

Numbers 11:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting:
and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall
give us flesh to eat?

Analysis

The 'mixed multitude' (Hebrew 'asaphsoph', רִפְרָף, 'riffraff' or 'rabble') who left Egypt with Israel now incite craving for meat, demonstrating how spiritual contamination enters through association with the unconverted. These Egyptians and others who joined the Exodus apparently without genuine faith in Israel's God became sources of temptation, their worldly appetites infecting Israel. The phrase 'fell a lusting' (Hebrew 'hit'awu ta'avah', הִתְאַוּ תַּאֲוָה, literally 'craved a craving') indicates excessive, self-indulgent desire beyond legitimate need. Their complaint 'Who shall give us flesh to eat?' reveals ingratitude—they had food (manna) but craved variety and luxury. The nostalgia 'We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely'—conveniently forgetting their slavery—illustrates how desire distorts memory and reason. They despised God's provision (the manna their souls 'loatheth,' verse 6) while craving Egypt's pleasures. This exposes the sinful heart's tendency to glorify the past, minimize present blessings, and demand more than God provides. The principle warns against worldly contamination in the church—association with unconverted people whose values remain earthly can tempt believers toward worldliness.

Historical Context

The 'mixed multitude' included Egyptians and perhaps other nationalities who joined Israel's exodus (Exodus 12:38). Ancient Near Eastern populations were diverse, with foreigners, servants, and refugees living among various peoples.

These hangers-on apparently left Egypt for pragmatic rather than spiritual reasons—escaping the plagues or seeking opportunity—without genuine faith commitment to Israel's God. Their presence created ongoing problems, as their worldly values influenced Israel. The foods they craved—fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, garlic—were staples of Egyptian diet. The Nile's fish were abundant and affordable, and Egypt's irrigation agriculture produced vegetables year-round. These were legitimate foods but represented Egyptian life and values. Israel's craving for Egypt despite experiencing bondage there illustrates spiritual blindness caused by fleshly appetite. The incident warned Israel (and warns us) that the church must maintain spiritual discernment about who truly belongs to God's people—mere physical presence doesn't constitute spiritual membership.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the 'mixed multitude's' influence warn about the danger of worldly contamination within God's people?
2. What does Israel's selective memory (remembering Egypt's food but forgetting its slavery) teach about how sinful desire distorts judgment?

Interlinear Text

וְהָאֶסְפֶּסֶף	אֲשֶׁר	בְּקִרְבּוֹ	הִתְאַווּ	תְּאֵוָה
And the mixt multitude	H834	that was among	them fell a lusting	H8378
H628		H7130	H183	
וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ	וַיִּבְכּוּ	גַּם	בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַיֹּאמְרוּ
again	also wept	H1571	and the children	of Israel
H7725	H1058	H1121	H3478	H559
				and said
				H4310
וַיֹּאכְלֵנוּ	בָּשָׂר:			
to eat	Who shall give us flesh			
H398	H1320			

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 10:6 (Parallel theme): Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Exodus 12:38 (Parallel theme): And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.

Psalms 106:14 (Parallel theme): But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tempted God in the desert.

Nehemiah 13:3 (References Israel): Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

Romans 13:14 (Parallel theme): But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (Parallel theme): Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners.