

Challenging The Lord's Goodness

By

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Introduction

Have you ever been in an uncomfortable or undesirable situation for a long time, maybe a demanding job, living on a tight budget, dealing with health issues or stressful relationships? And you've seen the hand of God in your life in the past, but the current situation makes you wonder, "Where is God in all this?" Doesn't He care?" You may find yourself "grumbling and complaining" throughout the day and even questioning His goodness. "If the Lord was really good, He'd do something to get me out of this...now!"

The Israelites, under the leadership of Moses, had left Egypt and spent about 11 months in the desert. Their time to enter the Promised Land was near. All this time, God had fed the people with manna. With all the wandering, eating the same food every day, and a longing to be settled in their own land, Israel began to complain. Their attitude eventually caused them to miss out on the very blessing of God for which they longed.

This lesson will teach us to have a different perspective on our difficult situations and help keep us from losing our "promised land" blessings.

Scriptures Used In This Lesson

Numbers 9:15 – 23

Numbers 11

Isaiah 55:8 – 13

Background

Israel had been delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God 11 months earlier. They were camped at Mount Sinai preparing to leave to move closer to the Promised Land. The Lord had been their guide through the desert. His presence was seen daily as a cloud over the Tent of the Testimony, which contained the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written. At night the cloud

appeared as fire. When the cloud rose above the tent and moved, the people moved and followed the cloud. When the cloud rested, Israel rested. (Read Numbers 9:15 – 23 for more information).

For 11 months they had eaten manna, a type of seed that miraculously appeared every morning except on the Sabbath day. From this seed, they could cook it in a pot or grind it up to make bread or cakes. The year was about 1406 BC.

Tired of the Same Ol' Same Ol'

Read Numbers 11:4 – 6. In these verses we see that the “rabble” started complaining about the food they were eating (manna). The “rabble” referred to a non-Israelites mixed group of people who followed the Israelites out of Egypt. Notice in verse 4 how the complaining spread among the Israelites. Discontent spread from those who were not God’s children to those who were.

Have you ever been in a situation where you became discontent with something or someone only after someone else influenced you? To a large degree, discontentment is a state of mind, not necessarily based on the facts of a situation. The goal of many television commercials is to make you dissatisfied with your looks, your hamburger, or your car so you will go out and spend money on something new. Advertisers are not concerned about your welfare; they are not interested in helping you. Their goal is to get you to buy something so they can make money. And many of them do this by creating dissatisfaction in you.

The creation of dissatisfaction can be direct or subtle. Some television commercials directly point out the shortcomings of a competitor’s product or services you may be using. Some commercials just show you “the good life”. You will see people younger than you, with whiter, straighter teeth, more muscular build, apparently happier than you. Both types of commercials send the same message, “Be dissatisfied with what you’ve got; go buy our stuff. After you buy our stuff, you’ll be happy.”

Discuss some commercials that directly or subtly tried to sew the seed of dissatisfaction.

Did some of them influence your buying decisions? Why or why not? Can you think of some times when you became dissatisfied with something due to another person’s ulterior or hidden motives, like jealousy or envy, or covet (they wanted what you had), or they were trying to harm you? Have you ever ended any relationships that was the result of an

outside influence, that now you regret ending? How did you become dissatisfied, i.e., what was your area(s) of weakness?

Key Point: Negative talk spreads discontent, even among God's children.

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Notice in verse 5, how the Israelites romanticized their experience in Egypt. First of all, it is unlikely that slaves ate meat, especially to the extent that they could romanticize about it. In part verse 5 says:

"We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost..." (NIV) (emphasis is mine)

The cost of the fish that Israel did happen to eat was slavery. The Egyptians had to feed the Israelites some food or else they would have all died and the Egyptians would have been without slaves. So Israel was deceiving itself.

Key Point: Dissatisfaction can cause us to deceive ourselves.

Verse 6 is really a rejection of God. How's that so? Let's take a look at what's underneath a rejection a provision of God and what's really being said.

When we reject a provision that is clearly from the hand of God, we are saying:

- What you provided is not enough; it is insufficient at this time.
- You really don't know what I need
- You can't provide for me. You are not that powerful
- You are not as capable as I thought
- I know better than You
- I can get my needs met better elsewhere
- You don't have my best interest in mind
- I question your love for me; if you really loved me, you would do this...

