

The Complaining Israelites

(Exodus 15 - 17)

Introduction

Do words like these ever come out of your mouth?

- “Why can’t I have it? Everybody else has one!”
- “I want my own room; I hate sharing a room with someone else!”
- “I wish I could be taller; I hate being the shortest one in my class!”

Do you ever find yourself complaining? Do you let others know that you are displeased or dissatisfied with what you’ve got in life? Some of us are quick to complain when things don’t go the way we think they should. [Teacher, discuss some things that children may complain about — home, parents, appearance.]

The people of Israel had just seen God do some amazing things to bring them out of bondage in Egypt. Surely they could follow God without complaint, knowing He was taking care of them — couldn’t they?

Opening Prayer

Lord, we love You and want to know You better. We want to understand just how awesome and powerful and incredibly loving and caring You are. Open the eyes of our heart this morning so that we might see You more clearly. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Memory Verse

...be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you.” (Hebrews 13:5)

Lesson

We’ve been studying about how God worked many powerful signs and wonders in the lives of the Israelites. He had sent the plagues to

the Egyptians and finally Pharaoh let the people go. Then Pharaoh had a change of mind and chased after the children of Israel. But God parted the Red Sea and they escaped. Now they were ready to go to the land that God had promised them.

After all these fantastic miracles, did the people trust that God would continue to guide them and care for them and provide for their needs? Let’s pick up the story in Exodus 15:22...

The First Complaint: no water!

Exodus 15:22

Then Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea, and they moved out into the desert of Shur. They traveled in this desert for three days without finding any water.

The Israelites had to cross the wilderness to get to the Promised Land. It was very big and totally barren. It was mostly sand and stone. They had been so anxious to leave Egypt they hadn’t prepared themselves for just how big and barren it would be out there. After three days in the wilderness without water they began to worry and complain. Then, they came to a pool of water.

Exodus 15:23-24

When they came to the oasis of Marah, the water was too bitter to drink. So they called the place Marah (which means “bitter”). Then the people complained and turned against Moses. “What are we going to drink?” they demanded.

The name of this lake was *Marah*, which means “bitterness.” After seeing God open the Red Sea for them to escape from their enemy, the Israelites should not have doubted that God would take care of their every need. But instead they complained.

God has provided everything you need in life; maybe not everything you want, but everything you need. Complaining is sin. It’s like slapping God in the face and saying, “What You’ve given me isn’t good enough!” When you complain, you are saying that He doesn’t know how to care for you or meet your needs.

You please God when you show contentment in your life. His word says we are to “do all things without complaining” (Philippians 2:14). God wants you to be satisfied with His care for you.

From their complaining it was clear that the Israelites were not content with God’s care for them. So, Moses cried out to the Lord.

Exodus 15:25a

So Moses cried out to the LORD for help, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. Moses threw it into the water, and this made the water good to drink.

After Moses prayed to God, He showed him a tree and told Moses to throw it into the water. The bitter taste disappeared and the water became drinkable.

At first the Israelites couldn’t drink the water because it was like acid. God wanted to teach the people a lesson. This water is a picture of the unbelieving, grumbling attitude of the people who would not trust God. The tree is a picture of the cross that Jesus was crucified on. Can you see the lesson? When you put Jesus into your attitudes they turn sweet!

The Israelites traveled on. Pretty soon the people ran out of the food they’d brought from Egypt and they began to worry again. Soon they were complaining.

The Second Complaint: no food!

Exodus 16:2-3

There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron. “If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt,” they moaned. “There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death.”

So you see, even after the miracle of throwing the tree into the bitter waters of Marah to sweeten them, they were complaining about the

lack of food. How quickly they forgot how faithful God had been to them all along.

The people complained and said they wanted to go back to Egypt! But, they didn’t really want to be slaves back in Egypt again; they just wanted life to get easier. In the pressure of the moment, they were only thinking of the quickest way of escape from a tough situation.

When pressure comes your way, don’t look for the easy way out. Instead, think about God’s power and wisdom to help you deal with the situation. Maybe He’s trying to teach you something! Maybe He’s trying to teach you to trust Him in all situations.

