

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

rfour.org

Year 4: Session 3 – The Israelites and the Wilderness

Class 7: Exodus 16:2-5; 13-15 & Numbers 11:4-10; 31-35 – Too much of a good thing

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Read and discuss the two stories of the Israelites being hungry and receiving food in the wilderness
- Illustrate how wanting too much and then acting on that want creates strain on the self and on others

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. For the activity...
 - a. You'll need five balled-up pieces of newspaper (or some other cheap piece of paper) per student
 - i. If you have a smaller class or don't mind blowing up a lot of balloons, balloons would be perfect to use instead of balled-up newspapers
 - b. You'll need one grocery bag per students
 - c. You'll need a larger room/space for this activity to take place in
 - i. Note: If you do not have a larger space, this activity can be happen in a small circle with students on their hands and knees – but the more space the better has been my experience.

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we're going to do that now.
- So here's the opening question for today's class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we'll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it's your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here's this week's question:* What is something that you want more of?

TRANSITION TO VIDEO

- We're starting a new session today. In it we'll read and discuss three stories about the Israelites after they leave Egypt.
- Basically what we will see is that 1. The Israelites have a hard time with freedom and 2. They have a hard time trusting God.
- We'll then be talking about why that is happening for them, as well as a few other things
- So, today's story happens a little bit after the Golden Calf story
- The Israelites don't have a land or a home, so they are slowly moving through the wilderness and are being led by a cloud-like column (provided by God)
- And, as we'll see – the Israelites don't really think that God is trustworthy...and it leads to some problems.
- And to help us think about today's story, let's watch a movie clip from *Cloudy With A Chance Of Meatballs*.
- A helpful thing to know about this movie, is that Flynn, the (very) young scientist, has created a machine that can make food fall from the sky.
- Let's see what happens

WATCH MOVIE CLIP

ASK

- Who is asking Flynn to make special food fall from the sky? (a dad)
- For what special occasion? (his son's birthday)
- Does Flynn agree? (he does)
- What special food falls from the sky the next morning, then? (ice cream)
- Does it look like the kids enjoy eating it? (yes)
- But at the end of the day, what's the result? (the son eats too much and goes into a "food coma")
- After the son wakes up, what does he do? (throw up)
- So even though all this food from the sky was a gift and a good thing, what makes it less of a good thing? (eating too much of it)

TRANSITION to Scripture Story

- In today's story, the Israelites are concerned about food
- Which makes sense, right? They are in the middle of nowhere
- So in the first story, we'll learn about their diet / what they are provided to eat
- And in the second story, we'll see how they end up a lot like the son in today's movie clip.
- Since there are two stories, let's read first story and then we'll go over that section before reading and reviewing the second story.
- Let's see what happens

READ Exodus 16:2-5; 13-15 & Numbers 11:4-10; 31-35 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

Exodus 16:2-5; 11-15

(this happens very soon after leaving Egypt)

2The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate

our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

4Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5On

the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.”

11The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 12“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

13In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

(pause to ask the Exodus questions below; then return to read the next passage)

Numbers 11:4-10; 31-35

(this happens not too much later after the first story we just read)

4 The rabble among them had a strong craving; and the Israelites also wept again, and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! 5We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.’

ASK

- (Exodus) Verse 2 and 3 – what do the Israelites do? (Complain about food)
- (Exodus) Verse 3 – Does this complain sound familiar? (Yep! Variations on we heard in last class’ story with the Golden Calf – basically the Israelites are saying, “Our old hardships were better than these new hardships” —except of course their old hardships involved being captives...)
- (Exodus) Verse 4 and 12 – What is God’s response to the Israelites? (to provide manna and quail)
- (Exodus) Verse 14 – What does the manna look like?
- (Exodus) Verse 15 – When the Israelites see it, what do they say? (“What is it?” Fun fact: That’s what *manna* actually means in Hebrew. It means: What is it?)
- (Exodus) So does God provide the people what they ask for? (Yes)
- (Exodus) Do you think it seems like enough is being provided to the Israelites? (seems like it, yes)

(read Numbers section and then return to the following questions)

- (Numbers) Verse 4 – Who had a strong craving? (the rabble – meaning a section of the whole – but it was contagious – see next question)
- (Numbers) Verse 4-6 – What are the Israelites as a whole complaining about? (complaining about food; wanting more meat, sick of the manna)

7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its color was like the color of gum resin. 8The people went around and gathered it, ground it in mills or beat it in mortars, then boiled it in pots and made cakes of it; and the taste of it was like the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna would fall with it.

