this it appears that God delights not in punishing, for, when he has begun his controversy, he is soon prevailed with to let it fall. Moses was one of those worthies who *by faith quenched the violence of fire*.

VI. A new name given hereupon to the place, to perpetuate the shame of a murmuring people and the honour of a righteous God; the place was called *Taberah, a burning* (v. 3), that others might hear, and fear, and take warning not to sin as they did, lest they should smart as they did, ~~10:10~~ 1 Corinthians 10:10.

~~CHIEF~~ NUMBERS 11:4-15

THE MURMURINGS OF THE ISRAELITES

These verses represent things sadly unhinged and out of order in Israel, both the people and the prince uneasy.

I. Here is the people fretting, and speaking against God himself (as it is interpreted, ~~CHIEF~~ Psalm 78:19), notwithstanding his glorious appearances both to them and for them. Observe,

1. Who were the criminals.

(1.) The *mixed multitude* began, they *fell a lusting*, v. 4. The rabble that came with them out of Egypt, expecting only the land of promise, but not a state of probation in the way to it. They were hangers on, who took hold of the skirts of the Jews, and would go with them only because they knew not how to live at home, and were disposed to seek their fortunes (as we say) abroad. These were the scabbed sheep that infected the flock, the leaven that leavened the whole lump. Note, A few factious, discontented, ill-natured people, may do a great deal of mischief in the best societies, if great care be not taken to discountenance them. Such as these are an *untoward generation*, from which it is our wisdom to *save ourselves*, ~~CHIEF~~ Acts 2:40.

(2.) Even *the children of Israel* took the infection, as we are informed, v. 4. The holy seed joined themselves to the people of these abominations. The mixed multitude here spoken of were not numbered with the children of Israel, but were set aside as a people God made no account of; and yet the children of Israel, forgetting their own character and distinction, herded themselves with them and learned their way, as if the scum and outcasts of the camp were to be the privy-counsellors of it. The children of Israel, a people near to God and highly privileged, yet drawn into rebellion against him! O how little honour has God in the world, when even the people which he formed for himself, to show forth his praise, were so much a dishonour to him! Therefore let none think that their external professions and privileges will be their security either against Satan's temptations to sin or God's judgments for sin. See ~~CHIEF~~ 1 Corinthians 10:1, 2, 12.

2. What was the crime: they lusted and murmured. Though they had been lately corrected for this sin, and many of them overthrown for it, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and the smell of the fire was still in their nostrils, yet they returned to it. See ~~1072~~ Proverbs 27:22.

(1.) They magnified the plenty and dainties they had had in Egypt (v. 5), as if God had done them a great deal of wrong in taking them thence. While they were in Egypt they sighed by reason of their burdens, for their lives were made bitter to them with hard bondage; and yet now they talk of Egypt as if they had all lived like princes there, when this serves as a colour for their present discontent. But with what face can they talk of eating fish in Egypt freely, or for nought, as if it cost them nothing, when they paid so dearly for it with their hard service? They *remember the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick* (precious stuff indeed to be fond of!), but they do not remember the brick-kilns and the task-masters, the voice of the oppressor and the smart of the whip. No, these are forgotten by these ungrateful people.

(2.) They were sick of the good provision God had made for them, v. 6. It was bread from heaven, angels' food. To show how unreasonable their complaint was, it is here described, v. 7-9. It was good for food, and pleasant to the eye, every grain like an orient pearl; it was wholesome food and nourishing; it was not to be called *dry bread*, for it tasted like fresh oil; it was agreeable (the Jews say, Wisd. 16:20) to every man's palate, and tasted as he would have it; and, though it was still the same, yet, by the different ways of dressing it, it yielded them a grateful variety; it cost them no money, nor care, for it fell in the night, while they slept; and the labour of gathering it was not worth speaking of; they lived upon free quarter, and yet could talk of Egypt's cheapness and the fish they ate there freely. Nay, which was much more valuable than all this, the manna came from the immediate power and bounty of God, not from common providence, but from special favour. It was, as God's compassion, new every morning, always fresh, not as their food who live on shipboard. While they lived on manna, they seemed to be exempted from the curse which sin has brought on man, that in the *sweat of his face should he eat bread*. And yet they speak of manna with such scorn, as if it were not good enough to be meat for swine: *Our soul is dried away*. They speak as if God dealt hardly with them in allowing them no better food. At first they admired it (~~1075~~ Exodus 16:15): *What is this?* "What a curious precious thing is this!" But now they despised it. Note, Peevish discontented minds will find fault with that

which has no fault in it but that it is too good for them. It is very provoking to God to undervalue his favours, and to put a *but* upon our common mercies. Nothing but manna! Those that might be very happy often make themselves very miserable by their discontents.

