

# WATER·FIRE·STONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MOSES

## Session 16 – The Crab Bucket List, Part One | Numbers Chapters 11–12

Exodus ends with the glory of the Lord filling the newly completed tabernacle. The pillar of cloud and fire was a visible reminder that God was with them, day and night. When it hovered over the tabernacle, the Israelites knew to stay put. When it moved, they would break camp and set out. Sometimes the cloud lingered for many days, or it might only be one day. Day or night, whenever the cloud lifted, they knew it was time to move.



In the book of Numbers, Moses and the Israelites leave Mt. Sinai and begin their journey to the land that God promised them—a trip that might have taken less than two weeks, had they been obedient. Their attitude through the wilderness would make all the difference.

Centered, or self-centered? Despite all that God was doing, they grouse and complain. Like crabs in a bucket, they kept pulling each other down. Fear. Rebellion. Anger. Regrets. This three-part series, *The Crab Bucket List*, confronts sins that trip us up and attitudes that get in our way.

### Icebreaker

Share a memorable camping story (funny or a flop) if you have one.

### Goals for this Session

- Discover the logistics of travel and setting up camp for two million people.
- Consider what makes God angry or receptive to complaints.
- Pray honest prayers that express gratitude and embrace change as a chance to grow.

## Israel in Camp and on the Move

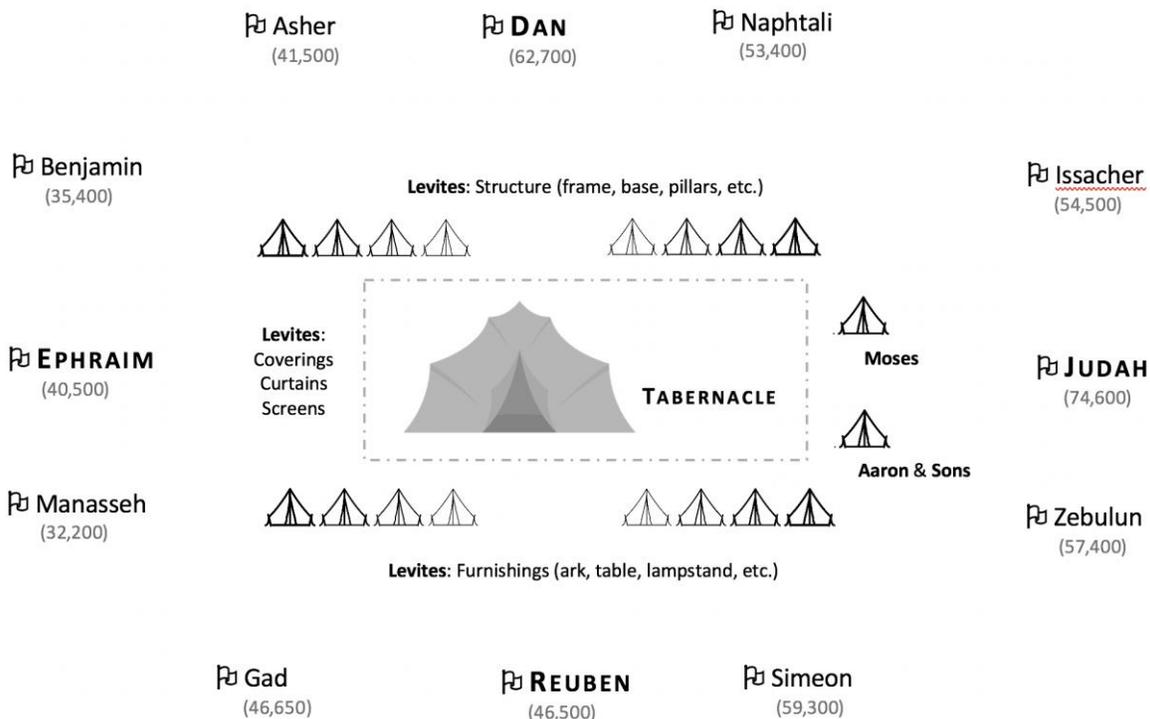
The Israelites camped at Mt. Sinai for a year. During that time, they received the Law, constructed the tabernacle, and established the Levitical priesthood. A census was taken and young men, age twenty and older, were recruited by tribe into Israel's military force (in parenthesis below). The Levites were exempt since they were responsible for guarding and maintaining the tabernacle. It was their job to dismantle, carry, and reassemble the tabernacle when Israel was on the move.

