

THE DANGEROUS SPIRIT OF SELF-PITY AND COMPLAINT

11 Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of Jehovah, and when Jehovah heard it his anger was aroused. Then fire from Jehovah burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. ²When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to Jehovah and the fire died out. ³So that place was called Taberah, because of the fire from Jehovah that burned among them.

⁴The foreigners who were among them had great cravings [for different foods,] and also the children of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat?" ⁵We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. ⁶But now our spirit languishes, we never see anything except this manna." ⁷Now the manna was like coriander seed and it looked like bdellium. ⁸The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a hand mill or crushed it in a mortar. They boiled it in pots or made it into cakes. It tasted like cakes baked with fresh olive oil. ⁹When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna would come with it. ¹⁰Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance of his tent. The anger of Jehovah was greatly aroused and Moses was troubled. ¹¹Then Moses asked Jehovah, "Why have you brought this trouble upon your servant? What have I done to displease you that you have put the burden of all these people upon me? ¹²Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them, so that you say to me, 'Carry them in your arms,' as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you pledged to their forefathers? ¹³Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, 'Give us meat to eat!' ¹⁴I am not able to carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵If this is how you are going to treat me, I beg you, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me suffer in my wretchedness."

¹⁶Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Bring before me seventy of the elders of Israel, men whom you know to be leaders and rulers over the people. Bring them to the Tent of Meeting, so that they may stand there with you. ¹⁷I will come down and speak with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and put him upon them; then they will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone. ¹⁸Say to the people: Consecrate yourselves [in preparation] for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. You have wailed in the ears of Jehovah, crying, 'Who will give us meat to eat? We were better off in Egypt!' Therefore, Jehovah will give you meat, and you will eat it. ¹⁹You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and it becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected Jehovah who is present with you and have wailed in his presence, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'" ²¹But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand in number, yet you have said, 'I will give them meat so that they may eat for a whole month.' ²²Shall the flocks and herds be slaughtered for them in order to satisfy them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them in order that they may have a sufficient [amount of meat?]" ²³Jehovah answered, "Has Jehovah's ability become limited?*" Now you will see whether or not my word shall be fulfilled."

²⁴So Moses went out and told the people what Jehovah had said. He brought together seventy elder from the people and had them stand around the Tent. ²⁵Then

Jehovah came down in the cloud and spoke with him; and he took of the Spirit who was upon Moses and put him upon the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do so again. ²⁶However, two men had remained in the camp. The name of the one was Eldad and the name of the other was Medad. They were listed [among the elders], but had not gone out to the Tent, yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷So a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!" ²⁸Then Joshua, the son of Nun, who ministered to Moses and was one of his chosen men, spoke up and said, "Moses, my lord, forbid them [from prophesying!]" ²⁹But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all Jehovah's people were prophets, that Jehovah would put his Spirit upon all of them!" ³⁰Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

*³¹ Now a wind went forth from Jehovah and brought quail from the sea. It brought them down all around the camp about three feet above the ground, as far as a day's walk in any direction. ³²All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers.** Then they spread them out throughout the camp. ³³While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of Jehovah was aroused against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague. ³⁴Therefore that place was called Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who craved [different food]. ³⁵From Kibroth Hattaavah the people traveled to Hazeroth, and they stayed at Hazeroth. (Num. 11:1-35)*

**Literally, "Has Jehovah's [arm] become short?"*

***Ten homers are approximately 60 bushels or 2.2 kiloliters*

Introduction

There once was a young boy named Billy who wanted a Green Bay Packers' football jacket—he wanted it so much that it was all he could think about, it was all he would talk about. He had a Packers' cap and he owned a Packers' jersey, but he wanted a Packers' jacket. He saw a Packer jacket advertised in a mail order catalogue, and that sparked his desire. He just had to have one of those jackets! He showed the advertisement to his parents, he told them how much he wanted one of those jackets—how he **needed** one of those jackets. But they told him, "No."

"Why?" asked the young boy, "Why can't I have one of those jackets?"