10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, all at the entrances of their tents. Then the Lord became very angry, and Moses was displeased.

31 Then a wind went out from the Lord, and it brought quails from the sea and let them fall beside the camp, about a day’s journey on this side and a day’s journey on the other side, all around the camp, about two cubits deep on the ground. 32So the people worked all that day and night and all the next day, gathering the quails; the least anyone gathered was ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp. 33But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was consumed, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague.

34So that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had the craving. 35From Kibroth-hattaavah the people journeyed to Hazeroth.

- (Numbers) Verse 5 – What do they remember fondly? (food they had in Egypt)
- (Numbers) Does that sound familiar – their fond memories of Egypt? (yes – just read it in the other section)
- What do you think -- should their memories of Egypt be so fond?
- (Numbers) Verse 8 – In verse 7, we get more description about the manna. In verse 8, how did the people use it/prepare it? (much like we do with ingredients for bread)
- (Numbers) Verse 10 – Are Moses and God as understanding/patient as they were in the Exodus story? (nope)
- (Numbers) Do you blame them for being less patient? Do you think the Israelites have a valid point here?
- (Numbers) Verse 31 – What is provided? (more quail)
- (Numbers) What was the least amount of quail that was gathered? (10 birds or “homers”)
- (Numbers) Verse 33 – What happens next? (the people die)
- (Numbers) Verse 34 – What is the reason given for the people dying? (God’s anger being kindled against them – gives them a great plague)
- Any overall thoughts / responses to the two stories that you’d like to share about the Israelites, Moses, God and/or quail?

TELL**

- We could read the second story and see how it says that God was so angry and annoyed with the people, that God punished the people for complaining about and then eating quail – that God made the people sick and then we could say, “That’s why the people died – because of God.”
- We could also read the second story and apply a modernist way of thinking (a modernist believes that everything can be rationally explained) and make decent arguments that some quail are poisonous to eat because of what they (the quail) eat when they are migrating and then say, “That’s why the people died – but they blamed God about it.”
 - Bonus (*optional*): We also know that the ancient Greeks wrote about this condition about quail – which probably means people knew about it for quite awhile before the Greeks were writing it down; including, possibly the Israelites (From <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coturnism>)
 - Bonus #2 (*optional*): We also know (at least from 1900s records of European quail) that not many migrating quail are poisonous – which means the vast quantity of quail the Israelites ate probably caused a greatly increased their chances of getting sick
- Regardless of what explanation you choose to accept, what we can also see is that the actual cause of death in both interpretations *starts* with the Israelites not trusting that what God had provided was enough
 - The Israelites didn’t think they had enough tasty experiences – so they complained for extra flavor
 - The Israelites also didn’t think they would have enough meat so they didn’t control themselves in eating it when it showed up the second time.
- This also started, though, because a *section* of the people were not pleased.
- Their dissatisfaction spread and soon enough, all of the Israelites thought that they didn’t have enough and couldn’t get enough.
- In other words, this idea of scarcity, this idea of not having enough, wasn’t universally accepted at first – but eventually it spread and infected the people, changing their behavior to the point of causing *dis*-ease.

TRANSITION to ACTIVITY

- To help us think about how a person’s dissatisfaction about not having enough can be contagious and spread among people, we’re going to do the following activity.

