



Israel Rejects God's Provision

Numbers 11–12



LESSON GOAL

Students will see God's judgment and mercy in His response to Israel's sin.

BIBLE TRUTHS

- The Israelites complained about God's provision.
- God punished some of the people by consuming them with fire.
- Moses interceded for the people, and God had mercy on their lives.

KEY VERSE

"Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused" (Numbers 11:1a).

APPLICATION

- Remember that complaining displeases the Lord.
- Be careful to thank God for His blessings in your life.
- Be an example to people around you by your thankful and obedient heart.
- Obey your parents because God has made them leaders over you.

NEXT WEEK

Israel Rejects God's Plan
Read Numbers 13–14.

Symbol Key



Craft



Memory Verse



Object Lesson



Game



Visual Aid



Activity



Q & A



Work Sheet



2 Grade Level

PREPARE WITH THE TRUTH

"Therefore you shall lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul... You shall teach them to your children" (Deuteronomy 11:18–19).

Please take time to prepare your mind and heart to accurately handle the truths of God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15). Read through the Bible background and study the truths contained in this lesson. Crucial background information is included here to aid you in understanding the Scripture.

Bible Background

The beginning of Numbers looks forward to God's leading Israel into the Promised Land. Very little time elapsed between the end of Exodus and the first chapters of Numbers. The tabernacle was raised on the first day of the first month, one year after the exodus (Ex. 40:17). Around this time, the priests were consecrated (Lev. 8) and the Levites were counted, cleansed, and dedicated for tabernacle service (Num. 3:5–51; 8:5–26). Upon the tabernacle's consecration, the leaders of each of the 12 tribes (Manasseh replacing the tribe of Levi) brought a dedication offering to the tabernacle (Num. 7). The people began to worship God at the tabernacle.

Two weeks after the raising of the tabernacle, Israel continued to remember the faithfulness of God as they celebrated the first anniversary of the Passover (Num. 9). What a blessed time of thinking about God's past goodness! Two weeks later, on the first day of the second month of the second year, God commanded Israel to count the men who were over 20 years old and able to fight (Num. 1:1–3). There were 603,550 soldiers in Israel. God had kept His promise to Abraham concerning the number of the Israelites; the total population could easily have been over two million! Preparations for entering the Promised Land were under way.

Nineteen days after the census, on the twentieth day of the second month, Israel departed from Sinai, where they had been camped for over a year. Numbers says that they followed the pillar of cloud and fire (Num. 9:15–23) and that God had instructed that silver trumpets be used to give directions to the people concerning their departure (10:1–10). In Numbers 10:11, the Israelites set out for the Wilderness of Paran (southwest of Canaan), from where God would send the 12 spies into Canaan. God's evaluation of Israel was promising; they had obeyed Him and had done just as He had commanded (Num. 1:54; 2:34; 3:51; 4:49).

In an insightful conversation, Moses asked Hobab the Midianite, probably his brother-in-law, if he would accompany Israel into the Promised Land, "the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you'" (Num. 10:29). Moses promised, "Come with us, and we will treat you well; for the LORD has promised good things to Israel." The short conversation shows Moses' expectation for the future. Moses knew that God was faithful and expected God to bless Israel as they entered the Promised Land.

After Israel had been camped near Sinai for more than one year, the pillar of cloud lifted, and the tribes of Israel departed for Canaan. Before each day of travel, the ark of the covenant would precede the people into the desert. Every day, Moses would say, "Rise up, O LORD! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You" (Num. 10:35). Moses' anticipation of victory is evident. Sadly, the people were not united with Moses in his dependence on God's faithfulness.

Numbers 11:1–3—Israel's Complaint

Not many details are given concerning Israel's first rebellion after leaving Sinai.

Additional Reference Materials

The MacArthur Study Bible by John MacArthur

Only three days into their journey (Num. 10:33), Israel complained against God. When God heard their complaint, He became angry and sent fire among the people. God dealt with the rebellion against His authority with righteous severity. The “fire of the LORD” consumed some of the Israelites (Num. 11:1). Struck by fear, the people cried out to Moses. When Moses interceded on behalf of the people, the Lord answered Moses’ prayer, and “the fire was quenched.” God held back the wrath that the people deserved.

While Moses does not give many details concerning this first complaint, the brevity of the narrative is powerful in its own way. Israel had not changed. After more than a year of God’s provision and the manifestation of His glory, Israel was no different from when they were on their first journey into the wilderness. Three days after crossing the Red Sea, Israel had complained against God (Ex. 15:22–25). Now, three days after leaving Sinai, they again were assuming that they knew better than God what was best for them.

