



Geography of Salvation

Preaching the Map

A Bible Study with Stan Key

GRAVES OF CRAVING: WHERE'S THE BEEF?

Numbers 11

I. Onward and Upward.

A. Summary of the journey so far:

1. It took about **3 months** to travel from the Red Sea to Mount Sinai (Ex 15–19). Five courses at University of the Desert.
2. The people remained camped at Sinai for **12–24** months (Ex 19–40). Three things happened here: Covenant/marriage, Tabernacle and the golden calf.

B. Finally, the **pillar of fire** lifts and the people are travelling again. Numbers 10:11–12.

C. The distance from Sinai (Horeb) to the border of Canaan (Kadesh-Barnea) is about **90** miles; an **11**-day journey (see Deut 1:2). In other words, the people are now **prepared** and **equipped** to enter Canaan and begin to possess their inheritance¹.

D. The book of Numbers.

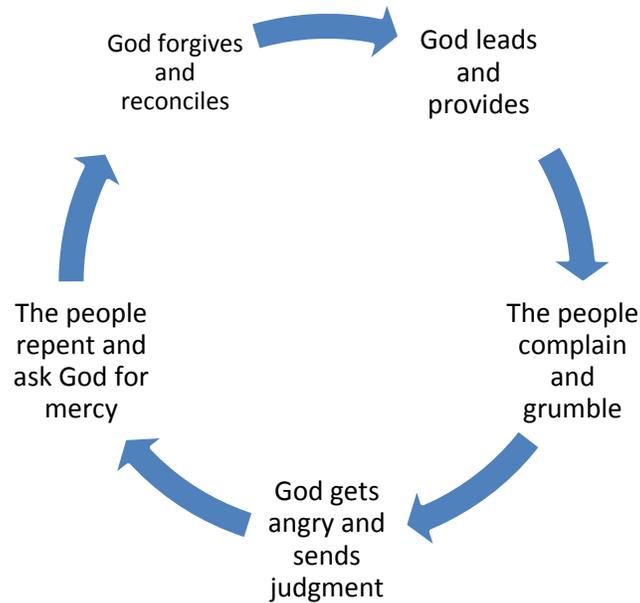
1. This book describes the journey from Sinai to the border of Canaan (Plains of Moab) and explains why a two-year journey took **40 years** to complete.
2. Though the book includes instructions for laws, offerings, feasts, cities of refuge, Levites, a census and many other organizational details, our study will focus on a number of key events that occurred during this phase of the **journey**:
 - a. Graves of craving at Kibroth-Hattaavah (Num 11).
 - b. The disaster at Kadesh-Barnea (Num 13–15).
 - c. Korah's rebellion (Num 16).
 - d. Moses' sin at Meribah (Num 20:2–13).
 - e. Snakes! (Num 21:4–9).
 - f. The siren attraction of Moabite women (Num 25).

II. The Crazy Cycle: Numbers 11:1–3

This incident seems to be a kind of summary statement that describes an on-going **pattern of dysfunction** that characterized the people of God on their journey.

¹This preparation included:

1. clear evidence of redemption (blood and water..)
2. five tests at Desert U (learning to trust God in bitter places, with provision, with protection and with administrative demands.
3. entering into a covenant relationship with God.
4. learning how live with and walk with the Holy One (worship, Tabernacle).
5. learning how to deal with sin in the camp (golden calf incident).



Two important questions emerge:

1. Does this crazy cycle describe the **normal Christian life**? Is this the best we can hope for in this life?
2. Is breaking this crazy cycle **the key** to entering Canaan (the land of victorious and abundant living)?

III. Where's the beef? Numbers 11:4–35.

A. Describe the problem (Num 11:4–9).

1. The people have a **strong craving** for meat and the food they once ate in Egypt: fish, cucumbers, leeks, onions, melons and garlic (Num 11:4–5). They are hungry for the **wrong things**!
2. They are weary and **bored** with the wonder bread that God provides them every day (Num 11:6). Though nutritious and perfectly suited for desert life, the manna is rather **bland** in taste; like “cakes baked in oil” (Num 11:8).
3. When the people grumble and complain, they set in motion once again the **crazy cycle**. This means they are not yet ready to enter Canaan and may well spend their entire lives doing **laps** in the desert.

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE: The Bible is a food-driven book and the successful completion of our journey hinges on whether our craving for the **milk and honey** of Canaan is stronger than our craving for the **leeks and onions** of Egypt.