(3.) They could not be satisfied unless they had flesh to eat. They brought flocks and herds with them in great abundance out of Egypt; but either they were covetous, and could not find in their hearts to kill them, lest they should lessen their flocks (they must have flesh as cheap as they had bread, or they would not be pleased), or else they were curious, beef and mutton would not please them; they must have something more nice and delicate, like the fish they did eat in Egypt. Food would not serve; they must be feasted. They had feasted with God upon the peace-offerings which they had their share of; but it seems God did not keep a table good enough for them, they must have daintier bits than any that came to his altar. Note, It is an evidence of the dominion of the carnal mind when we are solicitous to have all the delights and satisfactions of sense wound up to the height of pleasurable. *Be not desirous of dainties*, ^{<171>}Proverbs 23:1-3. If God gives us food convenient, we ought to be thankful, though we do not eat the fat and drink the sweet.

(4.) They distrusted the power and goodness of God as insufficient for their supply: *Who will give us flesh to eat?* taking it for granted that God could not. Thus this question is commented upon, ^{<173>}Psalms 78:19, 20, *Can he provide flesh also?* though he had given them flesh with their bread once, when he saw fit (^{<173>}Exodus 16:13), and they might have expected that he would do it again, and in mercy, if, instead of murmuring, they had prayed. Note, It is an offence to God to let our desires go beyond our faith.

(5.) They were eager and importunate in their desires; they *lusted a lust*, so the word is, lusted greatly and greedily, till they wept again for vexation. So childish were the children of Israel, and so humoursome, that they cried because they had not what they would have and when they would have it. They did not offer up this desire to God, but would rather be beholden to any one else than to him. We should not indulge ourselves in any desire which we cannot in faith turn into prayer, as we cannot when we *ask meat for our lust*, ^{<173>}Psalms 78:18. For this sin the *anger of the Lord was kindled greatly against them*, which is written for our admonition, that we should not *lust after evil things as they lusted*, ^{<106>}1 Corinthians 10:6.

(6.) Flesh is good food, and may lawfully be eaten; yet they are said to lust after evil things. What is lawful of itself becomes evil to us when it is what God does not allot to us and yet we eagerly desire it.

II. Moses himself, though so meek and good a man, is uneasy upon this occasion: *Moses also was displeased.* Now,

1. It must be confessed that the provocation was very great. These murmurings of theirs reflected great dishonour upon God, and Moses laid to heart the reproaches cast on himself; they knew that he did his utmost for their good, and that he neither did nor could do any thing without a divine appointment; and yet to be thus continually teased and clamoured against by an unreasonable ungrateful people would break in upon the temper even of Moses himself. God considered this, and therefore we do not find that he chided him for his uneasiness.

2. Yet Moses expressed himself otherwise than became him upon this provocation, and came short of his duty both to God and Israel in these expostulations.

(1.) He undervalues the honour God had put upon him, in making him the illustrious minister of his power and grace, in the deliverance and guidance of that peculiar people, which might have been sufficient to balance the burden.

(2.) He complains too much of a sensible grievance, and lays too near his heart a little noise and fatigue. If he could not bear the toil of government, which was but running with the footman, how would he bear the terrors of war, which was contending with horses? He might easily have furnished himself with considerations enough to enable him to slight their clamours, and make nothing of them.

(3.) He magnifies his own performances, that *all the burden of the people lay upon him*; whereas God himself did in effect ease him of all the burden. Moses needed not to be in care to provide quarters for them, or victuals; God did all. And, if any difficult case happened, he needed not to be in any perplexity, while he had the oracle to consult, and in it the divine wisdom to direct him, the divine authority to back him and bear him out, and almighty power itself to dispense rewards and punishments.

