



GRUMBLING AT GOD

Exodus 15:22–17:7

Trials reveal what is in our hearts. Israel's tests in the wilderness brought out dissatisfaction, bitterness, ingratitude, and a complaining spirit. When we learn to be thankful and trust the Lord in all things, our trials will not produce grumbling but peace and assurance.

I remember learning a little song when I was a child; the lyrics go like this:

*“Oh, they grumble on Monday, Tuesday,
Wednesday, grumble on Thursday too;
grumble on Friday, Saturday, Sunday,
grumble the whole week through.”*

The title of that song is “Grumblers.” That had become the national anthem of the Israelites here in Exodus chapter 15, and it sets the tone of this passage. It says here in verse 22:

*Then Moses made Israel set out
from the Red Sea, and they went*



Sinai Desert area

*into the wilderness of Shur. They
went three days in the wilderness
and found no water.*

Now let's not be too hard on them here. Just imagine hiking through the wilderness with some two million other people. The first day, you feel the heat of the sun and the sand, and the wind whips at your body. The little water you have is getting warm and starting to run out. The second day you start getting anxious for a supply of fresh water; and on the third day, you hear the good news that there's water up ahead. But then there's shattering disappointment. Verse 23 says: “They could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter.”

The Israelites arrive at what we would call a small lake of water, but they discover the water is contaminated—it's stagnant and bitter. So now what do they do? Verse 24 tells us, “The people grumbled against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’”

You're going to find the word *grumble* nine times in this passage we're studying. The people began grumbling on Monday and grumbled all the week through.

Moses responds in verse 25 by crying out to the Lord, and we read, “The LORD showed him a log, and he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.”



What’s God teaching the Israelites here? He’s teaching them to trust Him. Throwing a log into the water isn’t going to purify it at all, but when Moses obeyed the Lord and threw that log in, the Lord made the water “sweet.”

By the way, the only solution to your grumbling—and mine too—is realizing that God is in control and capable of providing what we need. Verse 27 offers even more proof of that: “Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy date palm trees, and they encamped there by the water.”

They reach an oasis here, following a very difficult time. Think about it: God took the Israelites to the bitter water where their faith was tested and they grumbled and failed the test. Then He gave them water when Moses obeyed His instruction. And now, the Lord leads them to an oasis where they have more than enough. That, my friend, is the grace of God, who lavishes His grace upon us (Ephesians 1:7-8).

Now we come to another stopover in Exodus, at chapter 16. It’s been a month since the Lord delivered them from Egypt, and we read here in verse 2, “The whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.”

Here they go again; so what’s the problem now? Well, they’ve run out of food. Someone calculated it would take four thousand tons of food every day to feed these two million Israelites. If you boxed all that food onto a train, the train would stretch two miles. That’s just for one day!

The Lord hears the grumbling and again responds with incredible grace. He says to Moses, “Say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread.’” (verse 12). And what happens?

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like

thing, fine as frost on the ground.

(verses 13-14)

God in his grace, sends over a huge flock of quail, and then He sends down a special kind of “bread,” which the people call “manna” (verse 31), meaning “what is it?”

Now the critics of the Bible say that these quail just happened to be migrating from Africa and became exhausted and were unable to fly more than three feet above the ground. They also claim that the manna was the excretion of little insects. Listen, there’s no way Moses is going to talk two million people into eating bug droppings—frankly, that would have been a miracle!

Let me tell you something. The critics have no explanation for verse 35, which reads: “The people of Israel ate the manna forty years . . . till they came to the border of the land of Canaan.” God miraculously provided literally *tons* of manna—train-car loads of provision—every morning for forty years!

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Now let’s go to chapter 17 of Exodus, where we see the people grumbling a third time. They’re out of water again, and so we read in verse 2:

The people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to



*drink.” And Moses said to them,
“Why do you quarrel with me?
Why do you test the LORD?”*

The Lord is obviously listening in, and He speaks to Moses:

“Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. (verses 5-6)

Beloved, God is bringing these people to the question of the ages here, and verse 7 spells it out for us: “Is the LORD among us or not?”

That’s the bottom line in life, isn’t it? Is God really alive and powerful or not? Is He really involved in your life or somewhere off in the universe? You see, how you answer that question will determine whether you grumble or you become grateful as you trust in the sovereign timing and provision and power of God.

What are some ways to stop grumbling and start becoming grateful? How do you develop that kind of attitude? Well, let me give you two key action steps.

The first action step is to *remember*. It’s a very important word that occurs more than two hundred times in Scripture. You will cultivate a grateful spirit when you remember what God has done for you—big and small.

Grumblers have very short memories; they can’t seem

¹ Thoro Harris, “Grumblers,” 1925. Public domain.

to remember anything good. Grumblers dwell on what they don’t have and seem to forget what they do have.

The second action step is *practice*. Colossians 3:15 commands us to practice being thankful. And the verb indicates it’s to be continual. It’s not something you do at Thanksgiving and then you’re done giving thanks.

Like anything in life worth doing well, being thankful is going to take practice. How about starting today by thanking God for the gospel—for the salvation that was given to you as a gift when you believed in God’s Son as your Savior. You are saved and forgiven and heading for heaven.

Start there. Practice thanking God for that. Say it out loud when the devil says, “It ain’t so.” When things get rough, begin there. Say, “I’m part of God’s family through faith in Jesus Christ. God Himself says I am. And because of that, I can always be thankful.”

Listen, let’s change our tune. Let’s sing, “Giving thanks on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, giving thanks on Thursday too; giving thanks on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, giving thanks the whole week through.”

Why do you think the Israelites reacted as they did to their trials? What is at the heart of your own complaining?

What do God’s responses to Israel’s trials tell you about them? How should this help shape your own response to hardships?

What causes you to be less thankful than you should? What are some practical steps you can take to combat ingratitude?

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