B. The results of the problem (Num 11:10–15).

1. For the people.

Craving “Egyptian” food and grumbling about God’s provision will make people miserable and keep them doing laps in the desert forever. Some may even want to abandon the journey altogether and **go back to Egypt** (see Num 14:4).

2. For God.

Every parent knows something of what this feels like. Twice, the text says that the whining of the people caused God to feel great **anger** (Num 11:10, 33). This

is not the first time the redeemed have complained about God's care and provision. At what point will God's patience end? How long is his fuse?

3. For Moses.

This congregation has pushed Moses' limits before. This time seems to almost push him over the edge! "Where am I to get meat" for so many people? "I can't bear (carry) this **burden** any more... it's just too heavy for me." His frustration is so great he just wants **to die!**

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE: Grumbling and complaining is a **deadly sin**. It angers God and is a major source of discouragement to ministry leaders. Craving that which God forbids can keep us doing laps in the desert forever.

C. The solution (Num 11:16–35).

1. For Moses, God's solution is to **delegate** ministry responsibility to others; to share the load (Num 11:16–17, 24–30). Perhaps Moses was hoping that God would solve the burden of ministry by removing it. No! God solved it by distributing the weight onto more shoulders.
2. For the people, God's solution is surprising. He gives the people **what they want!** He lets them have their way. He lets them fill their stomachs with what they crave (Num 11:18–23, 31–35). "You want meat? You *really* want meat? Alright then; I'll give you meat!"
 - a. Not even Moses believes that God can pull off a **miracle** of this scale!²
 - b. The people got what they craved... they ate so much quail that it came out their nostrils and became **loathsome** to them (Num 11:20).
 - c. With the quail came a "**great plague**" (Num 11:33).
 - d. Moses insured that this tragic story would be remembered by giving a new name to the place where this incident happened: Kibroth-hattaavah (Hebrew, "graves of **craving**").
 - e. Speaking of this incident many years later, the psalmist wrote: "But they had a wanton craving in the wilderness, and put God to the test... he gave them what they asked, but sent a **wasting disease** among them" (Ps 106:14–15).
 - f. Paul's description of divine judgment in Romans 1:18–32 is of God letting sinners have what they want! Three times Paul describes how God "**gave them over**" to sexual impurity, to shameful lusts, and to a depraved mind (Rom 1:24, 26, 28). Final judgment will be when God says, "If that's what you want, then that's what you'll get."

SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE: Be careful what you **ask for!** Final judgment for sinners will be the moment God gives them what they have always demanded.

² Thinking in terms of flocks, herds and fish, Moses considers it impossible to feed this many people in the desert... even for God! Indeed, providing meat for such a multitude in the Sinai Peninsula boggles the imagination! Do the math. There are 600,000 male adults (Num 11:21). If you add wives and children, we could estimate a total population of 2 million people. The meat supplied will last for an entire month (Num 11:19–20). Surprising everyone, the meat God chooses is quail. Starting from the center of camp and walking a day's journey in each direction, we could estimate 400 square miles of territory that was covered in quail 3 feet deep (Num 11:31). This calculates to roughly 60 bushels of quail for every Hebrew (Num 11:32)!

TABLE TALK

1. Do you think of grumbling and complaining as a serious sin? Why does God treat it so seriously?
2. Look again at the crazy cycle. Does this describe your life? Is this as good as it gets? What would it take to break out of this cycle?
3. How does one go about changing an appetite (craving) for leeks and onions to an appetite for milk and honey?
4. Have you been bored and/or critical of how God was leading your life and providing for your needs? What does such an attitude signify? How should it be addressed?
5. If you are a parent, think of a time your children craved something that was bad for them. How did you handle it?
6. Has God ever given you something you asked for... and then you regretted that he did? What lesson should we learn from this?

If You Will Only Let God Guide You

Georg Neumark (1641)

Translated from German to English by Catherine Winkworth

*If you will only let God guide you,
And hope in Him through all your ways,
Whatever comes, He'll stand beside you,
To bear you through the evil days;
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the Rock that cannot move.*

*Only be still, and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er the Father's pleasure
And all discerning love have sent;
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him Who chose us for His own.*

*Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,
So do thine own part faithfully.
And trust His word, though undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee.
God never yet forsook in need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.*