

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.

Part I: Overview

This week's lesson, "Restless and Rebellious," focuses on the relationship between the sinfulness of our fallen human nature and a lack of inner peace. Restlessness is that nagging discontent with life. Restlessness fights against life's circumstances when they are not going as expected. Restlessness has tragically failed to accept life on any other terms but its own. It is not satisfied with what it has, and it grasps for more.

This discontent is revealed in Israel's attitude of rebellion in the wilderness. God had graciously provided them with manna to satisfy their hunger as they wandered in the wilderness on their way to Canaan. Dissatisfied, they complained to Moses, and pleaded for the "flesh pots" of Egypt (*Exod. 16:3*). Their restlessness and rebellion led them to beg to return to Egypt. Rebellion leads to restlessness, and restlessness leads to further rebellion.

These twins, restlessness and rebellion, are often the result of a lack of faith. In this week's lesson, we will consider the experience of the 10 spies that searched out the Promised Land. They saw the amazing bounties of the land, recognized it as a land flowing with milk and honey, but did not have the faith to believe that God could defeat their enemies who occupied the land. This lack of faith burst forth in open rebellion. Then as God outlined the consequences of their rebellion, they rushed headlong into battle, contrary to God's instructions, and suffered a terrible defeat. In this week's lesson, we also will carefully consider the difference between faith and presumption.

Restlessness and rebellion lead to rash decisions and dire consequences. We also find this in the experience of Aaron and Miriam, who rebelled against God's authority in the leadership of Moses. Rather than letting these two leaders suffer the full impact of the consequences of their rebellion, Moses interceded for them. God heard his prayers. Intercession makes a powerful difference in the controversy between good and evil.

Part II: Commentary

There is a fascinating story about a devout king who was disturbed by the ingratitude of his royal court. He prepared a large banquet for them. When the king and his royal guests were seated, a beggar shuffled into

the hall (by prearrangement), sat down at the king's table, and gorged himself with food. Without saying a word, he then left the room. The guests were furious and asked permission to seize the tramp and tear him limb from limb for his ingratitude. The king replied, "That beggar has done only once to an earthly king what each of you does three times each day to God. You sit there at the table and eat until you are satisfied. Then you walk away without recognizing God or expressing one word of thanks to Him."

This was precisely Israel's problem. Ingratitude is at the very heart of this week's lesson, "Restless and Rebellious." When we forget what God has done for us in the past, is doing for us in the present, and will do for us in the future, the natural result is discontent. In a remarkable statement, Ellen G. White speaks directly to the problem of forgetting the blessings of God in our lives.

"They *forgot* their bitter service in Egypt. They *forgot* the goodness and power of God displayed in their behalf in their deliverance from bondage. They *forgot* how their children had been spared when the destroying angel slew all the firstborn of Egypt. They *forgot* the grand exhibition of divine power at the Red Sea. They *forgot* that while they had crossed safely in the path that had been opened for them, the armies of their enemies, attempting to follow them, had been overwhelmed by the waters of the sea. They saw and felt only their present inconveniences and trials; and instead of saying, 'God has done great things for us; whereas we were slaves, He is making of us a great nation,' they talked of the hardness of the way, and wondered when their weary pilgrimage would end."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 293; emphasis supplied.

Ingratitude denotes spiritual immaturity. Have you ever noticed how babies have very short memories? They want their needs to be met immediately. They don't have a lot of patience. They don't remember how their parents met their needs yesterday or have the confidence that they will meet them tomorrow. They live for the present. The Israelites were in some ways like immature children. They wanted their needs met immediately and forgot what God had done for them in the past.

