

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Numbers 11:16–23

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for our Bible reading again. We will continue reading Numbers chapter 11. Today, we are reading verses 16 through 23.

The Israelites wept aloud over their craving for meat, which not only provoked God's wrath but also left Moses completely exhausted with the burden of leadership. Moses came before God to lament, questioning why such a heavy load had been laid upon him. The Israelites were not his children—he had neither conceived nor birthed them—so God could not expect him to carry them like nursing infants, tending to their every need all the way to the Promised Land. Moses expressed that the weight was simply too great to bear alone, even asking God to end his life so he would not have to face his own misery.

Faced with such direct venting from Moses, God responded with profound patience and immediately provided a way forward by showing Moses what to do next. This reminds us to bring all our struggles to God, asking Him to lead us in resolving them according to His divine way. Moses faced two dilemmas: first, he could not carry the responsibility of leading Israel by himself; second, where could he find enough meat to satisfy their cravings? Today, we look at God's response.

Verse 16: “So the Lord said to Moses: ‘Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you.’”

God first addressed Moses' primary struggle: the overwhelming burden of leading Israel alone. God instructed Moses to gather seventy men from among the elders and officers of the people and bring them before the Tabernacle to stand together in God's presence.

Here, God specifically added the phrase, “whom you know.” Which seventy men were these? In Exodus 18, after Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt to Rephidim, his father-in-law arrived with Moses’ wife, Zipporah, and their two sons. Seeing Moses sitting from morning till evening to judge the people, his father-in-law, Jethro, realized how exhausting it was and advised him to delegate authority. Exodus 18:21–23 records, “Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people also will go to their place in peace.”

Moses followed his father-in-law’s advice and chose capable men to help him administer justice. The Scripture does not specify the exact count chosen at that time. Later, in Exodus 24:1–2, “Now He said to Moses, ‘Come up to the Lord, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship from afar. And Moses alone shall come near the Lord, but they shall not come near; nor shall the people go up with him.’” At that time, God called Moses up the mountain to reveal the blueprint for the Tabernacle and commanded him to bring seventy elders to worship from afar.

Then, in Exodus 24:9–11, “Then Moses went up, also Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and they saw the God of Israel. And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity. But on the nobles of the children of Israel He did not lay His hand. So they saw God, and they ate and drank.”

Here we see Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s two sons, and the seventy elders beholding God from afar, eating and drinking—a truly beautiful and peaceful picture. It appears that after Moses received Jethro’s counsel, a formalized system of elders and officers was established. By chapter 24, there were seventy elders recognized by all; not only were they acknowledged by the people, but God also affirmed that

these seventy could assist Moses in leading Israel. Thus, in Numbers 11:16, God instructed Moses to bring those seventy men to the Tabernacle to stand alongside him.

Verse 17: “Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.”

God promised to descend before them, speak with Moses, and distribute the Spirit that rested on Moses onto these seventy elders and officers so they could share the heavy responsibility of leadership.

We know Moses was personally chosen and called by God to deliver the enslaved people from Pharaoh’s grip. These seventy elders, initially selected by Moses to assist in judging civil matters, were subsequently confirmed by God when He summoned them to behold Him from afar. They began by managing practical affairs, advanced to beholding God, knowing Him, and experiencing His grace, and now God was imparting His Spirit to equip them to co-lead the nation.

God explicitly stated, “I will take of the spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them.” As John 3:34 reminds us, “For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.” God’s giving of the Holy Spirit is boundless and generous; it is only the smallness of the human vessel that limits how much can be received. Therefore, God taking a portion of the Spirit from Moses to impart to the seventy did not diminish what Moses had. If these seventy elders prepared their hearts with expansive capacity, they too could receive a rich measure of the Spirit. The Spirit desires to be given without limit, yet human capacity determines the fullness of that experience.

By mentioning that the Spirit on Moses would be shared with these seventy elders, God showed that their ministry would align with Moses’ own. The elders receiving the Holy Spirit to undertake God’s ministry reflects the exact pathway of maturity believers must follow today when stepping into responsibility in the church. Saints

who desire to serve in such roles must first have a good reputation among the brethren and a willing heart, undergo spiritual cultivation to know the truth, learn to gaze upon God, experience His grace, and finally be anointed by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts to shepherd and care for the flock.

God emphasized distributing the same Spirit to ensure they functioned in unity, sharing the same vision and working toward the same divine goal. What was once Moses' solitary struggle was now supported by seventy like-minded co-workers—a wonderful arrangement. Seven represents temporal completeness, while ten signifies human completeness. How God longs to raise up seventy faithful co-laborers in the church today so that every breach is closed and all members work in harmonious coordination to build up the Body of Christ!

When Moses lamented the crushing weight of his burden, God imparted the Holy Spirit to seventy elders to labor with him. Dear brothers and sisters, have you ever felt overwhelmed and stretched thin by the demands of ministry? Perhaps you need to bring these circumstances before the Lord, asking Him to raise up faithful co-workers to share the load. God deeply desires to see every saint in the church step up to shoulder responsibility and build up the Body of Christ together.

Verse 18: “Then you shall say to the people, ‘Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the hearing of the Lord, saying, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt.’ Therefore the Lord will give you meat, and you shall eat.’”