Numbers 11:4–35—Israel’s Rejection of God’s Provision

While the exact content of Israel’s first complaint is unknown, the second complaint is described in more detail. A “mixed multitude,” non-Israelites who had accompanied Israel since Egypt, began to remember and crave the food they had eaten in Egypt (Num. 11:4). The Israelites quickly followed and wept again, saying: “Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic” (11:5). While longing for what was eaten in slavery was ridiculous enough, the Israelites’ cry became even more offensive when they assaulted God’s provision. They cried, “Our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (11:6). God had miraculously given the people manna each morning. The food had sustained them and kept them healthy for over a year. It could even be made into a number of dishes (11:7–9). But all the people did was complain.

The sight of the “people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent” provoked the Lord. It also provoked Moses (Num. 11:10). Moses cried to God in desperation, faltering under the burden of leading the wicked people (11:11–15). God promised to help Moses by pouring out His Spirit on 70 of the elders of Israel (11:16–17). The prophesying of the elders marked an outpouring of the Spirit (11:24–30). God answered Moses’ desperate plea for relief in leading the people by gifting certain elders for leadership. God’s answer to the people’s rebellious complaint would be much different, though.

The Lord told Moses that He would give the people meat for a whole month (Num. 11:19). Although God would give them meat (11:18), it would not be satisfying to them. Instead, the meat would be the vehicle for their punishment. Moses told the people, “You shall eat...until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the LORD who is among you” (11:19–20). Moses wondered how God would give over two million people meat for a whole month (11:21–22).

The Lord sent a strong wind that spread quail around the camp as far as a day’s journey in every direction (Num. 11:31). The birds flew about three feet above the ground. The people spent two days and a night gathering quail; each person gathered at least 10 homers (perhaps 60 to 70 bushels; 11:32)! But as soon as the people began to eat the meat, the “wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague” (11:33). Those who ate the meat died (11:34).

For the second time since leaving Sinai, the people had rebelled against God’s provision. They exalted themselves in pride and believed that they deserved better

than what God was giving them. In rebelling against God's provision, the Israelites had rebelled against God Himself. God poignantly humbled the people by giving them exactly what they had asked for.

Numbers 12—Miriam and Aaron's Rejection of God's Provision

Sadly, the rebellious unfaithfulness of Israel was not limited to the people. Miriam and Aaron showed the same attitude in their rejection of God's provision of Moses' leadership. Supposedly, their attack against Moses was because of his marriage to an Ethiopian woman (Num. 12:1; commentators disagree about whether this woman was Zipporah). But the real reason for their disappointment comes out in Numbers 12:2: "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" Miriam and Aaron were jealous that God had given leadership to Moses. Like the rest of the Israelites, they believed that they knew a better way than what God had revealed.

The Lord brought Moses, Aaron, and Miriam together in front of the tabernacle. From the pillar of cloud, the Lord rebuked Aaron and Miriam (Num. 12:4–8). While God did have other prophets to whom he spoke through dreams and visions, God spoke to Moses "face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings" (12:8). Moses had a special knowledge of God, but he was not puffed up by this knowledge. Instead, the text says that Moses was "very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth" (12:3).

When the Lord departed from the three, Miriam had been stricken with some type of serious skin disease (Num. 12:10). Aaron, whom God had spared probably because of his function as high priest, apologized to Moses and begged Moses to intercede for Miriam, who was "as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb" (12:12). Moses, who showed amazing humility and forgiveness, quickly asked God to heal Miriam. God did, but only after Miriam was shamed by being shut out of the camp for seven days, the period that had to pass before someone could be declared clean of a skin disease. God wanted Miriam, and the other Israelites, to remember the seriousness of rebelling against God's leader. Only after the seven days did the Israelites continue on their journey.

Conclusion

Numbers 11–12 exposes the heart condition of Israel. Despite God's incredible faithfulness, His daily provision of food, and His gifting of the humble Moses, the Israelites, from the least to the greatest, were unfaithful toward God. They succumbed to their pride and claimed that God's goodness was failure and that His faithfulness was unfaithfulness. Actually, it was Israel who showed that they were unfaithful to God, rejecting His provision of both food and leadership.

POINT TO THE TRUTH

"Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth"
(Psalm 78:1).

