

Numbers 11:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And say thou unto the people, Sanctify yourselves against to morrow, and ye shall eat flesh: for ye have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt: therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat.

Analysis

God's command through Moses 'Sanctify yourselves against to morrow' called Israel to prepare ceremonially for divine action. The Hebrew *hitqaddesh* (הִתְקַדְּשׁוּ) means to consecrate or set apart—ironically, here sanctification prepares not for blessing but for judgment. The people would receive what they demanded, but it would become a curse rather than blessing. This illustrates the principle that God sometimes grants sinful requests to expose their folly and bring correction (Psalm 106:15: 'He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul').

The phrase 'ye have wept in the ears of the LORD' emphasizes that their complaint, though directed at Moses, was heard by God. The anthropomorphic expression 'in the ears of the LORD' indicates God's personal awareness and response to their murmuring. Their tears weren't hidden from divine notice—God knows every complaint, whether whispered privately or shouted publicly. The specific complaint 'Who shall give us flesh to eat? for it was well with us in Egypt' revealed selective memory and distorted perception. Egypt wasn't 'well'—they were slaves, oppressed, crying out for deliverance (Exodus 2:23-24).

God's response 'therefore the LORD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat' granted their request but added consequence. The provision wasn't gracious gift but

judicial response—God would demonstrate that getting what we sinfully crave often brings misery, not satisfaction. This prefigures the New Testament warning: 'Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts' (James 4:3). Desires pursued in unbelief, even when granted, cannot satisfy the soul created for God alone.

Historical Context

The command to sanctify themselves 'against tomorrow' follows the pattern of divine visitation requiring ceremonial preparation (Exodus 19:10-15). However, this sanctification preceded judgment rather than blessing, showing that meeting God is always serious whether for mercy or wrath. The people's claim 'it was well with us in Egypt' contradicted their earlier cries of oppression (Exodus 2:23-25; 3:7-9) and demonstrated how quickly human hearts forget suffering when facing present trials. This selective memory characterizes unbelief throughout Scripture—minimizing past bondage while magnifying present difficulty.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's granting of Israel's sinful request demonstrate the principle that receiving what we wrongly desire can be a form of judgment rather than blessing?
2. What does the people's claim 'it was well with us in Egypt' teach about how unbelief distorts memory and causes us to romanticize past bondage?

Interlinear Text

וְאָל־ H413	הָעָם thou unto the people H5971	וְאָמַר And say H559	וְהִתְקַדְּשׁוּ Sanctify H6942	לְמָחָר yourselves against to morrow H4279
וְאָכְלֶתֶם: H398	וְשָׂרַר Who shall give us flesh H1320	כִּי H3588	בְּכִיְתֶם for ye have wept H1058	בְּאָזְנֵי in the ears H241
יְהוָה of the LORD H3068	וְאָמַר And say H559	וְאָכְלֶתֶם: H4310	וְשָׂרַר Who shall give us flesh H1320	כִּי H3588
טוֹב for it was well H2895	לְנוֹ H0	בְּמִצְרַיִם with us in Egypt H4714	וְנָתַן will give H5414	יְהוָה of the LORD H3068
וְשָׂרַר Who shall give us flesh H1320	וְאָכְלֶתֶם: and ye shall eat H398			

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 19:10 (References Lord): And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes,

Acts 7:39 (References Egypt): To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt,

Numbers 11:1 (References Lord): And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.