2. Restless and Rebellious (3Q 2021—Rest in Christ)


**Quotes**
- God takes everyone he loves through a desert. It is his cure for our wandering hearts, restlessly searching for a new Eden... The best gift of the desert is God’s presence... The protective love of the Shepherd gives me courage to face the interior journey. *Paul E. Miller*
- Often we are really restless and dissatisfied with the way we rest. *Curtis Zachary*
- Our restlessness in this world seems to indicate that we are intended for a better. We have all of us a longing after happiness; and surely the Creator will gratify all the natural desires he has implanted in us. *Robert Southey*
- The thing worse than rebellion is the thing that causes rebellion. *Frederick Douglass*
- A rebellion against God, even as believers, is fueled by the toxic fumes of unbelief. *James MacDonald*
- Complaining does not work as a strategy. We all have finite time and energy. Any time we spend whining is unlikely to help us achieve our goals. And it won’t make us happier. *Randy Pausch*

**Questions**

Why do we find it so easy to grumble and complain? Why were the Israelites so restless and rebellious that they even wanted to go back to the land of slavery? What does this tell us about our own fallen human nature? What lessons can we learn? How do the rebellions of the Israelites illustrate the issues of the great controversy?

**Bible summary**

In Num. 11:1–33 the Israelites complaining about their “suffering” in the desert. Some “troublemakers” then grumble about the food, moaning that all they get is “manna,” and they want some meat. God provides them with quail, but they eat so much they make them sick. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses for marrying an Ethiopian woman (Num. 12:1-13), and Miriam is struck with leprosy. Ten of the twelve explorers sent ahead into Canaan come back and give a negative report (Num. 13:27–33). In Num. 14:1–23 the Israelites are so tired of the wilderness that they decide to go back to Egypt. They even want to stone Joshua and Caleb for bringing back a good report from Canaan. Then they change their minds and invade Canaan against the Lord’s explicit warning, and many Israelites die (Num. 14:39–45). Paul references the experience of the Israelites as a warning about rebelling against God (1 Cor. 10:1–11).

**Comment**

Most of this week’s study focuses on the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness. They quickly became tired of traveling from place to place, and longed to be back in Egypt, conveniently forgetting that they had been slaves there. The journey to the Promised Land shouldn’t have taken long. But because of their attitude, it took far longer, and in the end almost all that generation died in the desert. They argued among themselves, they fought with Moses and Aaron, they grumbled about their lives, and most of all, opposed the God who led them.
It’s easy to dismiss the Israelites as a bunch of ungrateful troublemakers. But what if we put ourselves in their shoes? How often do we grumble and complain? Do we long for an idealized picture of “the good old days,” forgetting how bad they were—like the Israelites wanting to “go home” to Egypt even as slaves?

It was his jealous thoughts that led Lucifer to rebel against God and his government, seeking to be like the Most High and take his place. However crazy this plan may seem to us, it reflects the jealous self-centeredness that is at the heart of Lucifer’s sin. Proud of himself, and demonstrating his rebellious spirit, Lucifer attempted to lead the universe down a path that resulted in ruin and loss. All this was the result of Lucifer’s choice to go his own way, insanely believing he could run God’s Universe better than God himself (see Isaiah 14:13, 14). The heart of the rebellion is believing your way is better than God’s. You justify yourself by turning God’s value system upside down. So God becomes the tyrant, you the freedom-fighter. God the liar, you the source of truth. God the author of wrong, you the defender of the right. Right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right in this nightmare scenario that is the negative of God’s good creation (see Ezekiel 28:13-17).

We should not lose sight here of the underlying causes and the continuing drama. The conflict between God and Satan is now playing out here on planet Earth and each one is involved. Satan is trying to win the battle for the minds of God’s children, and his successes are all too obvious. If it is a question of numbers, then he is winning here, as the vast majority in the time of the Flood or the Tower of Babel demonstrated. Now generations later, Satan is still making a play for each and every person, through every trick in the book. Most significantly, by working through humanity’s tendency to do things their own way, he seeks to draw the followers of God off-track, and to trust in their own schemes. The deceptive practices in these chapters of Genesis well illustrate the way in which he insinuates and suggests, leading these participants to follow their own inclinations and desires.

Ellen White comments
Satan can sow discord; Christ alone can harmonize the disagreeing elements. Then let every soul sit down in Christ’s school and learn of Christ, who declares Himself to be meek and lowly of heart. Christ says that if we learn of Him, worries will cease and we shall find rest to our souls.  {11MR 266}

During the march of the children of Israel through the wilderness, God tried their faith, to lead them to trust in him. Before they left Egypt, he began to give them these lessons, to lead them to look to him as their deliverer and protector. The tribulations through which they passed were a part of his great plan. It was not by chance that they came to Marah, where they could not drink of the water, “for it was bitter.” Thus God desired to teach them a lesson of trust. But they murmured and complained, crying out in distrust, “What shall we drink?” Do we not too often, like the Israelites, forget God, and by murmuring and complaining lose the blessing of the trial? Remember that in every time of trouble Jesus is near you, seeking to impress his image upon you. He is trying to help you to carry the cross. He is close beside you, seeking to lead you to see how sorry he is that you make mistakes. He is always ready to clasp the hand stretched out for aid.  {RH, June 20, 1907 par. 6}

Many look back to the Israelites, and marvel at their unbelief and murmuring, feeling that they themselves would not have been so ungrateful; but when their faith is tested, even by little trials, they manifest no more faith or patience than did ancient Israel.  {PP 293.2}