This section includes questions to review last week's lesson and ideas to prepare students for this week's lesson. Choose from the following ideas to point to the truths of this lesson.



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Obedience Leads to Blessing

(This activity is designed to teach the students that God's plan for us is the best, but we are responsible to obey His instructions carefully.)

Before class, prepare a volunteer leader. Explain to him that he will be instructed through an obstacle course. He is to go his own way in the beginning and not follow the directions. While going his own way, he will get lost and injured. He will then follow the instructions carefully and will arrive safely. Practice instructing the volunteer as he walks through the obstacle course. Then send him out of the room.

Once the students arrive, explain that you will be playing a game. Explain that God gave the children of Israel a wonderful gift. The Promised Land was full of good things and produced good food. All the children of Israel had to do was obey. If they followed God's commands and obeyed Him, they would be able to enjoy His blessings. But instead, they did what they wanted. They complained about the food that God provided. They complained about not having water to drink. They wanted to be their own leaders.

Begin by asking the prepared volunteer leader to leave the room. Place good foods on a table, and stagger chairs in a path between the table and the volunteer leader. Blindfold the volunteer leader and bring him back into the room. Instruct one of the students to give him oral directions on how to get to the table with the food. The leader will go his own way a few times, ignoring the instructions. He will pretend to get lost and hurt. Finally, the leader should begin to follow the instructions exactly and get to the table to enjoy some of the food.

Explain that the volunteer could have followed the instructions and gotten there faster and without getting hurt, but he chose to go his own way. When he was obedient and followed the instructions exactly, he arrived at the treats.



God's Promise Is Close

Remind students about the special promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3. Use pictures from the A Beka Book Flash-A-Card series on Abraham and Jacob to review the promise God made to them. God had given them a great nation and a law to run the country, and now He was about to give them their own land. This should have been a very exciting time, but it was not exciting for Israel. The moment their lives became just a little difficult, they complained and failed to trust God.



Complaining Puppet Role-Play

Use a puppet to show complaining attitudes. Have the puppet complain about cleaning his room, being kind to his sister, sharing with a friend, or about the food that he has received. What is wrong with having a complaining attitude? In today's lesson, the students will see what happened when Israel complained about their food and their leader.

PROCLAIM THE TRUTH

"Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Psalm 78:4).

This section includes the Bible lesson, lesson questions, and praise and worship ideas. Song suggestions are included that you can use to proclaim your worship to God. Use the lesson questions to check the students' understanding. This section also includes various presentation ideas to use during the teaching time. Read the Bible passage several times before you read these pages. All teaching should be done directly from the Bible.

Bible Lesson

In the previous lesson, we learned that the Israelites were moving away from Mount Sinai, where they had camped for more than a year. The Lord led them by the pillar of cloud toward the land that He had promised to give them.

When they were three days into their trip, the Israelites complained to the Lord. Do you remember when they complained to the Lord three days after He parted the Red Sea? That event happened before they went to Mount Sinai. After more than a year at Mount Sinai, the Israelites still did not trust God and continued to complain. God was angry with the Israelites for complaining and punished them by creating fire near the edge of the camp, killing some of the people who were there. The people became scared and asked Moses to pray to God. God answered Moses' prayer and took away the fire, even though the people deserved to be punished.

The Israelites again complained to God. This time, they complained that they did not like the manna God provided for them every morning; they wanted meat. Remember that manna looked like white wafers and tasted something like honey. When the people made it into cakes, it tasted like pastry. God was angry with the Israelites for rejecting what He provided for them. The Israelites had a rebellious attitude toward God; they would not submit to Him and obey Him.

When Moses heard the people complaining, he became very discouraged. He cried out to God because he did not think that he could carry this heavy burden of caring for the people by himself. God answered Moses' cry by pouring out His Spirit on 70 of the Israelite elders. By pouring His Spirit out on these men, He made them ready to be leaders and allowed them to prophesy in praise and worship to the Lord. Moses now had 70 helpers to care for the Israelites.

To the complaining Israelites, God had a different response. He said He would provide them with quail, but He also would punish them. He said He would give them quail to eat for one month, until they were sick of it. Remember that the Israelites were numerous; there were over 600,000 men, not counting the women and children. The Lord had no problem feeding all these people because nothing is too hard for Him to do.

The Lord sent a strong wind that brought quail around the camp as far as a day's walk in every direction. The people gathered the quail for that day and that night, as well as for the next day. Can you imagine working that long to capture quail? When the people started to eat the meat, God's wrath came on them, and many people who ate the meat died.