- If you ever played the “board” game “Hungry Hungry Hippos” when you were a kid, then the following activity will be very familiar to you.
- The rules are simple.
- We’ll stand in a circle and back up until we can’t back up anymore.
- In the middle of the circle is your “food”
- Once the activity begins, you need to go out and gather your food
- You can only hold two pieces of food at a time
- Each of you will be given a bag to put your food; once your hands are full go back to your bag to empty your hands.
YOU CANNOT TAKE THE BAG WITH YOU
- Once you empty your hands by dropping your food in the bag, then you can go and get more food.
- We’ll play a number of rounds. The goal is to survive the round
- However, each round will have different requirements in order to survive
- Any questions so far?

DO ACTIVITY

- FIRST ROUND: Survive by ONLY collecting three pieces of food – you may NOT take more
- SECOND ROUND: Survive by collecting AT LEAST five pieces of food – you MAY take more than 5, though
 - (Note: there will only be enough for everyone if no one takes more – should be interesting to see if people take more than 5. If someone “dies” – go ahead and let them play round 3)
- THIRD ROUND: Collect as much food as you possibly can. After the round is complete, I’ll tell you how much you need to survive
 - After the round, tell them that 5 pieces of food were needed to survive.

ASK

- So – what round was the **least** stressful? (round 1)
- Did anyone die in round 1? (no)
- Was there food left over when round 1 ended? (yes)
- Why were the other rounds more stressful? (because we weren’t limited in how much we could take – we had to compete against our fellow students)
- Was there any food left over in rounds 2 and 3?
- But there was the same amount of food available per student in round 2 and 3 as there was in the first round – what changed? (the rules made it so that there wasn’t enough, anymore)
- So, what do you think – did this shift in how you thought about the food (from “just get three piece of food” to “GET AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE”) change how you acted / treated each other?

TELL

- So in the movie clip and in the second Bible story, we see how taking too much can be harmful to the self, right? The boy got a “food coma” and threw up. Individual Israelites got food poisoning.
- And then in our activity and in the second Bible story, we see how changing the perception of “what is enough” drastically changes how we feel about each other and treat each other. We pushed each other and grabbed at each other in the activity. The Israelites grumbled and complained and wanted to return to an old way of living.
- In other words, when we think there isn’t enough, it causes great *dis-ease* in us, both personally and to the group

- One helpful way to not fall victim to these thoughts and feelings of scarcity, even when others do fall victim to it, is to practice giving thanks to God for what we have.
- This is a particularly good thing to practice in prayer
- By giving thanks to God, we have to pay attention to what we've received which shifts our attention away from what we don't have
- By doing this, it also shifts our attitude to be closer to how we were in the first round of that activity – less stressed and less aggressive towards others
- It also can increase our trust in God as we become clearer about how God does provide
- So then, when our attitudes shift in how we think about God and items – then our actions change too ...
- And if enough of us change our actions, then guess what? Then it's a lot like that first round when there's PLENTY of items left over for everyone!

CLOSING PRAYER

***Notes for teachers about the two approaches / interpretations that are referenced in the scripture TELL section*

- Before we talk about quail, let's talk about theology and philosophy and worldviews!
- First, know that it is a common theological approach in the Old Testament to give God credit for EVERYTHING that happens.
- So, if good things happened, God got the credit. When bad things happened, God also got the credit.
- This type of theology can make it sound like God interferes with the people's lives. That God throws lightning bolts and makes people sick, but what the authors are trying to point out is that nothing can happen without God allowing it (which is a *little* more passive than a God who interferes with our decisions)
- There's then a way of thinking called "modernism" (especially popular in the mid-1900s) that said, "We can explain everything that happens."
- This way of thinking tends to try to explain every miracle in the Bible with science. For example, the modernist interpretation of the Parting of the Red Sea story is that they actually walked through the sea of reeds (which would've been shallow enough to wade across)
- However, today, we *mostly* live in a post-modern world that says, "We once thought we could explain everything that happens in the universe, but we've now learned enough to know that we don't know everything – in fact there is a great amount of the universe and how it works that we just don't understand."
- So when we look at a story like today's story, it is helpful to know the two main paths for talking about what happened in the story. However, the main thing to focus on is not what *happened* but what the actions and outcomes *mean* and how that meaning can be conveyed. And for that, we don't need Old Testament theology or modernism. Which is what the TELL section is meant to convey.