

Exodus 16:1-21 • The Grumbling Game

Introduction

Chapters 13-18 record the exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt, an event that began in chapter 12, verses 33-41. By chapter 16, the Hebrews have crossed the Red Sea and watched the pursuit of Pharaoh turn into a punishment by God for Egypt's treatment of His chosen people. Now the Hebrews are facing the reality of wandering in a strange land, a hostile and harsh wilderness of which they have little knowledge. They have little in the way of possessions and only enough food and water for a few days. They suddenly find themselves ill-prepared, alone, scared, and, in spite of what they witnessed crossing the Red Sea, wondering if they had put too much faith in one man.

It didn't take long for the grumbling to begin.

¹Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt. ²The whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³The sons of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the LORD'S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

[Read v.1-3]

Q: This is not the first time grumbling has taken place. When did it occur even earlier?

A: See 15:22-25 below, three day's journey into the wilderness. The place was called Marah, meaning "bitterness." This means that the water was probably poisonous. That God instructed Moses to throw "a tree" into the waters is a type of cross. It is the cross of Christ that turns the unpalatable into the palatable, the bitter into sweet. Note, too, that it was three days into the journey. Not only is three days the limit for a human being to go without water, it is also the amount of time Christ spent in the grave after the cross.

Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. When they came to Marah, they could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore it was named Marah. So the people grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Then he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a tree; and he threw it into the waters, and the waters became sweet. There He made for them a statute and regulation, and there He tested them.

Exodus 15:22-25

Q: How does the complaint of 16:1-3 differ from the first complaint? What is the same about the two grumbings?

A: First, the Hebrews are 4-6 weeks into their journey. They are running out of food. The maximum amount of time a person can go without food is about 30 days. This time, instead of water, the Hebrews are grumbling about the food, for they are hungry. The two events are similar in that Moses (and in the second case, Aaron) is the focal point of their anger.

Q: How are the claims of their discontent not in sync with reality?

- First, they easily forget how hard was their life in Egypt. It is unlikely that they had pots full of meat and "bread to the full."
- Second, they state that it would have been better to die at the hands of Pharaoh than to exist in the present conditions (free from enslavement).
- Third, they accuse Moses of intentionally trying to kill them (cf. 14:11-12).

[Continued on the next page.]

Q: What is the primary emotion driving the grumbling in both these events? What does God want the Hebrews to do in regard to this primal emotion?

A: Fear—fear of Pharaoh, fear of the unknown, fear of not knowing what’s going to happen next, fear of starvation. God wants the Hebrews to learn to fear **Him** more than Pharaoh, more than their circumstances, more even than their own fate.

Q: Do you think the people were prone to grumble before they left Egypt, and, if so, how has the focus of their grumbling changed?

A: It is highly probable that the people grumbled day in and day out against the Egyptians and the oppression to which they were subject. They have now simply changed the direction of their grumbling to their own leaders, rather than the Egyptian leadership. (This also tells us that grumbling can become a habit, a way of coping, even a way of life.)

Application: *Why do leaders often suffer the brunt of people’s grumbling? What are some issues about which you are currently grumbling? Is the grumbling associated with the perception that leaders make your life or workplace more difficult or unbearable? What is the lesson God is trying to teach the Hebrews, and how does that lesson apply to your own life and living or working situation?*

[Read v.4-8]

⁴Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction. ⁵On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.”

⁶So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, “At evening you will know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; ⁷and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD; and what are we, that you grumble against us?”

⁸Moses said, “This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.”

Q: Against whom does Moses say the people are grumbling?

A: Verse 8: “Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.” Moses warns the people clearly that they had better be careful, for their grumblings are not so much against Moses and Aaron as against the Lord Himself. In fact, Moses twice asks the question, “What are we?” meaning that he and Aaron are nothing; that God Himself is in charge and they are just His spokesmen.

Q: In verse 4, God states that on the sixth day the people are to gather twice as much as on the other days. What is God preparing the Hebrews for, and why is this unique to their former living situation? (See 16:22-26 below).

A: God is preparing for the introduction of the Sabbath, the keeping of which will be a “test” for them. This is unique to the Hebrews, and remains unique to Israel to this day. The only life they have known is to work seven days a week. That a day would be set aside for rest and devoted to worship exclusively would be unheard of.

Now on the sixth day they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, then he said to them, “This is what the Lord meant: Tomorrow is a sabbath observance, a holy sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.” So they put it aside until morning, as Moses had ordered, and it did not become foul nor was there any worm in it. Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field. “Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the sabbath, there will be none.”

Exodus 16:22-26

Application: *In what ways does this occurrence of grumbling resemble complaints or criticism against the pastor or leadership of your local church? What are the similarities and what are the differences? After that issue has been*

decided, ask the question, “Is grumbling in a local church ever acceptable behavior?” In what ways have you grumbled against the leadership of your church, and what should you do about it?

[Read v.9-21]

⁹Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.’”

¹⁰It came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. ¹¹And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹²“I have heard the grumblings of the sons of Israel; speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

¹³So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. ¹⁴When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground.

¹⁵When the sons of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

And Moses said to them, “It is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.

¹⁶This is what the LORD has commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in his tent.’”

¹⁷The sons of Israel did so, and some gathered much and some little. ¹⁸When they measured it with an omer, he who had gathered much had no excess, and he who had gathered little had no lack; every man gathered as much as he should eat.

¹⁹Moses said to them, “Let no man leave any of it until morning.”

²⁰But they did not listen to Moses, and some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul; and Moses was angry with them. ²¹They gathered it morning by morning, every man as much as he should eat; but when the sun grew hot, it would melt.

Q: What unnerving fact does verse 9 tell us about our grumblings?

A: They are heard by the Lord, even if said in private or in confidence.

Q: How does God provide for the Hebrews, and on whose terms does He make the provision in spite of their grumbling?

A: God provides “*manna*” which is translated, “the thing which” came from heaven. Verse 31 describes the manna as “*like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers with honey.*” Verse 35 states that the manna sustains the “*sons of Israel...forty years*” and stopped when “*they came to the border of the land of Canaan.*” The terms of receiving the manna is that it is to be gathered daily and that which is not gathered is not to be used. Twice as much is to be gathered on the sixth day so that they do not have to gather it on the seventh, the Sabbath.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread.

[Read Matthew 6:11]

Q: How does this request in the Lord's Prayer relate to manna?

A: Jesus is stating that all we need is what we receive from day to day; that God is capable of providing for our basic needs in the same manner in which He provided for the needs of the Hebrews. Therefore, there is no cause for grumbling or for worrying

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Matthew 6:25

[Read John 6:26-35]

Q: In what way is Jesus calling Himself the "bread of life"?

A: He is relating His own coming to earth in the same manner in which the manna came "from heaven." God sent the manna; God sent the Son. However, He makes the clear distinction that those who ate manna in the wilderness were hungry the next day. However, he who "comes to Me" will never hunger again.

²⁶Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. ²⁷Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal."

²⁸Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

²⁹Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

³⁰So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform?" ³¹Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'"

³²Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world."

³⁴Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread."

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.

Overall Application

- *In what ways do we find ourselves grumbling about what we don't have instead of being grateful for what we do?*
- *Why should grumbling never be a part of the Christian's walk?*
- *Is the source of our grumbling dependence on our possessions or on satisfying our earthly needs instead of relying upon Christ for all that we need? And, is He Himself not sufficient?*
- *Do you ever live in fear that your basic needs will not be met? What has Christ promised to provide for all those who "come to Me."*