Then we find that even Moses' brother, Aaron, and sister, Miriam, had the same rebellious attitude. Rebellion is doing something we know is wrong. Aaron and Miriam rejected Moses' leadership even though God was the one who had placed him as the leader of Israel. They said that God had spoken not only through Moses

but also through them. They believed that they should be made leaders just like Moses. We know from the Bible that Moses was humbler than any other man on the earth, and he was not prideful like Miriam and Aaron. Miriam and Aaron were prideful because they thought they were better and more important than they really were. God does not like prideful attitudes. God punished Miriam and Aaron by giving Miriam a skin disease called leprosy. Then Moses prayed to God to heal Miriam, and God did heal her. But He required her to stay outside camp for seven days and nights before she could come home so that everyone would know about her rebellious attitude toward God. After seven days, Miriam returned home.

Moses interceded for Aaron and Miriam's sin. He asked God to take away the leprosy that Miriam had been given because of her rebellion. Jesus also interceded for us. Our rebellion and sin against God separated us from Him. Because of Jesus' death, believers' sins have been forgiven, and believers can have fellowship with God.



Lesson Questions

What did the Israelites do in Numbers 11?

They complained about their hardships and wanted to go back to Egypt.

Did the Israelites have any reason to complain?

No. God gave them water and food (manna from heaven). He also gave them guidance and protection. God gave them everything they needed. They had no reason to complain.

How were the Israelites rejecting God's provision?

The people of Israel were not satisfied with what God had given them; they wanted more. They were tired of the manna and wanted meat. They rejected God's provision by not being grateful for what He had given them. They had unthankful attitudes.

Moses asked the Lord for mercy. How did God respond to Moses' prayer?

He stopped the judgment. God is merciful!

What did God give the people because of their complaints about not having meat?

God gave Israel quail to eat. There was quail for a day's journey in every direction and three feet deep.

What did the people do with the quail?

They gathered food for two days, not trusting God for His provision.

What did Aaron and Miriam do in Numbers 12, and what was the punishment?

They spoke out against Moses. They were not trusting God's decision for Moses' leadership. They thought they knew what was best for God's people. God punished Miriam for her sin with a terrible skin disease called leprosy.

What was God's answer to Moses' prayer?

God healed Miriam, but first she was sent out of the camp for seven days.



Presentation Ideas

A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards

Use appropriate A Beka Book Flash-A-Cards with the lesson.



Betty Lukens Flannelgraph

Use appropriate flannelgraph pieces with the lesson.



Crowd Participation

Make two signs for the Bible lesson. One should read "boo," and one should read "yay." As you read the story from Numbers, hold up the appropriate sign of approval or disapproval of Israel's actions and attitudes. When Israel does something sinful, hold up the "boo" sign. When the students see it, they should calmly but seriously say "boo." When God does something merciful or the people obey, hold up the "yay" sign. The students should quietly but happily say "yay." Before you read the Bible lesson to the students, have them practice saying "yay" and "boo" the right way. Make sure you keep the activity very controlled.



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Gathering Quail

During part of the Bible lesson, have the students pretend to pick up quail and put them in a basket. Emphasize that the quail were piled three feet high. For small students, this could be up to their necks.



The Root of Sin

Materials: one healthy plant and one dead plant (or pictures of plants), small tags, bobby pins

Directions: Before class, prepare the plants by labeling the roots. Write "Pride" on a tag, and use a bobby pin to affix it to the roots of the dead plant. Repeat the process with the healthy plant, but write "God" on the tag. When you start your lesson, ask the students what the differences are between the two plants (good/bad, alive/dead, beautiful/ugly, healthy/sick, etc.) Ask the students what they think caused the differences; lift up the root of the healthy plant and talk about how God is the root of all goodness, beauty, health, and life. Then lift up the root of the dead plant and discuss the fact that pride is the root of many sins. Explain that in today's lesson, the students will learn about how the nation of Israel pridefully sinned by trusting in their own will instead of God's will.

Praise and Worship

God Is So Good

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

This Is the Day

This Little Light of Mine

Trust and Obey



Israel Complains

God led Israel faithfully,
(Point up; place hand over heart.)

Provided for their every need.

(Place hands over head; wiggle fingers while lowering hands.)

But they complained of food and life,

(Move hands in talking motion.)

Complained of Moses and his wife.

(Continue talking hands motion.)

The Lord was angry and displeased,

(Point up and shake head back and forth.)