"Because those jackets are much too expensive," explained his parents (patiently at first). "Besides," they said, "you have a Packers' cap and a Packers' jersey, why can't you be content with them?"

But the boy kept asking, "Why can't I have the jacket?" And he kept pleading, but his parents kept saying "No" and explaining why not. Finally the boy stomped off in a huff to his bedroom, slammed the door behind him, and threw himself on his bed,

sobbing in self-pity. All this after informing his parents that they did not love him, and that he was making plans to run away and make a million dollars and buy his own Packers' jacket and not give them a penny!

In a few weeks the boy's birthday came. Because he still wanted the Packers' jacket, his parents decided to take the birthday money sent by his uncles and aunts and grandparents and purchase with it the much-desired Packers' jacket.

When it arrived the boy couldn't have been more surprised or happy—he wore it to school the next day. That afternoon his mother received a phone call from the police: Can you pick up your son? He's badly shaken. He was mugged by a street gang who wanted his jacket. The young boy had finally gotten his jacket, ... and he got more than he expected.

This account to some extent parallels the incident described here in Numbers 11. When the people of Israel wailed in self-pity and protest, the LORD gave them what they wanted—and something more:

Say to the people: Consecrate yourselves [in preparation] for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. You have wailed in the ears of Jehovah, crying, 'Who will give us meat to eat? We were better off in Egypt!' Therefore, Jehovah will give you meat, and you will eat it. ...³³While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of Jehovah was aroused against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague. (Num. 11:18,33)

Whenever we allow ourselves to wallow in self-pity and display contempt for the way in which He is dealing with us, we arouse the LORD's righteous anger against us. Do not entertain a spirit of self-pity and complaint against the LORD, or else you may provoke His righteous indignation and cause Him to take action against you.

I. Don't Entertain a Spirit of Self-Pity and Complaint, Which Can be Incited by the World

Numbers 11:4b tells us that the people of Israel developed a craving for meat, *"Who will give us meat to eat?"* They began to think back to "the good old days" in Egypt where they ate an abundance of fish, as well as cucumbers, melons and onions (vs. 5.) As they dwelt upon their desire for meat and recalled the variety of food they had back in Egypt, they became dissatisfied with the LORD's present provision for them. They lost their taste for the manna, even though it was nourishing and in ample quantity and very good (vs. 6-9.)

Verse 4 indicates that the foreigners who were among them stimulated this dissatisfaction on the part of Israel. Apparently, there were some Egyptians or, possibly, some other foreign peoples who likewise had been under Egyptian subjugation, who attached themselves to Israel at the time of the Exodus. Note that Exodus 12:38 states, *"Many other people went up with them [out of Egypt]."*

These people now begin to yearn for what they had in Egypt, and they stimulate Israel to adopt a spirit of self-pity and complaint: *“the children of Israel wept again”* (vs. 4.)

Scripture cautions us that it is possible for Christian people to be incited to self-pity and complaint by observing the world around us:

But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold, because I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. ⁵They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills. ...¹²This is what the wicked are like—always carefree, they increase in wealth. ¹³Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence. (Psl. 73:2-6,12-13)

You have said, “It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before Jehovah of hosts? ¹⁵But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.” (Mal.3:14-15)

When we are tempted to entertain an attitude of self-pity and complaint because of what we see in the people of the world, what is the antidote?

First, in the light of God’s truth, consider their final outcome:

When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me ¹⁷until I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny. ¹⁸Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. ¹⁹How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! ²⁰As a dream when one awakes, so when you arise, O Lord, you will despise them as fantasies. ...²⁷Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you. (Psl. 73:16-20,27)

Second, consider what you have as a Christian and the future God has prepared for you:

Yet I am always with you, you hold me by my right hand. ²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is no one on earth that I desire beside you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psl. 73:23-26)

Don’t entertain a spirit of self-pity and complaint, incited by contemplating “the good life” of the people of the world—as a remedy against such a temptation, consider such passages as these:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

So then ... all things are yours. ²²Whether ... the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all things are yours; ²³and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God. (1 Cor. 3:21-23)

Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²⁰Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you. (Psl. 84:11-12)

II. Don't Entertain a Spirit of Self-Pity and Complaint, Because the LORD May Give You Your Desire—Along with Judgment

In response to the people's complaint and demand for meat, Moses informs the people that the LORD will grant their desire, *"Jehovah will give you meat, and you will eat it"* (vs. 18.)

