

Restless *and* Rebellious



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Num. 11:1–33, Num. 12:1–13, Num. 13:27–33, Num. 14:1–23, 1 Cor. 10:1–11, Num. 14:39–45.*

Memory Text: “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (*1 Corinthians 10:11, NKJV*).

Over the centuries, many people have reported strange, restless behavior in dogs and other domestic animals before major earthquakes.

Scientists have now established that animals are able to detect the first of an earthquake's seismic waves—the pressure wave—that arrives in advance of the secondary shaking wave. This probably explains why animals have been reported as acting confused, or restless, right before the ground starts to shake. Some animals, such as elephants, can perceive low-frequency sound waves and vibrations from foreshocks, which humans can't detect at all.

A few minutes before the 5.8-magnitude quake that hit the Washington, D.C., area on August 23, 2011, some of the animals at the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo started behaving strangely. Among those were the lemurs, who began calling loudly for about 15 minutes before the ground started shaking.

In this week's study, we look at some examples of strange human restlessness that was brought about, not by impending natural disasters such as earthquakes, but, rather, by the basic sinfulness of fallen human beings who were not resting in what Christ offers all who come to Him in faith and obedience.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, July 10.

Restless in a Wilderness

Israel must have felt restless and unhappy when they departed Sinai on their way to Canaan. More than a year had passed since they had left Egypt (*Num. 1:1*). They were ready to enter the Promised Land. They had been counted and organized. They had witnessed incredible displays of divine favor and clear signs of God’s presence. Yet, their first stop following their departure from Sinai finds them complaining.

Read Numbers 11:1–15. What are the Israelites complaining about?

The Israelites craved the meat, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic of Egypt. “ ‘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; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’ ” (*Num. 11:4–6, NKJV*). They also must have suffered from severe selective memory when they remembered the food and forgot the slavery and unbelievable hardship (*compare with Exodus 1*).

They had been fed by God’s *manna* for more than a year; yet, they felt restless and wanted something else. Even Moses was affected. Trying to lead a group of restless people is not easy. But Moses knew whom to turn to. “ ‘Why have You afflicted Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all these people on me?’ ” (*Num. 11:11, NKJV*).

How does God respond to the complaints? Read Numbers 11:16–33.

God is not deaf to our needs when we feel restless. In Israel’s case, He gave them quail to satisfy their hunger for meat. But it wasn’t really the meat Israel wanted. When we are unhappy and restless and angry, what we are angry about is often just the detonator—not the cause of the conflict. We fight because there is something deeper amiss, affecting our underlying relationships. Israel rebelled against God’s leading, something that we all have to be careful about, no matter our immediate situation and context, for it’s easier to do than we think.

Why is it so easy to remember the past as better than it really was?

It's Contagious

Read Numbers 12:1–3. What were Miriam and Aaron upset about?

Ostensibly, Miriam and Aaron were unhappy about Moses' Cushite wife. Zipporah was an outsider hailing from Midian (*see Exod. 3:1*). Even among Israel's "elite," the fallenness of their nature was revealed, and not in a very pleasant way, either. (Is it ever?)

The biblical text, however, clearly shows this to be a pretext. The main focus of their complaint is about the prophetic gift. In the previous chapter God had told Moses to appoint 70 of Israel's elders who would help Moses carry the administrative burden of leadership (*Num. 11:16, 17, 24, 25*). Aaron and Miriam had been playing key leadership roles, as well (*Exod. 4:13–15, Micah 6:4*), but now they felt threatened by the new leadership development and said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" (*Num. 12:2, NKJV*).

How does God respond to this complaint? **Read** Numbers 12:4–13. Why do you think God responds so decisively?

God's response was immediate and leaves no room for interpretation. The prophetic gift is not a weapon to be used to wield more power. Moses was well suited for leadership because he had learned how extremely dependent he was on God.

The fact that Miriam is mentioned before Aaron in Numbers 12:1 suggests she may have been the instigator of the attack on Moses. At this time, Aaron was serving as Israel's high priest. If he had been struck with leprosy, he would not have been able to enter the tabernacle and minister on the people's behalf. God's punishment of Miriam with temporary leprosy communicates vividly His displeasure with both of them and helps bring about the attitude change that this family needs. Aaron's plea for her affirms that he, too, was involved (*Num. 12:11*), and now instead of criticism and restlessness, we see Aaron pleading for Miriam, and we see Moses interceding on her behalf (*Num. 12:11–13*). This is the attitude that God wants to see in His people. He hears, and He heals Miriam.