Next, God addressed Moses' second problem: the people's craving for meat. God instructed Moses to tell them to consecrate themselves in preparation for eating meat the following day. Our immediate thought might be: what does consecration have to do with eating meat? The Hebrew word translated here as “consecrate” is *qadash*, which the King James Version renders as “sanctify”—meaning to be set apart as holy unto God. God was calling Israel to set themselves apart and dedicate themselves to Him.

Their intense desire for meat stemmed from the flesh, so they needed to separate themselves unto God first to keep their fleshly desires from running rampant. When God provided the meat, they would then exercise self-control rather than indulge their appetites recklessly. God wanted Moses to warn the people to deal with their carnal desires first—a vital prerequisite. As we will see later in the text, the Israelites ignored this warning completely, resulting in disastrous consequences.

God then stated the reason for giving them meat: they had cried out, “Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt, where we could eat freely.” God heard their cries and resolved to provide meat to display His mighty power, abundance, and generosity. Providing enough meat was never a problem for God; the real issue was their unchecked carnal cravings. When people cannot govern their desires, abundant provision only leads to greater trouble.

Verses 19–20: “You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, ‘Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?’”

God wanted Israel to recognize His immense power to provide. Since they craved meat, God declared that He would supply more than enough. They would not eat it for merely one, two, five, ten, or twenty days; they would eat it for an entire month, every single day, until it literally came out of their nostrils.

God’s description here is vivid and striking. He promised a month-long abundance so overwhelming that their stomachs would be stuffed to the point of nausea, making meat utterly loathsome to them. Why would God do this? Because the Israelites had despised the Lord who dwelt among them and wept before Him, asking, “Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?” God knew the mixed multitude had incited this rebellion out of greed, but He wanted Israel to see that gorging on meat every day would only lead to revulsion.

When people fail to appreciate the God who dwells with them and seek only to satisfy their physical appetites, the fulfillment of those desires ends in disgust. If the Israelites had consecrated themselves to God first, they would have exercised restraint while enjoying the food. After eating meat for a full month and growing sick of it, they would turn back and re-appreciate the manna God had provided. Though simple in flavor, manna never grew sickening and offered true nourishment and life. God had a thoughtful purpose: by temporarily granting their craving, He allowed them to experience weariness so they would turn back and treasure the God in their midst.

This closely parallels the warning God gave to the church in Laodicea in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 3:15–16, the Lord says: “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.” Remarkably, God states that He wishes they were either cold or hot, because He cannot tolerate a lukewarm state.

We often wonder why being cold could be preferable to being lukewarm. For a genuinely saved person, going through a cold period often exposes their true spiritual state, leading them to repentance and confession. Lukewarm believers, however, continue their religious routines and assume they are fine, blind to the fact that lukewarmness cannot produce real spiritual growth. Rather than spending a lifetime in lukewarm compromise, going cold for a few months may bring full repentance, allowing God to restore them to genuine spiritual fervor.

Moses could not understand God’s deeper intention because he was not yet fully mindful of God’s limitless power. Having led two million people out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, received the Law, and built the Tabernacle, Moses had already witnessed immense miracles. Yet when the people complained and demanded meat, Moses became consumed by emotion and lost sight of the greater works God had performed through him. We often do the same: when faced with adversity, we instinctively rely on our own strength and forget what God has already accomplished in our lives.

Verses 21–22: “And Moses said, ‘The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, “I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.” Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?’”

Moses was clearly overwhelmed by the dilemma, his emotions stirred by the people’s weeping. While the Israelites were trapped in carnal desires, Moses fell into a mindset of self-reliant leadership. Worldly leaders depend on their own strength, fueled by self-confidence, and when they succeed, they draw the admiration of the crowds.

Moses mistakenly assumed that the responsibility of feeding the people meat for an entire month rested on his shoulders. He quickly responded to the Lord, pointing out that there were six hundred thousand men on foot alone, meaning the entire assembly exceeded two million. How could he find enough meat for such a vast multitude for a full month? Would slaughtering all their flocks and herds even suffice? And in the dry wilderness, where could he gather fish from the sea, and even if he could, would it ever be enough?

When God told Moses He would give the people meat for a month, Moses thought God expected him to engineer a solution. How could that be possible? Dear brothers and sisters, when we forget to depend on God, every problem seems insurmountable. Often, while professing trust in God, we secretly try to direct His steps—telling Him how things ought to be done. When we dictate terms to God, we become trapped within the limits of our own imagination, complaining just as Moses did: “Would slaughtering all our livestock be enough? Should we gather all the fish in the sea to feed them?”

Verse 23: “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Has the Lord’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.’”

Knowing Moses' struggle, the Lord immediately challenged him: "Has the Lord's arm been shortened?" With just the move of His finger, God can accomplish the greatest wonders and resolve any dilemma. The Creator of heaven and earth had no difficulty feeding Israel meat for a month. "Has the Lord's arm been shortened?" Where our reach ends, God's reach begins. His hand is never too short; therefore, we must never restrict His power with our finite imagination. God redirected Moses' focus back to Himself, calling him to watch His word come to pass. This remains a vital reminder for us today.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, help us bring every difficult matter into Your presence. In You there is nothing too hard, and Your arm is never shortened. Whether we feel inadequate in our service or face shortages in our circumstances, teach us to bring everything before You, relying wholly on You without trying to orchestrate the outcome, allowing You to lead us through every trial. Dear Lord Jesus, we entrust the church into Your gracious hands. The church is Your Body, which You tenderly nourish and cherish. Lord, You care for every single need in the church. In the precious name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.