(4.) He is not so sensible as he ought to be of the obligation he lay under, by virtue of the divine commission and command, to do the utmost he

could for his people, when he suggests that because they were not the children of his body therefore he was not concerned to take a fatherly care of them, though God himself, who might employ him as he pleased, had appointed him to be a father to them.

(5.) He takes too much to himself when he asks, *Whence should I have flesh to give them* (v. 13), as if he were the housekeeper, and not God. *Moses gave them not the bread,* ~~4162~~ John 6:32. Nor was it expected that he should give them the flesh, but as an instrument in God's hand; and if he meant, "Whence should God have it for them?" he too much limited the power of the Holy One of Israel.

(6.) He speaks distrustfully of the divine grace when he despairs of being *able to bear all this people*, v. 14. Had the work been much less, he could not have gone through it in his own strength; but had it been much greater, through God strengthening him, he might have done it.

(7.) It was worst of all passionately to wish for death, and desire to be killed out of hand, because just at this time his life was made a little uneasy to him, v. 15. Is this Moses? Is this the meekest of all the men on the earth? The best have their infirmities, and fail sometimes in the exercise of that grace for which they are most eminent. But God graciously overlooked Moses's passion at this time, and therefore we must not be severe in our animadversions upon it, but pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation.*

~~4116~~ NUMBERS 11:16-23

ASSISTANCE PROVIDED FOR MOSES

We have here God's gracious answer to both the foregoing complaints, wherein his goodness takes occasion from man's badness to appear so much the more illustrious.

I. Provision is made for the redress of the grievances Moses complains of. If he find the weight of government lie too heavy upon him, though he was a little too passionate in his remonstrance, yet he shall be eased, not by being discarded from the government himself, as he justly might have been if God had been extreme to mark what he said amiss, but by having

assistants appointed him, who should be, as the apostle speaks (⁽⁴⁷⁸⁾1 Corinthians 12:28), *helps, governments* (that is, helps in government), not at all to lessen or eclipse his honour, but to make the work more easy to him, and to *bear the burden of the people with him*. And that this provision might be both agreeable and really serviceable,

1. Moses is directed to nominate the persons, v. 16. The people were too hot and heady and tumultuous to be entrusted with the election; Moses must please himself in the choice, that he may not afterwards complain. The number he is to choose is seventy men, according to the number of the souls that went down into Egypt. He must choose such as he knew to be elders, that is, wise and experienced men. Those that had acquitted themselves best, as *rulers of thousands and hundreds* (⁽⁴⁸⁵⁾Exodus 18:25), purchase to themselves now this good degree. “Choose such as thou knowest to be elders indeed, and not in name only, officers that execute their office.” We read of the same number of elders (⁽⁴²⁴⁾Exodus 24:1) that went up with Moses to Mount Sinai, but they were distinguished only for that occasion, these for a perpetuity; and, according to this constitution, the Sanhedrim, or great council of the Jews, which in after ages sat at Jerusalem, and was the highest court of judgment among them, consisted of seventy men. Our Saviour seems to have had an eye to it in the choice of seventy disciples, who were to be assistants to the apostles, Luke 10.

2. God promises to qualify them. If they were not found fit for the employ, they should be made fit, else they might prove more a hindrance than a help to Moses, v. 17. Though Moses had talked too boldly with God, yet God does not therefore break off communion with him; he bears a great deal with us, and we must with one another: *I will come down* (said God) *and talk with thee*, when thou art more calm and composed; *and I will take of the same spirit* of wisdom, and piety, and courage, *that is upon thee*, and *put it upon them*. Not that Moses had the less of the Spirit for their sharing, nor that they were hereby made equal with him; Moses was still unequalled (⁽⁵⁴⁴⁾Deuteronomy 34:10), but they were clothed with a spirit of government proportionable to their place, and with a spirit of prophecy to prove their divine call to it, the government being a Theocracy. Note,

(1.) Those whom God employs in any service he qualifies for it, and those that are not in some measure qualified cannot think themselves duly called.

(2.) All good qualifications are from God; every *perfect gift is from the Father of lights*.

II. Even the humour of the discontented people shall be gratified too, that every mouth may be stopped. They are ordered to *sanctify themselves* (v. 18), that is, to put themselves into a posture to receive such a proof of God's power as should be a token both of mercy and judgment. *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel*, ~~3012~~ Amos 4:12.