This may seem like a lot, but you have to remember Who you are talking about. God is all powerful, all knowing, is everywhere. He is all loving. He is the creator of all things. To not trust Him or His judgment is an insult. It would be like a two-year-old not trusting the judgment of their thirty-two-year-old parents. The two-year-old knows what they want and when they want it and when they are not happy. But the parent who has three decades more experience in life knows what's best for the child. The parents have a long-term perspective that the child doesn't have. The parents have a love for the child that the child doesn't have the capacity to fully understand. So it is with us (the two-year-old) and God (the parent).

Key Point: To reject a gift or provision of God is a rejection of Him. You are in effect challenging His goodness to you.

Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted something so bad, but you were blocked from getting it? And later was glad that you didn't get it? Have you ever gotten something that you fought to get and ignored several warning signs that later you regretted? What drove you in these instances, i.e., what was motivating you to do the things you did? Why did you ignore the warning signs? Have you learned anything from that experience? If not, why not? Did you ever think about God beyond just blaming Him for not getting what you wanted?

Poor Moses

Read Numbers 11:10 – 15. Here we read how the attitude of the people affected Moses. Remember by this time Moses had a personal encounter with the Lord at Mount Horeb (the burning bush experience) before approaching Pharaoh to free the Israelites (Exodus 3). He had witnessed multiple miracles of God which led to the release of the people from Egypt. His relationship and faith in God were strong. He had also experienced 11 months of “moaning and groaning”. It appears that he and reached his limit with them. Any time you ask God to put you to death, you are stressed out (verse 15).

Read verses 16 – 17. Notice how God first deals with the situation: He gets some help for Moses. He instructs Moses to get seventy elders who will help him “carry the burden of the people”. But verse 17 teaches us a key lesson in dealing with stress. God was going to “take of the Spirit” that was on Moses and “put the Spirit on them”. We can't deal effectively with the stresses of life on our own, we need the Spirit of God. It is only by the Spirit of God that we can make wise decisions, keep our emotions in check,

and persevere through the situation. Without the guidance of His Spirit, you may find yourself asking God to “put you to death”, figuratively or literally.

Key Point: It is only by living by God’s Spirit that we can effectively and successfully handle stressful situations.

You Want It, You Got It

Read Numbers 11:18 – 20. God declared that He would give the people what they wanted most – meat. They would not only eat it for a day, but for a whole month until they were sick of it. Now why did God do it this way? Verse 20 provides the answer:

“...because you have rejected the Lord, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, ‘Why did we ever leave Egypt?’” (NIV)

In effect the Lord was saying, “When you reject what I have done for you and provided for you, you reject Me. You are not trusting Me, My judgment, power, faithfulness or love for you.” God took their rejection personally. It goes back to what we learned earlier, when you reject what God has done or provided, you are saying:

- What you provided is not enough; it is insufficient at this time.
- You really don’t know what I need
- You can’t provide for me. You are not that powerful
- You are not as capable as I thought
- I know better than You
- I can get my needs met better elsewhere
- You don’t have my best interest in mind
- I question your love for me; if you really loved me, you would do this...

If a teenager came home one day and told these things to their parents, how do you think they would feel after they had sacrificed for 17 years for their child’s benefit?

“Is The Lord’s Arm Too Short?”

Read verses 21 – 23 and verses 31 – 35. Verses 21 and 22 could have easily gone under the **Poor Moses** section, but we can see that Moses is still stressed and distraught. He still feels the burden and in effect asks the Lord how he will provide meat for so many people...for a month.

I smiled at God's response, "Is the Lord's arm too short?", i.e., "Am I not capable enough to provide what I said I would give them?" Verses 31 – 32 tell us how the Lord brought in quail to satisfy the people's craving for meat. The "ten homers" referred to in verse 32 is about 60 bushels. 60 bushels is about 480 gallons. So, if each person picked up their quota of quail and put them in gallon sized containers, they would have had at least 480 containers of meat. The Lord did more than supplied their needs. He proved that "His arm was *not* too short".

Now why did God do things this way? Here are three reasons:

1. He wanted to punish the people for rejecting Him.
2. He wanted to demonstrate that He was still all powerful and in control.
3. He wanted to show that they could trust Him, even when they could not understand His ways.

I think items 2 and 3 above are most important for us. When we are in the midst of an unpleasant situation but can point to the hand of God working in our lives, we need to remember these two important points. God will never leave us nor forsake us.

Summary

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is found in Isaiah 55: 8 – 13. We must remember Who is in ultimate control – Someone Who has ways that are *far* above what we can think or imagine and Who's love for us knows no bounds. If we keep this in mind, then we can endure (without grumbling) difficult situations. And notice verses 12 – 13. If we persevere, in faith, we will go out in joy and see the blessings of our "promised land". He is forever faithful.