The children of Israel never thought of asking God to help them. But God spoke to Moses...

Exodus 16:4-5

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.”

Exodus 16:11-12

Then the LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the Israelites’ complaints. Now tell them, ‘In the evening you will have meat to eat, and in the morning you will have all the bread you want. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’”

God promised to meet the Hebrew’s need for food in the desert, but He decided to test their obedience. God wanted to see if they would obey his detailed instructions. He told them to only gather enough for each day, no more and no less. They were to eat it all and not save any overnight for the next day. And, on the sixth day, gather enough for two days so that they might rest on the seventh.

We learn to trust Him as our Lord only by following His exact instructions. Even when we don’t understand them.

Did the Israelites follow His instructions?

Exodus 16:13-15

That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground. The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was. And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you to eat.

They called the bread from heaven *Manna*, meaning, "What is it?"

Let's look ahead to see more about what it looked and tasted like.

Exodus 16:31

The Israelites called the food manna. It was white like coriander seed, and it tasted like honey wafers.

[Teacher, bring in some coriander seed and some sweet wafers for a taste experiment.]

See also Numbers 11:7-9 [Teacher, read....]

The manna looked like small coriander seeds, and it was pale yellow like gum resin. The people would go out and gather it from the ground. They made flour by grinding it with hand mills or pounding it in mortars. Then they boiled it in a pot and made it into flat cakes. These cakes tasted like pastries baked with olive oil. The manna came down on the camp with the dew during the night.

Did the Israelites follow God's instructions about gathering and eating the manna?

Exodus 16:19-20

Then Moses told them, "Do not keep any of it until morning." But some of them didn't listen and kept some of it until morning. But by then it was full of maggots and had a terrible smell. Moses was very angry with them.

Exodus 16:23-24

He told them, "This is what the LORD commanded: Tomorrow will be a day of complete rest, a holy Sabbath day set apart for the LORD. So bake or boil as much as you want today, and set aside what is left for tomorrow." So they put some aside until morning, just as Moses had commanded. And in the morning the leftover food was wholesome and good, without maggots or odor.

But did everybody listen to the instructions?

Exodus 16:27

Some of the people went out anyway on the seventh day, but they found no food.

This is unbelievable to us! Why didn't they obey? They underestimated the power of God. Their concept of God was way too small.

Look how God reacted to their stubbornness:

Exodus 16:28

The LORD asked Moses, "How long will these people refuse to obey my commands and instructions?"

God provided this bread from heaven the whole time it took them to get to the Promised Land.

Exodus 16:35

So the people of Israel ate manna for forty years until they arrived at the land where they would settle. They ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

What is the bread of heaven a picture of? (Jesus)

The Third Complaint: no water!

Did the Israelites stop complaining? No! They set off on their journey again and, again there was no water for the people to drink.

Exodus 17:3

But tormented by thirst, they continued to argue with Moses. "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? Are you trying to kill us, our children, and our livestock with thirst?"

Moses goes to the Lord in prayer...

Exodus 17:4

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What should I do with these people? They are ready to stone me!"

And the Lord answers Moses...

Exodus 17:5-6

The LORD said to Moses, "Walk out in front of the people. Take your staff, the one you used when you struck the water of the Nile, and call some of the elders of Israel to join you. I will stand before you on the rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come gushing out. Then the people will be able to drink." So Moses struck the rock as he was told, and water gushed out as the elders looked on. (See also Numbers 20:8-13)

The striking of this rock to provide life-giving water was to be a picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ would come to do many years later. The Bible refers to Jesus as a rock (1 Corinthians 10:4). The water is a picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said,

On the last day, the climax of the festival, Jesus stood and shouted to the crowds, "Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the Scriptures declare, 'Rivers of living water will flow from his heart.'" (When he said "living water," he was speaking of the Spirit, who would be given to everyone believing in him. But the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet entered into his glory.) (John 7:37-39)

Moses' staff is a type or picture of the cross of Jesus. When Moses struck the rock it was a picture of Jesus being crucified or 'struck down' for the sins of the world to provide everlasting life for all. Notice that Moses only had to strike the rock one time. This is important to

remember because as we will read in a few weeks, the Israelites come back to this very same rock about 40 years later, run out of water and complain to Moses again. That time God tells Moses to only speak to the rock. You see Jesus only had to be stricken once for all. After that anyone who wants the power of the Holy Spirit need only ask for it.