1. God promises (shall I say?) — he threatens rather, that they shall have their fill of flesh, that for a month together they shall not only be fed, but feasted, with flesh, besides their daily manna; and, if they have not a better government of their appetites than now it appears they have they shall be surfeited with it (v. 19, 20): You shall eat *till it come out at your nostrils, and become loathsome to you*. See here,

(1.) The vanity of all the delights of sense; they will cloy, but not satisfy: spiritual pleasures are the contrary. As the world passes away, so do the lusts of it, ~~627~~ 1 John 2:17. What was greedily coveted in a little time comes to be nauseated.

(2.) What brutish sins (and worse than brutish) gluttony and drunkenness are; they put a force upon nature, and make that the sickness of the body which should be its health; they are sins that are their own punishments, and yet not the worst that attend them.

(3.) What a righteous thing it is with God to make that loathsome to men which they have inordinately lusted after. God could make them despise flesh as much as they had despised manna.

2. Moses objects the improbability of making good this word, v. 21, 22. It is an objection like that which the disciples made, ~~488~~ Mark 8:4, *Whence can a man satisfy these men?* Some excuse Moses here, and construe what he says as only a modest enquiry which way the supply must be expected; but it savours too much of diffidence and distrust of God to be justified. He objects the number of the people, as if he that provided bread for them all could not, by the same unlimited power, provide flesh too. He reckons it must be the flesh either of beasts or fishes, because they are the most bulky animals, little thinking that the flesh of birds, little birds, should serve the purpose. God sees not as man sees, but his thoughts are above ours. He objects the greediness of the people's desires in that word, *to*

suffice them. Note, Even true and great believers sometimes find it hard to trust God under the discouragements of second causes, and *against hope to believe in hope.* Moses himself could scarcely forbear saying, *Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?* when this had become the common cry. No doubt this was his infirmity.

3. God gives a short but sufficient answer to the objection in that question, *Has the Lord's hand waxed short?* v. 23. If Moses had remembered *the years of the right hand of the Most High,* he would not have started all these difficulties; therefore God reminds him of them, intimating that this objection reflected upon the divine power, of which he himself had been so often, not only the witness, but the instrument. Had he forgotten what wonders the divine power had wrought for that people, when it inflicted the plagues of Egypt, divided the sea, broached the rock, and rained bread from heaven? Had that power abated? Was God weaker than he used to be? Or was he tired with what he had done? Whatever our unbelieving hearts may suggest to the contrary, it is certain,

(1.) That God's hand is not short; his power cannot be restrained in the exerting of itself by any thing but his own will; with him nothing is impossible. That hand is not short which measures the waters, metes out the heavens (²³⁰¹² Isaiah 40:12), and grasps the winds, ²³⁰⁰⁴ Proverbs 30:4.

(2.) That it has not waxed short. He is as strong as ever he was, *fainteth not, neither is weary.* And this is sufficient to silence all our distrusts when means fail us, *Is any thing too hard for the Lord?* God here brings Moses to this first principle, sets him back in his lesson, to learn the ancient name of God, *The Lord God Almighty,* and puts the proof upon the issue: *Thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass or not.* This magnifies God's word above all his name, that his works never come short of it. If he speaks, it is done.

~~01124~~ NUMBERS 11:24-30

THE CASE OF ELDAD AND MEDAD

We have here the performance of God's word to Moses, that he should have help in the government of Israel.

I. Here is the case of the seventy privy-counsellors in general. Moses, though a little disturbed by the tumult of the people, yet was thoroughly composed by the communion he had with God, and soon came to himself again. And according as the matter was concerted,

1. He did his part; he presented the seventy elders before the Lord, round the tabernacle (v. 24), that they might there stand ready to receive the grace of God, in the place where he manifested himself, and that the people also might be witnesses of their solemn call. Note, Those that expect favour from God must humbly offer themselves and their service to him.