Though it's always easy to be critical of church leadership at any level, how much better would our church and our own spiritual life be if, instead of complaining, we would intercede in behalf of our leaders, even when we disagree with them?

Restlessness Leads to Rebellion

This story begins on a positive note. The Israelites have finally reached the borders of Canaan, and 12 spies are sent to explore the land. Their report is extraordinary.

Read the spies' report in Numbers 13:27–33. At which point are the expectations of the Israelites dashed?

In spite of Caleb's intervention, the voices of the doubters and skeptics prevail. The Israelites did not set out to conquer what God had promised them. Restless at heart, they choose weeping and murmuring over marching and shouting for victory.

When we are restless at heart, we struggle to walk by faith. Restlessness, however, does not affect our emotions alone. Scientists tell us that there is a direct line of cause and effect between too little rest (including lack of sleep) and bad choices, resulting in obesity, addictions, and more restlessness and unhappiness.

Read Numbers 14:1–10. What happened next?

Things move from bad to worse. Caleb's desperate plea, “ ‘only do not rebel against the LORD’ ” (*Num. 14:9, NKJV*), goes unheeded, and the entire assembly prepares to stone their leaders. *Restlessness leads to rebellion, and rebellion ultimately leads to death.*

“The unfaithful spies were loud in denunciation of Caleb and Joshua, and the cry was raised to stone them. The insane mob seized missiles with which to slay those faithful men. They rushed forward with yells of madness, when suddenly the stones dropped from their hands, a hush fell upon them, and they shook with fear. God had interposed to check their murderous design. The glory of His presence, like a flaming light, illuminated the tabernacle. All the people beheld the signal of the Lord. A mightier one than they had revealed Himself, and none dared continue their resistance. The spies who brought the evil report crouched terror-stricken, and with bated breath sought their tents.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 390.

Right then, however, the glory of the Lord manifested itself publicly. When we read the story in Numbers 14, it seems as if the entire scene has been frozen, and we are now privy to listen in on God's conversation with Moses. God recognizes that even though the stones are meant for Moses and Caleb and Joshua, ultimately the rebellion is directed against God Himself.

An Intercessor

What opportunity is God offering Moses in the face of this rebellion? Read Numbers 14:11, 12.

God is offering to destroy the Israelites and make a whole new nation with Moses as the father of them all.

How does Moses respond to this outright rebellion, not simply against himself but against God? (See Num. 14:13–19.)

This is the moment that we can see the true man of God. Moses' answer, frozen into time, anticipates the Intercessor who, more than 1,400 years later, would pray for His disciples in their afflictions (*John 17*). Indeed, in what Moses did here, many theologians and Bible students have seen an example of what Christ does for us. Their guilt, our guilt, is not even questioned. And yet, Moses pleads, saying, “according to the greatness of Your mercy” (*Num. 14:19, NKJV*), please forgive these people. And just as the Lord did then because of Moses' intercession, thus He does for us because of Jesus, because of His death and resurrection and intercession for us.

Thus, Moses pleads: “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now” (*Num. 14:19, NKJV*). Grace combats rebellion and restlessness at its core. Forgiveness offers new beginnings.

Yet, there are costs. Grace can never be cheap. Though forgiven, the people will face the consequences of their rebellions, and that generation will not enter into the Promised Land (*Num. 14:20–23*).

Yes, God will sustain them for another 38 years in the wilderness. He will feed them. He will speak to them from the sanctuary. He will be at their side in the wilderness. But then they will die, and a new generation will have to pick up the baton and find rest in the Promised Land.

It sounded like judgment; yet, it really was grace. How would this generation be able to conquer Canaan's powerful city-states if they had not yet learned to trust Him? How would they be a light to the nations when they themselves were stumbling in the darkness?

What hard lessons have you learned about the consequences of forgiven sin?

Faith Versus Presumption

What similarities do you see in Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness and God’s people living just prior to the second coming of Jesus? (See *1 Cor. 10:1–11.*)

Throughout history, God’s people have been roaming in the wilderness as they seek the Promised Land. This wilderness has many faces. Right now, it looks like an endless media barrage, the constant beeps of incoming messages, and the deep roar of interminable entertainment. It tries to sell us pornography as love and materialism as the answer to our problems. If we just could be a bit fitter, a bit younger, a bit more affluent, a bit sexier—that would take care of all our problems.

Like the Israelites, we are restless in our search for peace, and so often we look for it in the wrong places.

How did the Israelites react to God’s judgment in Numbers 14:39–45?

Israel’s reaction to the divine judgment is typical. “We have sinned,” they said. “ ‘We will go up to the place which the LORD has promised’ ” (*Num. 14:40, NKJV*).