God knew the people needed food and water; He planned all along to provide for their needs. But He wanted them to be content in knowing He would provide everything they needed instead of complaining about what they didn't have.

When others think of you, are they reminded of your complaining, or do they think of you as someone who is content? Being content is a godly attitude. It's being sure of the fact that God knows your needs and will always be faithful to you.

When you are tempted to complain, think about all the ways God cares for you and say a "thank-You" prayer to Him instead. Ask Him to help you be content. Remember today's memory verse,

"...be satisfied with what you have. For God has said, "I will never fail you. I will never abandon you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Closing Prayer

Father, we don't want to be complaining-type people. Help us whenever we are tempted to grumble, to get our eyes off what we think we don't have and help us to see all that we do have. Give us thankful hearts this morning for all You have done and all that You promise to do for us. We love You and never want to forget how wonderful You are to us. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

[Teacher let each of the children thank God for something.]

Learning Activities

Craft Corner

Game Center

Use the following review questions in a game of your choice:

1. In our lesson this morning the Israelites complained about three things. What were they? (No water, no food, and no water, again.)
2. After the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, why did the people panic when they ran out of water? (They had a limited understanding of who God is; they doubted His ability to care for them and meet their needs.)
3. What happened when they got to the waters of Marah? (The water was bitter and the people could not drink it. They panicked and began to complain to Moses.)
4. Does God provide everything you want in life? (No, but He does provide all that you need.)
5. Why is complaining a sin? (When you complain, you are saying that God doesn't know how to care for you or meet your needs.)
6. What did God tell Moses to do about the bitter waters at Marah? (Throw a tree in the bitter waters.)
7. When Moses threw the tree into the bitter water, what was that a picture of? (The water is a picture of the unbelieving, grumbling attitude of people who would not trust God. The tree is a picture of the cross that Jesus was crucified on. When you put Jesus into your attitudes they turn sweet!)
8. From today's lesson, what was the second thing the children of Israel complained about? (The lack of food.)
9. Why did the people complain and say that they longed to go back to Egypt? (The people were hungry and they remembered all the food and water that was available to them in Egypt. And, they still didn't understand the power of God nor trust Him to provide for their needs.)
10. When you get into a tough situation is it best to look for the quickest way out of it? (No, it's best to follow God's leading which may not be the quickest way out; just the best.)
11. Why did they call the bread from heaven, Manna? (It means, 'What is it?' They didn't know what it was.)
12. What was Manna like? (It was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.)
13. God promised to meet the people's need for food, but he decided to test their obedience. What were God's detailed instructions about the manna? (He told them to only gather enough for each day, no more and no less. They were to eat it all and not save any overnight for the next day. And, on the sixth day, gather enough for two days so that they might rest on the seventh.)
14. What happened when some of the people didn't follow God's instructions about the manna? (Some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank.)
15. Are we supposed to follow God's instructions even when we don't understand them? (Yes!) How about our parent's instructions? (Yes!)
16. Why did God tell the people to gather enough for two days on the sixth day of the week? (So they could rest on the seventh and spend time worshiping God and meditating on Him and fellowshiping with their friends.)

17. What happened when some of the people went out on the Sabbath day to gather the manna? (There wasn't any!)
18. What should you do if you are ever tempted to complain about things? (Think about all the ways God cares for you and say a "thank-You" prayer to Him instead. Ask Him to help you be content. And remember today's memory verse.)
19. From today's lesson, what was the third thing the people complained about? (No water.)
20. When there was no water, what did God tell Moses to do? (Strike the rock, and water will come out of it.)
21. What was striking the rock a picture of? (Jesus who would be struck down for the sins of the whole world to provide living water for all.)

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