2. God was not wanting to do his part. *He gave of his Spirit to the seventy elders* (v. 25), which enabled those whose capacities and education set them but on a level with their neighbours of a sudden to say and do that which was extraordinary, and which proved them to be actuated by divine inspiration: they prophesied, and did not cease all that day, and (some think) only that day. They discoursed to the people of the things of God, and perhaps commented upon the law they had lately received with admirable clearness, and fulness, and readiness, and aptness of expression, so that all who heard them might see and say that *God was with them of a truth*; see ^{<42>}1 Corinthians 14:24, 25. Thus, long afterwards, Saul was marked for the government by the gift of prophecy, which came upon him for a day and a night, ^{<906>}1 Samuel 10:6, 11. When Moses was to fetch Israel out of Egypt, Aaron was appointed to be his prophet, ^{<810>}Exodus 7:1. But, now that God had called Aaron to other work, in his room Moses has seventy prophets to attend him. Note, Those are fittest to rule in God's Israel that are well acquainted with divine things and are apt to teach to edification.

II. Here is the particular case of two of them, *Eldad and Medad*, probably two brothers.

1. They were nominated by Moses to be assistants in the government, but they *went not out unto the tabernacle* as the rest did, v. 26. Calvin conjectures that the summons was sent them, but that it did not find them, they being somewhere out of the way; so that, though they were written, yet they were not called. Most think that they declined coming to the tabernacle out of an excess of modesty and humility; being sensible of their own weakness and unworthiness, they desired to be excused from

coming into the government. Their principle was their praise, but their practice in not obeying orders was their fault.

2. The Spirit of God found them out in the camp, where they were hidden among the stuff, and there they prophesied, that is, they exercised their gift of praying, preaching, and praising God, in some private tent. Note, The Spirit of God is not tied to the tabernacle, but, *like the wind, blows where he listeth*, ~~ARR~~ John 3:8. *Whither can we go from that Spirit?* There was a special providence in it that these two should be absent, for thus it appeared that it was indeed a divine Spirit which the elders were actuated by, and that Moses gave them not that Spirit, but God himself. They modestly declined preferment, but God forced it upon them; nay, they have the honour of being *named*, which the rest have not: for those that humble themselves shall be exalted, and those are most fit for government who are least ambitious of it.

3. Information of this was given to Moses (v. 27): “*Eldad and Medad do prophesy in the camp; there is a conventicle in such a tent, and Eldad and Medad are holding forth there, from under the inspection and presidency of Moses, and out of the communion of the rest of the elders.*” Whoever the person was that brought the tidings, he seems to have looked upon it as an irregularity.

4. Joshua moved to have them silenced: *My lord Moses, forbid them*, v. 28. It is probable that Joshua himself was one of the seventy, which made him the more jealous for the honour of their order. He takes it for granted that they were not under any necessitating impulse, *for the spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets*, and therefore he would have them either not to prophesy at all or to come to the tabernacle and prophesy in concert with the rest. He does not desire that they should be punished for what they had done, but only restrained for the future. This motion he made from a good principle, not out of any personal dislike to Eldad and Medad, but out of an honest zeal for that which he apprehended to be the unity of the church, and concern for the honour of God and Moses.

5. Moses rejected the motion, and reproved him that made it (v. 29): “*Enviest thou for my sake? Thou knowest not what manner of spirit thou art of.*” Though Joshua was Moses's particular friend and confidant, though he said this out of a respect to Moses, whose honour he was very loth to see lessened by the call of those elders, yet Moses reproves him, and in him all that show such a spirit.

(1.) We must not secretly grieve at the gifts, graces, and usefulness of others. It was the fault of John's disciples that they envied Christ's honour because it shaded their master's, ~~485~~ John 3:26, etc.

(2.) We must not be transported into heats against the weaknesses and infirmities of others. Granting that Eldad and Medad were guilty of an irregularity, yet Joshua was too quick and too warm upon them. Our zeal must always be tempered with the meekness of wisdom: the righteousness of God needs not the wrath of man, ~~301~~ James 1:20.

(3.) We must not make even the best and most useful men heads of a party. Paul would not have his name made use of to patronise a faction, ~~401~~ 1 Corinthians 1:12, 13.