Rebuked with fire, plague, disease.

(Wag finger.)

Israel turned on God and trusted pride,

(Turn head to side and hold up hands; rub finger under tip of nose.)

Unfaithful and unsatisfied.

(Cross arms; shake head back and forth.)

PRACTICE THE TRUTH

"That they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments" (Psalm 78:7).

Choose ideas from this section to review and apply the truths of the Bible lesson.



Complaining

In today's lesson, we learned about the Israelites' complaining attitudes. Ask the students the following questions so they can learn what complaining is and how to stop it. Who complains? What is complaining? When do we complain? How do we complain? Why is it wrong to complain? What should we do instead of complaining?



Keys of a Thankful Heart

Materials: loose-leaf rings, copies of the "Keys to a Thankful Heart" craft page (at back of lesson), crayons, pencils, hole punch, clear tape

Directions: Use this craft to help the students develop thankful attitudes. One key is to find specific examples of God's goodness in the past. A second key is to see God's goodness now. The third is to trust God's goodness in the future. We do this by trusting His promises. Have the students cut out one copy of each key. Have them color the keys different colors. Punch holes in each of the keys. Hint: Before punching the holes in the keys, reinforce the area with clear tape. On the back of the "God's Goodness in the Past" key, have them write three good things God has given to or done for them. On the back of the "God's Goodness Now" key, have them write three ways in which they can see God's goodness now. On the back of the "God's Goodness in the Future" key, have them write down a verse reference that shows God will be good in the future. Once the students are finished coloring and writing, have them put the keys on the loose-leaf ring.



Fill a Pail with Quail

Place a bucket in the center of the room, and spread objects (paper birds, stuffed animals, feathers, etc.) around the room. Have the students fill the pail with all the objects as quickly as they can. For large groups, have multiple buckets and race. Then talk about how God provided so much quail that the people spent 1½ days gathering it. They each gathered at least 10 homers (one homer = 6½ bushels)—a lot! If possible, bring in enough items and buckets to make that amount.



Follow the Leader

Play the game by choosing a student or a teacher to be leader. As you play the game, or after you play, talk about issues in the game that compare with the Israelites' response to God's chosen leaders for them. Did anyone have the desire to be the leader? Did anyone try to take over? Did anyone get out of line or refuse to follow the leader who was chosen? Also discuss how God has chosen leaders for us, including our parents, teachers, pastors, and government officials.



Three Feet of Quail

Give each student materials to create the Israelites' camp. After creating and coloring, remind them that God gave the Israelites so much quail that it was two cubits, or three feet, deep around the camp for 12–15 miles (Num. 11:31–32). Glue paper birds or feathers all around the camp on the bottom third of the paper.

Coloring Sheets

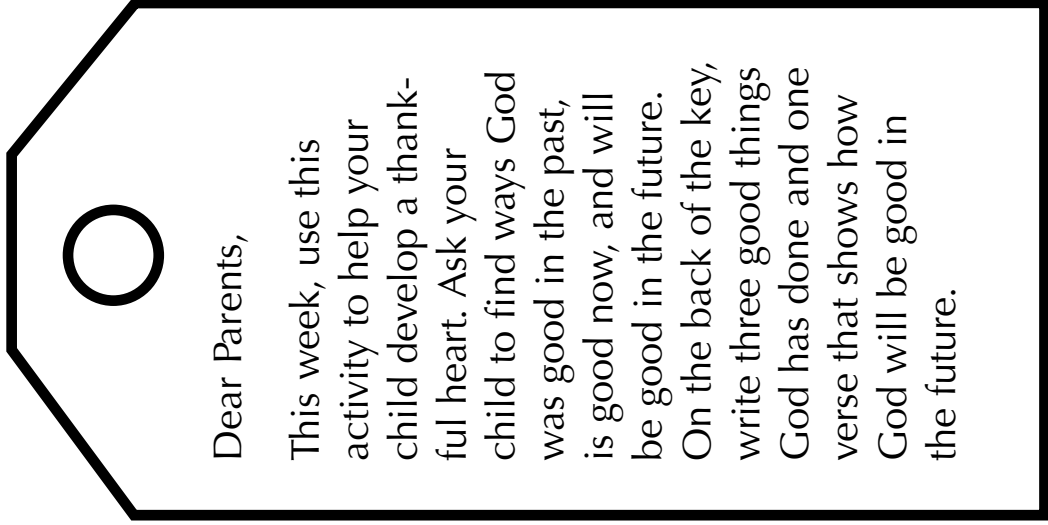
Give each student a copy of the coloring sheets at the back of this lesson. The students can color the pages in class or at home.