Wandering in the barren desert, traversing the burning sands, winding through narrow mountain gorges and crossing the rough hilly terrains, the exhausted, weary Israelites thought only of their immediate needs. They forgot the abundance of God's blessings. They lacked spiritual maturity. Ingratitude always leads to restlessness. Discontent rises when we are not grateful and is largely caused by a lack of faith. Because Moses had married Zipporah, who was an outsider from Midian, Miriam

and Aaron were discontent. They failed to trust God's guidance. When God supplied manna in the wilderness, many of the Israelites were discontent and wanted to return to Egypt. We become restless when we lose focus. The psalmist David encourages us to "forget not all His benefits" (*Ps. 103:2*). Keeping God's goodness prominently in mind brings peace to our hearts. Every day for 40 years in their wilderness wanderings, the Israelites had the opportunity to rejoice in God's goodness as the manna fell.

Manna: A Symbol of the Bread of Life

The falling of the manna in the wilderness was a powerful symbol of God's constant care. It also was a reminder of the Messiah who was to come to satisfy the Israelites' spiritual hunger and give them true rest. In the imagery of bread, the Jewish prophets saw a symbol of the coming Messiah who would meet all of Israel's needs. Isaiah the prophet declared, " 'Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. . . . Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance' " (*Isa. 55:1, 2, NKJV*). Here bread is obviously a symbol of spiritual food that satisfies the soul. After feeding the 5,000 seated on a hillside in Galilee, in a miracle reminiscent of Israel's being divinely fed by the manna, Jesus declared, " 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever' " (*John 6:51, NKJV*). The manna falling daily in the wilderness to satisfy the physical needs of God's people had a deeper message. Just as God had satisfied their physical hunger, He would satisfy the hunger of their souls. He longed to give them rest of mind and body as by faith they trusted His provisions to meet their needs. But they failed to appreciate the blessings of heaven, and their restless spirits led them to rebel against God's plans for their lives.

The account of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness is a classic story of ingratitude, discontent, and lack of faith. Restlessness, crippling anxiety, and excessive worry are often signs of a lack of faith. There are exceptions. Sometimes, deep-seated emotional distress stems from a physical or mental condition and requires a medical solution. But most often, as in the case of Israel, it is a lack of faith that leads to our restlessness and anxiety.

Ten Spies: Restlessness and Presumption

This is certainly true of the spies that Moses sent to spy out the land of Canaan. Their investigative analysis was to be thorough. Israel's attacking

armies must be fully informed. A positive report would spur them on to a courageous conquest. They followed Moses' instructions carefully. They were faithful at their assignment. They explored the land for 40 days, then returned home. They gave a glowing report. They excitedly told of a land that was rich and fertile with abundant crops. But then with fearful anxiety they told of what they perceived to be giants in the land, impenetrable fortresses, and massive enemy armies. They were restless and lacked the faith to believe God could deliver them. They became so frustrated that they threatened to stone the two spies, Caleb and Joshua, who brought back a positive report about their chances for conquest. Eventually, in one rash act, after God forbade the people to move forward, they rushed into battle and suffered a crushing defeat.

Faith would have led them forward, trusting God for victory. Presumption led them forward, trusting their own abilities to accomplish the task, and they were utterly defeated. Faith trusts God, takes Him at His word, and moves forward to victory. Presumption trusts human impulse, substitutes human feelings and judgments for faith, and moves forward to defeat.

Moses: Intercession

One of the major emphases in this week's lesson is Moses' intercession for his people. Despite the Israelites' restless rebellion, Moses did not abandon them. He interceded in their behalf until he had the assurance that God would spare His people and ultimately lead them to the Promised Land. Moses is a type of Christ. Jesus leads us from the bondage of the Egypts of this world, through the wilderness, and on to the Promised Land. He will never abandon us. He will not forsake us when we fail Him. This day He is interceding for you. You are in His mind. You are on His heart. If we let Him, our mighty Intercessor will take us home to live with Him forever.

Part III: Life Application

Ellen G. White makes this insightful comment revealing the underlying cause for all discontent and ingratitude: "Do we well to be thus unbelieving? Why should we be ungrateful and distrustful? Jesus is our friend; all heaven is interested in our welfare; and our anxiety and fear grieve the Holy Spirit of God. We should not indulge in a solicitude that only frets and wears us but does not help us to bear trials. No place should be given to that distrust of God which leads us to make a preparation

