

## A Complaining Spirit

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Life is tough, we all know that. But chronic complaining about our hardships reveals a deeper problem that threatens our relationship with God.

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*“Then they despised the pleasant land; they did not believe His word, but complained in their tents, and did not heed the voice of the Lord” (Psa. 106:24-25).*

*“. . . nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:10).*

*“Do all things without complaining and disputing” (Phil. 2:14).*



After witnessing God’s power in delivering them from Egyptian bondage, the Israelites immediately started grumbling about the travel accommodations. There was no potable water: *Complain!* (Ex. 15:24; 17:3). They got hungry: *Complain!* (Ex. 16:2). Even when God gave them food from heaven, it was too bland. *Complain!* (Num. 11:1; 21:5). Rebels threatened to take over and were punished in dramatic fashion: *Complain!* (Num. 16:41). The land of Canaan was everything God had promised, but it was occupied by powerful enemies: *Complain!* (Num. 14:2). Are we starting to see a pattern here?

The story of the Israelites’ odyssey from Egypt to the Promised Land is an object lesson in how *not* to handle hardship. But we need to look beyond the surface behavior and understand *why* this kind

of grumbling became their default response to every difficulty they encountered. Doing so can help us avoid their mistake.

The author of Psalm 106 offers a commentary on the behavior of the Israelites that reveals a couple of important details we should consider. First, he says that “they did not believe His word.” Which is to say, *their complaining was merely a symptom of an underlying heart of disbelief in God and His promises.* Oh, they believed that God existed, but they did not *trust* Him. They had no confidence that He was willing, or even able, to help them. They saw God the same way we view a disinterested DMV clerk or a corporate customer service robo-answering machine: there to help, but of no practical value in actually solving our problem. Their complaining spirit was an outgrowth of their low view of God and His power.

The second detail is a natural outgrowth of the first: they “did not heed the voice of the Lord.” Why should they obey God’s instructions, if they had no confidence that God knew what He was doing? In their minds, this whole wilderness crossing thing was a fool’s errand, and they were paying the price for God’s incompetence. Expressed another way, *complaining is the recourse of people who have no confidence in God to deliver on His promises.* Why should I trust my life to a God who is out to lunch?

The implications of these two principles should be sobering to those of us who are given to complaining whenever things in our life don’t go as we think they should. Do we believe in God? If so, great, but do we *trust* God? Are we fully confident in His ability and willingness to take care of us—as HE defines it? If we do, then there should be no place in our hearts for complaining. We should be willing to let God run the show as He determines and adapt our lives to whatever He sends our way, be it good or bad.

Life can be hard, and there’s nothing wrong with crying out to God when it hurts (cf. Job). But whenever we catch ourselves focusing on the negatives, or obsessing over the obstacles, or lashing out at the unfairness of it all, we need to step back and reassess where we’re at spiritually. A person who has truly put his faith in God has no room for that kind of negativity in his life.

— David King