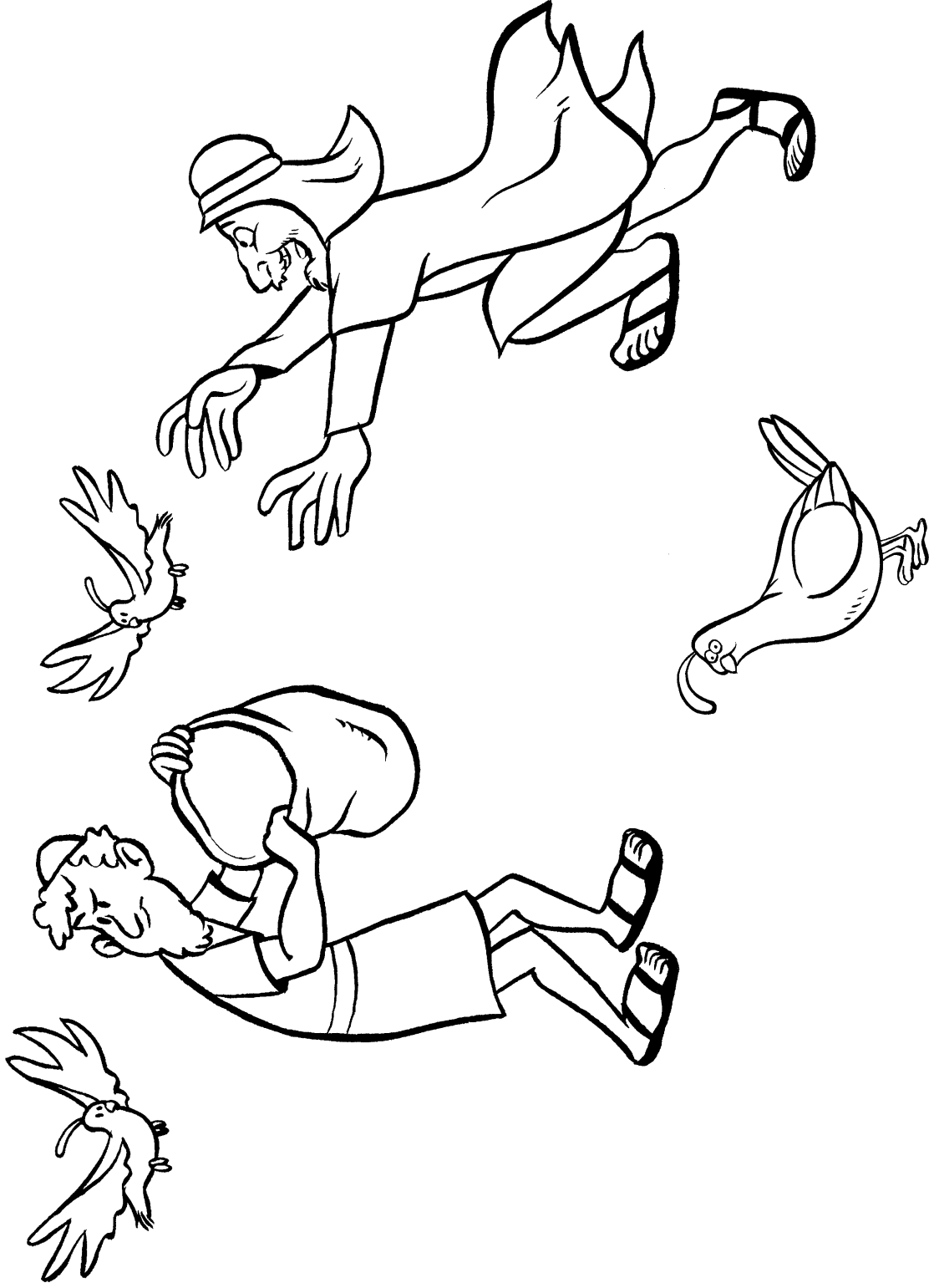
MEMORY VERSE

"Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and His anger was aroused" (Numbers 11:1a).

Key to a Thankful Heart









The Israelites complained about the manna God gave them (Numbers 11:6).



Israel complained and asked God for meat to eat. God provided meat for Israel, and the people stayed up all that day, all night, and all the next day gathering the quail (Numbers 11:31-32).

