

## **Journey to the Promise: The Power of Complaining**

**Dr. John Carmichael**

[Num 21:4-10 NASB95] 4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. 5 The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." 6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery [serpent,] and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live." 9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived. 10 Now the sons of Israel moved out and camped in Oboth.

- Complaining is a common response to discomfort, dissatisfaction, or difficulty.
- In Numbers 21:4-10, the Israelites fall into the trap of complaining despite God's provision and guidance. Some have suggested that this is the 15<sup>th</sup> time of complaining.
- This passage teaches us that complaining has consequences but also shows us that God's provision is the cure.
- Unable to cross Edomite territory, Israel had to go around, which meant turning back towards the Red Sea (and this in the middle of the fortieth year). Impatience gave way to open rebellion once more and contempt for the manna which God had provided was again voiced. (Naylor, New Bible Commentary)
- In fact, to go around the Edomites, they had to turn back towards the wilderness and away from Canaan. They had a reason to be discouraged but they had no excuse for their discouragement. (Guzik)

**What do Christians need to understand about complaining while on the journey to the promise?**

**Here are three important things to understand about complaining while on the journey to the promise.**

### **I. The Sin of Complaining (Numbers 21:4-5)**

#### **a. Dissatisfaction with God's Path**

- i. The Israelites grew impatient on the way to the Promised Land.
- ii. They complained about the journey and the provision (manna).
- iii. [Phl 2:14 NASB95] 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing;
- iv. Complaining often arises from impatience and a lack of trust in God's timing.

#### **b. The Danger of Forgetting God's Faithfulness**

- i. Despite God's miraculous provision, they despised the "worthless bread."
- ii. They failed to remember how God brought them out of slavery.
- iii. [Psa 106:25 NASB95] 25 But grumbled in their tents; They did not listen to the voice of the LORD.
- iv. Complaining stems from a forgetfulness of past blessings and miracles.

### **II. The Consequences of Complaining (Numbers 21:6)**

#### **a. God's Judgment Through Serpents**

- i. God sent fiery serpents among the people, and many died.
- ii. The consequence was immediate and severe, reflecting God's intolerance of ungratefulness.

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- iii. [1Co 10:9 NASB95] 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents.
- iv. Persistent complaining brings spiritual consequences, sometimes manifesting in physical challenges.

### **b. Complaining Damages Relationships**

- i. Complaining created division among the people and alienated them from Moses.
- ii. [Pro 21:19 NASB95] 19 It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman.
- iii. Complaining breeds conflict and undermines unity within the Body of Christ.

## **III. The Cure for Complaining: Looking to God (Numbers 21:7-9)**

### **a. Repentance Brings Healing**

- i. The people admitted their sin and asked Moses to intercede.
- ii. God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole.
- iii. [2Ch 7:14 NASB95] 14 and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land.
- iv. The first step toward overcoming a complaining spirit is to repent and seek God's help.

### **b. Looking to the Savior Brings Deliverance**

- i. Those who looked at the bronze serpent were healed.
- ii. This foreshadowed Christ being lifted up for our sins.
- iii. [Jhn 3:14-15 NASB95] 14 "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.
- iv. Turning our eyes from our problems to Jesus brings spiritual healing and perspective.

### **c. If this new generation was capable of deeper sin (such as openly complaining against the Lord in Numbers 21:5), they also have hearts softer and quicker to repent — they quickly humble themselves before the Lord and Moses.**

- **Complaining is not just a harmless habit; it is a sin that reveals a heart of ingratitude.**
- **God does not overlook our complaints, but He offers a remedy through repentance and looking to Christ.**
- **Today, God calls us to turn from complaining and fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.**