But He will not allow them to enjoy their desire with His blessing. The LORD will give them so much of what they want that they will become sick of it: *"You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five days, or ten days, or twenty days, ²⁰but for a whole month—until it comes out of your nostrils and it becomes loathsome to you—because you have rejected Jehovah who is present with you and have wailed in his presence, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'"* (Num. 11:19-20)

Moses testifies that the LORD will do so because *"you have rejected"* (the Hebrew verb, *רָחַק*, means "to lightly esteem, to hold in contempt, to disregard,") *Jehovah who is present with you"* (vs. 20.) The people of Israel did not appreciate the LORD's presence with them, and the provision He thought best for them. Rather than appreciating what they had and recognizing it as having been provided for them by the LORD their God, they complained about what they did not have. We must remember that the LORD was leading them into the Promised Land of Canaan where they were to enjoy an abundance of all good things with His blessing. They foolishly thought that what they did not have would make them happy, whereas true happiness consists in having the LORD's presence, accepting the LORD's will, and enjoying the LORD's good gifts in His time.

Not only did the LORD withhold His blessing, He administered His discipline and even divine punishment (vs. 31-35.) By means of a strong wind, the LORD brought tremendous quantities of quail into the camp. But as the people ate the food they so desired, *"while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of Jehovah was aroused against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague"* (vs. 33.) Verse 34 contains the sobering report: *"there they buried the people who craved [different food]."* The Hebrew

text literally reads, *“there they buried the people who lusted;”* that is to say, the people who became so preoccupied with their own desires that they rejected God’s present will for their lives, refusing to trust Him and wait for His good blessings in His good time.

What makes this severe judgment of the Lord all the more just and tragic is the fact that the people refused to learn from previous experience. On an earlier occasion, immediately preceding this present episode, the people had complained and were rebuked by the fire of the LORD which struck the rearmost section of the camp (vs. 1-3.) Rather than learn the lesson that complaining against the LORD’s direction and provision for your life is answered with His displeasure and rebuke, they became even more obstinate as is seen by their behavior recorded in verses 4-6. Can you look back on your life and identify a time when you insisted on having your own way, and the LORD gave you what you desired, and it all turned out for the worse? Have you learned from such an experience? Or are you persisting in that attitude and heading for a more extreme encounter with God’s discipline or with His judgment?

Don’t entertain a spirit of self-pity and complaint, because the LORD may give you your desire, ... along with judgment. Consider the example of King Hezekiah:

In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, This is what Jehovah says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover. ²Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Jehovah, ³Remember, O Jehovah, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes. And Hezekiah wept bitterly. ⁴Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of Jehovah came to him: ⁵Go back and tell Hezekiah, the leader of my people, This is what Jehovah, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of Jehovah. ⁶I will add fifteen years to your life. (2 Kgs. 20:1-6a)

The LORD granted Hezekiah’s request for an extended period of life, but during those fifteen years Hezekiah’s prideful conduct in showing the Babylonian ambassadors his wealth would eventually lead to the judgment of God upon the entire nation of Israel:

At that time Merodach-Baladan son of Baladan king of Babylon sent Hezekiah letters and a gift, because he had heard of Hezekiah’s illness. ¹³Hezekiah received the messengers and showed them all that was in his storehouses—the silver, the gold, the spices and the fine oil—his armory and everything found among his treasures. There was nothing in his palace or in all his kingdom that Hezekiah did not show them. ¹⁴Then Isaiah the prophet went to King Hezekiah and asked, What did those men say, and from where did they come? From a distant land, Hezekiah replied. They came from Babylon. ¹⁵The prophet asked,