Imagine setting up camp for two million people. God told Moses how to arrange the camp and organize the march. Those details are given in Numbers 1–4, 9–10. Whether they were encamped or on the move, the tabernacle was always at the center.

In camp, the Levites surrounded the tabernacle; each group had specific duties, listed below. Moses, Aaron, and the priests camped on the east side, directly in front of the entrance. The 12 tribes were divided into four groups of three. Each tribe flew its own flag; each three-tribe division had a second banner. The Judah division held position on the east. The Reuben division on the south. The Ephraim division on the west. The Dan division on the north.

**Moving Day** | When the cloud lifted, the Levites would disassemble the tabernacle and all its furnishings. A loud blast of two silver trumpets signaled it was time to break camp. With each subsequent blast, Israel marched out in the following order:

Moses, with the ark of the covenant, carried by priests → Judah division → Reuben division → Levites in six carts bearing the dismantled tabernacle, followed by Levites carrying the vessels and furnishings → Ephraim division → Dan division. What an amazing spectacle it would've been!



**1** On the first anniversary of their escape from Egypt, the Israelites celebrated the Passover at Sinai. One month later, God lifted the cloud above the tabernacle and they were on their way.

Each time they moved, Moses began the journey with a prayer. “Arise, O Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered! Let them flee before You!” And when the cloud rested at the next place to camp, he would pray, “Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel!”<sup>1</sup>

The people set out in high spirits and three days after leaving Sinai, the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran (Numbers 10:12). This was exactly where the Lord intended them to be, but what was wrong? These things were written down to warn us (1 Corinthians 10:10–11) so let’s think it through.

- a. Numbers 11:1–3 | The people begin complaining (again) about how hard they have it. Explain why this would be so offensive to God.

**A divine control burn?**  
When a wildfire breaks out, setting fires along a man-made firebreak prevents the spread and extent of damage that an uncontrolled fire can cause.

→<sup>1</sup> In what way was the fire a judgment and a clear warning?

**Outskirts of the camp.**  
This is where the mixed multitude dwelt, a short distance apart from the tribes. This seems to indicate that some of the “rabble” were consumed by fire.

- b. Numbers 11:4–10 | Moses gives more detail. The complaining started with the “rabble”<sup>2</sup> and spread like wildfire through the tribes (families). It didn’t take long. Complaining was their default response to stressful, difficult, even mildly uncomfortable circumstances. How do we avoid that same *poor me* trap?

Philippians 2:14–15

Ephesians 4:29–32

1 Peter 5:6–10

<sup>1</sup> Numbers 10:35-36 NLT

<sup>2</sup> The word Moses used to describe the non-Jews that left Egypt with them. [www.studylight.org/lexicons/hebrew/628.html](http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/hebrew/628.html)

2 Complaining is like smoking—you don't have to be the one doing it to suffer ill effects from breathing it in. Moses couldn't walk through camp without hearing their complaints.

- a. Numbers 11:11–15 | What effect does all their complaining have on Moses and how does he respond?

**Moses heard the people weeping...**

This describes a chronic habit of moaning and dissatisfaction.

**Moses was displeased...**

This word is translated from two Hebrew words. One describes being afflicted by what he saw. The other describes a sense of misery, inferior ability, and brokenness.

