

Wednesday with the Word

Wheat Street Baptist Church

Teacher: Rev. Ralph Basui Watkins, MFA, DMin, PhD
Pastor

Complaining on the Way to the Promised Land: Will You Complain?

Lord I want complain.....really.....

Why do we complain?

How do we deal with complainers?

What are you complaining about?

What is the difference in asking a question / being inquisitive and complaining?

Introduction: I have always found it interesting that as soon as Israel was set free from slavery they begin to complain. It has always puzzled me that here they are coming out of slavery and at every turn they complained.

What was at the root of their complaining?

Did they not understand what the journey to freedom would look like?

Were they taken aback by the trek into the wilderness?

Had they suffered from a slave mentality?

Had they been slaves so long that they couldn't enjoy the benefits / blessings of freedom?

Had they become comfortable being slaves?

Were they impatient?

Were they unappreciative?

Is this just the natural order of things? Is there always a gap between God, leaders and followers, therefore we complain against God and those God has called to lead us?

Brief Synopsis: The Exodus Story: From Liberation to Freedom to Complaining

1. 400 Years of slavery - **Exodus 6:5-7** **5** I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. **6** Say therefore to the Israelites, 'I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **7** I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.

2. **Exodus 6** - Then the Lord said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.
3. **Exodus 7** - The Lord said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. **2** You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land.
4. **Exodus 7:14 - 12:32** - Ten Plagues: (1) Water Turned to Blood (2) Frogs (3) Gnats (4) Flies (5) Livestock Dead (6) Boils (7) Thunder and Hail (8) Locusts (9) Darkness (10) Death of First Born
5. **Exodus 12:29-32 - 29** At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock. **30** Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. **31** Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said. **32** Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!”
6. Crossing the Red Sea - **Exodus 14:1-31**
7. **Exodus 15:1-18** - Moses song...starts like this... Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord:
 “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
 horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

2

The Lord is my strength and my might,[a]
 and he has become my salvation;
 this is my God, and I will praise him,
 my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

3

The Lord is a warrior;
 the Lord is his name.

8. Miriam’s Song - **Exodus 15:20-21** Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. **21** And Miriam sang to them:
 “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
 horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

Questions to Keep in Mind:

What do they have to complain about for a long time?

Where does complaining come from?

Why did they complain?

Why do we complain?

How do we deal with complainers?

How do we deal with our complaining?

How do we deal with our desire or temptation to complain?

How do you (I) keep from complaining?

Let the Complaining Begin!

Sweet Water

Exodus 15:22-27

22 Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea,[a] and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water.

23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah. **24** And the people complained against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" **25** He cried out to the Lord; and the Lord showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the Lord made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. **26** He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you."

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

Commentary:

They cried out against Moses but Moses cried out to the Lord. Moses didn't cry out against them. He didn't chastise them but rather he went to God and God showed him the solution and how to help the people. Moses didn't take their complaint personally. It is also interesting that the solution wasn't to put sugar in the water but rather to throw a piece of wood into the water. Many times God's answer to the complaints of God's people doesn't look like what we expect it to be. If we get caught up in the people's complaints we will miss God's answer. We will be so talking back to the people and we focus on them we may not take time to talk to God!

God commands them to listen to God's voice. I wonder if some of our complaining comes from our being deaf to God's voice? If we heard from God and what is going on is of God would we be complaining? What if we asked before we complained, is God pleased? Many times when we complain it is because of something we don't agree with. What if what we don't agree with is of God? If it is of God then why are we complaining and why don't we know it is of God? Do we spend time with God before we complain? Maybe one way to deal with our temptation to complain is to take our complaint to God before we pick up the phone or the keyboard to type that email or enter a complaining conversation!

The Entire Assembly Complain

Exodus 16:1-3

The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. **2** The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. **3** The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

What is the root of their complaint?

What comparisons are they making?

Do the comparisons make sense?

Why is it they see freedom as wilderness and not the journey to the promised land?

Why are they complaining about freedom and comparing freedom to slavery?

God’s Answer to the Complainers

Exodus 16:4

Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.

Commentary:

This goes back to an earlier conversations with God, Moses and the people. Will they listen to God and follow God or will they insist on doing what they want to do and not what God wants them or instructs them to do.

Exodus 16:5-8

5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” **6** So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, **7** and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” **8** And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him —what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.”

When you are doing what God has called you to do and people complain don’t take it personal. If God has called you and you are doing what God called you to do, the way God wants you to do it, with love, respect, gentle yet firm while sharing the whys behind the whats then you must proceed. Don’t take the complaints personally because they aren’t complaining against you but rather they are complaining against God. God got

this. Don't get mad, don't retaliate, don't talk about folk...just do what God has called you to do with love and respect (love is the key here).

The Godly Instructions and Test

Exodus 16:9-12

9 Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" **10** And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. **11** The Lord spoke to Moses and said, **12** "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"

Exodus 16:13-19

13 In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. **14** When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. **15** When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?"^[a] For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. **16** This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" **17** The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. **18** But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. **19** And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning."

Did they Listen?

Exodus 16:20-26

20 But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. **21** Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

22 On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, **23** he said to them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the Lord; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.'" **24** So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. **25** Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field." **26** Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none."

Moses is becoming angry. Moses is getting worn out. What is happening to Moses? In this part of the story Moses isn't talking to God. Moses focus has changed, he is talking to the people. Before he was talking to God and he could still love and lead the people with love. He understood that it wasn't personal. Things are beginning to change for Moses.

Do we respect the sabbath?

Do we give one day to God for a day of rest and worship?

Do we decide whether or not we are coming to worship as a gift to God?

"I don't feel like going today!"

Do we listen?

Do we hear God?

Are we willing to follow God and those God has called to lead us?

Exodus 16:27-30

27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none.

28 The Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions?" **29** See! The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day." **30** So the people rested on the seventh day.

Now the Lord is talking to Moses and now Moses is in the middle of this mess!

Moses Messes Up Because His Focus Has Changed

Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. **2** The people quarreled with Moses, and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" **3** But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" **4** So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people?" They are almost ready to stone me." **5** The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah,

because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”

Moses is about to lose it. It is getting to him. Why is Moses about to lose it?

Why is Moses talking back and forth with the people and God?

Why isn't Moses focusing only on talking to God?

Moses You Need Help: Jethro's Advice

Exodus 18:1-27

17 Moses' father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good. **18** You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone. **19** Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God; **20** teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do. **21** You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. **22** Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.