Half-hearted commitment is like a poorly administered vaccination—it doesn’t work. Today, doctors recommend a hepatitis B vaccination right after birth within the first 24 hours of life. That’s a good beginning. However, following that first shot, if there are not two or three booster vaccinations administered at the right times and in the right doses, then there is no protection against hepatitis B whatsoever.

Israel’s rebellious turnaround, reported in the last verses of Numbers 14, results in death and disappointment as the Israelites now refuse to accept God’s new directions and stubbornly launch an attack without the ark of the covenant or Moses’ leadership.

Presumption is costly; presumption leads to death. Very often, presumption is powered by fear. Because we are afraid of something, we make decisions that we later regret.

Think about a time you acted on faith and a time you acted on presumption. What was the crucial difference?

Further Thought: “Now they seemed sincerely to repent of their sinful conduct; but they sorrowed because of the result of their evil course rather than from a sense of their ingratitude and disobedience. When they found that the Lord did not relent in His decree, their self-will again arose, and they declared that they would not return into the wilderness. In commanding them to retire from the land of their enemies, God tested their apparent submission and proved that it was not real. They knew that they had deeply sinned in allowing their rash feelings to control them and in seeking to slay the spies who had urged them to obey God; but they were only terrified to find that they had made a fearful mistake, the consequences of which would prove disastrous to themselves. Their hearts were unchanged, and they only needed an excuse to occasion a similar outbreak. This presented itself when Moses, by the authority of God, commanded them to go back into the wilderness.”—Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 391.

“But faith is in no sense allied to presumption. Only he who has true faith is secure against presumption. For presumption is Satan’s counterfeit of faith. Faith claims God’s promises, and brings forth fruit in obedience. Presumption also claims the promises, but uses them as Satan did, to excuse transgression. Faith would have led our first parents to trust the love of God, and to obey His commands. Presumption led them to transgress His law, believing that His great love would save them from the consequence of their sin. It is not faith that claims the favor of Heaven without complying with the conditions on which mercy is to be granted. Genuine faith has its foundation in the promises and provisions of the Scriptures.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 126.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Discuss the difference between faith and presumption. Why would conquering the land of Canaan first be seen as an act of faith and then later, when the Israelites did attack, be seen as a presumptuous act? How do motive and circumstances play a big role in the difference between faith and presumption?
- 2 Dwell more on the fact that though sin can be forgiven, we often have to live with the consequences of those sins. How can you help those who struggle with knowing that they are forgiven a sin that, nevertheless, still negatively impacts them and, perhaps, even their loved ones?

Impact of a Mission School

By DIANA FISH

What kind of impact can a mission school have on a family?

Shima, which means “mother” in the Navajo language, heard about Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School about 40 years ago.

An elderly friend spoke very highly of Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School, located on the Navajo reservation in the U.S. state of Arizona. “The school provides an excellent education to our Navajo children,” he said.

Shima enrolled five of her seven children at Holbrook Indian School.

Her eldest son learned how to weld and do other metal work at Holbrook Indian School. He loved working with metal and became a metalworker.

Shima’s second-eldest child, a girl, decided to go to an Adventist college after graduating from Holbrook. She studied nursing at Pacific Union College in California and works today as a nurse on the Navajo reservation.

Shima did not send her two youngest children to Holbrook. She decided against it because she became unhappy with the school. One of her daughters, Nabaa, had some difficulties at the school, and the school ended up asking her to leave. Shima felt hurt that her daughter was not allowed to stay.

Nabaa not only had difficulties at Holbrook but also at every school she attended. She eventually graduated, went to college, and became a teacher. Nabaa is still teaching and a member of the Adventist Church today.

Nabaa must have forgiven Holbrook for dismissing her because she enrolled all three of her children at the school. Nabaa’s children, who are now young adults, have graduated from Holbrook and are doing well. One is a teacher and another is about to become a teacher. The third child is the wife of an Adventist pastor and is studying to become a teacher too.

What happened to Shima’s two youngest children who never attended Holbrook? The Adventist influence of Holbrook still permeated their family, and both became Adventists. One teaches at an Adventist school today.

What kind of impact can a mission school have on a family? Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School has had a major impact on Shima’s family and many others on the Navajo reservation and beyond.

Thank you for your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering three years ago that kickstarted plans on a new gym and health center called New Life Center at Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Indian School. Your offering this quarter will help finish the second phase of the center, where the school will address high rates of obesity, heart disease, diabetes, depression, and suicide among Native American children and youth.