What did they see in your palace? They saw everything in my palace, Hezekiah said. There is nothing among my treasures that I did not show them. ¹⁶Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Jehovah: ¹⁷The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, declares Jehovah. (2 Kgs. 20:12-17)

Furthermore, during those fifteen years there was born a son to Hezekiah. That son, Manasseh, *“did evil in the eyes of Jehovah, following the detestable practices of the nations Jehovah had driven out before the Israelites. ³He rebuilt the high places his father Hezekiah had demolished”* (2 Chron. 33:2-3.) Manasseh would undo all the good that his father had accomplished.

III. Don't Entertain a Spirit of Self-Pity and Complaint, But Do Bring Your Concerns to the LORD

The people brought their complaint to Moses, and actually demanded that he give them meat to eat (vs. 13.) Moses, grieved by their attitude (vs.10,) and distressed by their demand (vs. 13,) brings his concern to the LORD (vs.11.)

Moses pours out his heart to the LORD in prayer:

Why have you brought this trouble upon your servant? What have I done to displease you that you have put the burden of all these people upon me? (vs. 11)

Did I conceive all these people? Did I give birth to them, so that you say to me, 'Carry them in your arms,' as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you pledged to their forefathers? (vs. 12)

I am not able to carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. (vs. 14)

If this is how you are going to treat me, I beg you, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your sight—and do not let me suffer in my wretchedness. (vs. 15)

The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand in number, yet you have said, “I will give them meat so that they may eat for a whole month.” ²²Shall the flocks and herds be slaughtered for them in order to satisfy them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them in order that they may have a sufficient amount of meat? (vs. 21-22.) Moses is asking, You, O Lord, have promised meat to satisfy all these people, but how will this be accomplished?

Whereas the LORD was angered by the peoples' complaint, He graciously answers Moses' concerns. In response to Moses' protest that he is not able to cope with

the task of caring for this vast multitude of people, the LORD promises to supply him with fellow-workers whom He will anoint with His Holy Spirit (vs. 16-17.) In response to Moses' legitimate question as to how the people shall be supplied with sufficient meat, the LORD assures Moses that He is able (vs. 23.) Moses accepts the answer given by the LORD, trusting in Him and showing that trust by confidently reporting to the people what the LORD will do (vs. 24.)

Why does the LORD respond in a completely different way towards Moses than He did with regard to the people of Israel? The people were dissatisfied with the LORD's provision and stubbornly were insisting on their own way, determined to whine and nag and cry until they got what they wanted, refusing to accept what the LORD had ordained for them at the present time. Moses, on the other hand, is desperately trying to gain support in accepting God's will so that he might carry out the divine will, and he is trying to understand what God is doing.

Don't entertain a spirit of self-pity and complaint, but by all means do bring your concerns to the LORD. Note the Psalmist's prayer, *"Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. ²From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I, ³for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe"* (Psl. 61:1-3); as well as the invitation and promise of God: *"call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me"* (Psl.50:15.) The Apostle Peter exhorts us to *"humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, (so that he may exalt you at the appointed time), ⁷by casting all your cares upon him, because he cares for you"* (1 Pet. 5:6-7.)

Conclusion

Remember our illustration, featuring little Billy and his desire to have a Green Bay Packers' jacket—his whining and crying and refusal to take "No" for an answer. Have we ever acted like him? Is there some area of your life in which you are acting like him right now?

That is the way the people of Israel acted. When they wailed in self-pity and complaint the LORD gave them what they demanded—and He also gave them something more: *"While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of Jehovah was aroused against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague"* (Num. 11:33.)

Do not entertain a spirit of self-pity and complaint against the LORD, or else you may provoke His righteous indignation and cause Him to take action against you. On the contrary, thank Him for His present provisions and confidently trust Him to supply His good blessings in His good time: *"Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you"* (Psl. 84:11-12.)