(4.) We must not be forward to condemn and silence those that differ from us, as if they did not follow Christ because they do not follow *him with us*, ~~408~~ Mark 9:38. Shall we reject those whom Christ has owned, or restrain any from doing good because they are not in every thing of our mind? Moses was of another spirit; so far from silencing these two, and quenching the Spirit in them, he wished *all the Lord's people were prophets*, that is, that he would *put his Spirit upon them*. Not that he would have any set up for prophets that were not duly qualified, or that he expected that the Spirit of prophecy should be made thus common; but thus he expresses the love and esteem he had for *all the Lord's people*, the complacency he took in the gifts of others, and how far he was from being displeased at Eldad and Medad's prophesying from under his eye. Such an excellent spirit as this blessed Paul was of, rejoicing that Christ was preached, though it was by those who therein intended to *add affliction to his bonds*, ~~306~~ Philippians 1:16. We ought to be pleased that God is served and glorified, and good done, though to the lessening of our credit and the credit of our way.

6. The elders, now newly ordained, immediately entered upon their administration (v. 30); when their call was sufficiently attested by their prophesying, they went with Moses to the camp, and applied themselves to business. Having received the gift, they *ministered the same as good stewards*. And now Moses was pleased that he had so many to share with him in his work and honour. And,

(1.) Let the testimony of Moses be credited by those who desire to be in power, that government is a burden. It is a burden of care and trouble to

those who make conscience of the duty of it; and to those who do not it will prove a heavier burden in the day of account, when they fall under the doom of the unprofitable servant that buried his talent.

(2.) Let the example of Moses be imitated by those that are in power; let them not despise the advice and assistance of others, but desire it, and be thankful for it, not coveting to monopolize wisdom and power. In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.

~~<0112>~~ NUMBERS 11:31-35

THE QUAILS

God, having performed his promise to Moses by giving him assessors in the government, thereby proving the power he has over the spirits of men by his Spirit, he here performs his promise to the people by giving them flesh, proving thereby his power over the inferior creatures and his dominion in the kingdom of nature. Observe,

1. How the people were gratified with flesh in abundance: A *wind* (a south-east wind, as appears, ~~<0185>~~ Psalm 78:26) brought quails, v. 31. It is uncertain what sort of animals they were; the psalmist calls them *feathered fowl*, or *fowl of wing*. The learned bishop Patrick inclines to agree with some modern writers, who think they were *locusts*, a delicious sort of food well known in those parts, the rather because they were brought with a wind, lay in heaps, and were dried in the sun for use. Whatever they were, they answered the intention, they served for a month's feast for Israel, such an indulgent Father was God to his froward family. Locusts, that had been a plague to fruitful Egypt, feeding upon the fruits, were a blessing to a barren wilderness, being themselves fed upon.

2. How greedy they were of this flesh that God sent them. They *flew upon the spoil* with an insatiable appetite, not regarding what Moses had told them from God, that they would surfeit upon it, v. 32. Two days and a night they were at it, gathering flesh, till every master of a family had brought home ten homers (that is, ten ass-loads) at least. David longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem, but would not drink it when he had it, because it was obtained by venturing; much more reason these Israelites had to refuse this flesh, which was obtained by murmuring, and which,

they might easily perceive, by what Moses said, was given them in anger; but those that are under the power of a carnal mind will have their lusts fulfilled, though it be to the certain damage and ruin of their precious souls.

3. How dearly they paid for their feasts, when it came into the reckoning: *The Lord smote them with a very great plague* (v. 33), some bodily disease, which probably was the effect of their surfeit, and was the death of many of them, and those, it is likely, the ringleaders in the mutiny. Note, God often grants the desires of his own people in love. He *gave them their request*, but *sent leanness into their soul*, ^{}Psalm 16:15. By all that was said to them they *were not estranged from their lusts*, and therefore, *while the meat was in their mouths, the wrath of God came upon them*, ^{}Psalm 78:30, 31. What we inordinately desire, if we obtain it (we have reason to fear), will be some way or other a grief and cross to us. God satiated them first, and then plagued them,

(1.) To save the reputation of his own power, that it might not be said, “He would not have cut them off had he been able to supply them.” And,

(2.) To show us the meaning of the prosperity of sinners; it is their preparation for ruin, they are fed as an ox for the slaughter. *Lastly*, The remembrance of this is preserved in the name given to the place, v. 34. Moses called it *Kibroth-hattaavah*, the *graves of lusters* or *of lust*. And well it had been if these graves of Israel's lusters had proved the graves of Israel's lust: the warning was designed to be so, but it had not its due effect, for it follows (^{}Psalm 78:32), *For all this, they sinned still*.