

How to Whine Effectively - Part One

Now the people began complaining openly before the Lord about hardship. When the Lord heard, His anger burned, and the fire from the Lord blazed among them and consumed the outskirts of the camp. – Numbers 11:1 HCSB

The people of Israel had just been miraculously delivered from Egypt. They had been subject to systematic racism, considered second-class citizens, not unlike the “apartheid” in South Africa. Bigotry became slavery and they were forced to build Egypt’s storehouse cities. As if that wasn’t bad enough, the pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill all male Jewish babies as they were delivered. They were ostracized, persecuted, beaten, starved, enslaved and killed. The Lord graciously delivered them from this bondage through a series of amazing miracles. They no longer had to do any hard labor – all they were doing was traveling a few miles a day and pitching their tents. Their food and water was delivered to them on a daily basis. To get some perspective, imagine what it must have been like finding an appropriate campsite two-thirds the size of Rhode Island (25 miles wide and 130 miles long) for millions of people every single night!

But they began to take their blessings for granted and ingratitude deteriorated into a positive dislike for their present condition. How typically human! We are enamored by something new, only to have familiarity breed contempt. Instead of being grateful for all the many good things that God has done for us, like spoiled children we start nit-picking and whining – only happy when we are being given new toys. We feel like we deserve better; like everybody should listen to us; like we should be able to “have our say.” Arrogance! Hubris!

Notice God’s response. God became angry - very angry. In fact, He got so angry that a fire was literally kindled! We must keep in mind that though God is patient, He does not tolerate ingratitude because it is a sign of pride. God despises pride¹ because it is so hurtful. Pride makes it impossible for a man to learn new things. Pride renders a woman incapable of admitting that she is wrong.

When the Israelis whined they weren’t bringing their concerns and fears TO God. They were complaining ABOUT God. They felt they deserved better. God saw their pride and reacted as any good parent does when his child is placed in danger because of foolishness – with anger. But just as we acknowledge that kind of parental anger is driven by a love for the foolish child, so God’s anger with us is driven by His love. He doesn’t expect us to like all of what life brings our way. He doesn’t expect us to keep our fears and disappointments bottled up inside. But when we do bring them to Him, He rightfully expects a respectful and grateful attitude marked by an expectation that God our Father will take care of it.

¹ Proverbs 6:16-19