→ Think about it. What set Moses apart from the other complainers? There is no indication that God was angry with Moses in this situation. What compelled God to be receptive to his complaint, and is there a lesson here for us? Read Psalm 142:1–3 for help with your answer.

- b. Numbers 11:16–35 | Complaints that rise from a selfish, critical heart increase the pressure of life. Complaints that rise from a broken, humble heart *relieve* the pressures of life. The Lord graciously let Moses vent his frustration and answered the big issues he was facing. Describe what happened and highlight what stands out to you.

*I can't do this alone. The burden is too heavy.*

*Where am I supposed to get meat for all these people?*

3 After being settled at Mt. Sinai for a year, life on the road meant adapting to a new routine—that is, following a cloud with an unpredictable ever-changing schedule. Do we imagine it was easy? But the promised land was always their destination.

In spite of everything God was doing, they fixated on the monotony of their present situation and lost sight of God’s presence and provision. Is there a lesson here for us?

- a. It has been said that the more comfortable we become, the less we welcome change; and yet there’s no growth without challenge and no challenge without change.<sup>3</sup> Identify some aspect of life where you have been seeking, or possibly avoiding, a change. What challenges are holding you back?

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The only person  
who likes change  
is a wet baby.  
—Aristotle

- b. Gratitude won’t change our situation but it does transform our attitude. The moment we find ourselves complaining, even just in our thoughts, what should we do? Make your answer personal, practical and specific.

## Memory Verse

By Him, let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God,  
that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.  
Hebrews 13:15 NKJV

Which part of this verse resonates most with you today? How or in what way?

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<sup>3</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Bible Exposition Commentary/Pentateuch*, (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Cook Communications, 2001), p. 326

**4** Numbers 12:1–16 | Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses by finding fault with his wife<sup>4</sup> but the real issue was rivalry. They challenged Moses' authority as God's spokesman and the nation's leader. Because Miriam is mentioned first (verse 1) and God singles her out for specific punishment, it appears that she instigated this conflict.

- a. Both of Moses' siblings were God's chosen servants; gifted leaders used by the Lord to help and support their brother. But in this instance, they were working against Moses. We know Aaron well, but Miriam has only been mentioned twice so far. From these verses, what can we observe about her character, her spiritual gifts, and her calling?

Exodus 2:1–8

Exodus 15:20–21

- b. "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?"

This is a sobering reminder that envy can creep in and cause trouble among the best of us. When two of the 70 leaders chosen by Moses prophesied (without reporting to Moses first) Joshua's initial reaction was jealousy for Moses' sake. He thought they were out of line. Miriam and Aaron may not have been pleased about it either, but not for Moses' sake.

The implication here is that Moses was hoarding authority for himself and cutting them out of the picture. This was especially hurtful, coming from his own family. The Lord wasted no time in letting Aaron and Miriam know that *they* were out of line.

→<sup>1</sup> What set Moses apart in a distinctly different role from everyone else?

→<sup>1</sup> How would you summarize the Lord's message to Miriam and Aaron?

→<sup>1</sup> What is the most difficult lesson from this episode? What is the most encouraging?

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<sup>4</sup> It's likely that Zipporah died and Moses had taken a new wife. Much is speculated about her identity but the only thing we know for sure is that she was not an Israelite.

**A**ction Steps ►► As you think through this part of Moses’ story, what is the most important takeaway point for you personally? How will you put what you’ve learned into action?

**P**ray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people. —Ephesians 6:18 NIV

**Adoration** – Giving praise and honor to God for who He is and what He does.

**Confession** – Honestly deal with sin; acknowledge to God the ways (and whys) you fall short.

**Thanksgiving** – Verbalize your gratitude; express your praise and a thankful heart.

**Supplication** – Pray specifically for the needs of others, ourselves, our church, our nation.



Close your discussion time by praying together. Use the A•C•T•S pattern as a group focus and keep it simple. No need to be lengthy or profound—just authentic.

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