

Text: Exod. 16:1-13

Title: "Flesh for fleshly complainers"

Time: 1/3/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The Israelites of Exodus 16 find themselves between Elim (or Ayun Musa, the "Springs of Moses" on the eastern bank of the Gulf of Suez) and Mt. Sinai, in a region of the Sinai Peninsula called the Wilderness of Sin. In chapter 17 we will find them in a place called Rephidim. Moses gives us a few more geographical details about this stretch of the journey in Num. 33:10-14. There we learn that there was first an encampment along the Red Sea south of Elim. Then we also learn about stops in places called Dophkah and Alush.

In 1838 Edward Robinson, who was the Professor of Biblical Literature at Union Theological Seminary in NYC, went to the Sinai Peninsula in an attempt to trace the journey of the Israelites after the exodus to Mt. Sinai. He is remembered today as the father of biblical geography, and visitors to Jerusalem now pass under the Robinson's Arch, which leads to the southwestern part of the Temple Mount, because it is named in his honor. More recently, Egyptologist David Rohl conducted a similar expedition with many of the same findings.

Rohl notes the dead-end created on the eastern bank of the Gulf of Suez by a rocky protrusion some 48 miles south of Elim called Gebel Hammam Faraon, which means "Mountain of Pharaoh's Bath." The rocks are home to sulphurous hot-springs that pour into the Gulf. Somewhere north of that dead end, Israel camped along the Red Sea - the Bible name for all the water around the Sinai peninsula.

What is a bit unusual about what comes next on their journey, however, is that rather than going around this protrusion and continuing southward, they make a left-hand turn and go east to Dophkah and the wilderness of Sin. Rohl observes in this regard that it “suggests that he [Moses] had a mission to fulfill which required a journey through a much less hospitable landscape” (206). He goes on to explain in some detail that at this site, today called Serabit el-Khadim meaning “Cavern of the Slaves,” a number of Egyptian workers were employed in mining activity.

This site is also very important when it comes to the history of the development of the alphabet, with its Proto-Sinaitic language inscriptions. Rohl, who does not believe in the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch as our Lord Jesus did, nevertheless concludes from these inscriptions, which he dates back to the time of Joseph: “I think it is entirely possible for Moses, the literate prince of Egypt, educated by the royal nursery (*per menaut*) in the inner palace (*kap*), to have kept logs during the Israelite wanderings in the wilderness and written laws using the Proto-Sinaitic alphabetic script based on Egyptian hieroglyphs” (219).

And then Rohl says this about this biblical detour from the ordinary route to Mt. Sinai: “Why had Moses taken his people into the Wilderness of Sin rather than following the coastal route to southern Sinai? Because he needed to gather up the Hebrew and Kenite miners and copper smelters of Dophkah/Mofka(t) and neighboring Wadi el Nasb to release them from their servitude. These Semites were expert metalworkers, and their skills would be needed to provide the weapons for the pending war of conquest when the Israelites reached the Promised Land. They would also have been needed to craft the metal accoutrements for the shrine

[i.e., the tabernacle] of Yahweh, which would be built in the desert below Mount Sinai” (221).

Dr. Rohl is an agnostic who titled his book *Exodus: Myth or History?* He says over and over again that, although he denies the supernatural realities of this history, the biblical account of these events is historically reliable and truthful.

Jesus never needed a book like that to trust the historical accuracy of these accounts, nor do we. For us who are Christians, the question is not “Did this happen?” but “Since it did happen, what does it say about me?”

Unfortunately, what these historical events say about you and me this morning is that we, like the Israelites of this passage, are made up of complaining flesh. We too are complainers. This morning, I have given the message a title in honor of the quails mentioned here: “Flesh for fleshly complaining.” God provides the flesh of quails in response to a terrible sin that I want us all to take a closer look at as we examine our own heart’s temptation toward it.

I. Our fleshly complaining is forgetful (vv. 1, 6).

Illustration: *Brain fog* is a somewhat new medical term. My wife and I were having a conversation this past week on whether or not the added calories of coconut oil are worth the benefits for brain health. We both know what the experience of brain fog is like, so we are interested in combating that through our diet. For me Kimchi seems to be helpful.

Application: Brain fog is not a medical condition, but rather a term that describes symptoms that include forgetfulness. When our flesh begins to complain, it suffers from something very similar to a spiritual brain fog.

Our text explains some things that should be remembered, but they were forgotten by the complaining children of Israel. The Israelites had been able to spend weeks in Elim's refreshment, but even more important than that, they were the redeemed people of the Lord (v. 1). Amazingly, they somehow had forgotten what the Lord now needed to help them learn anew (v. 6, "you will know that Yahweh brought you from the land of Egypt.").

As I thought about the forgetfulness of our complaining flesh, I was reminded that whenever we complain for whatever reason, we do so as those whom Eph. 1:3 describes as "blessed . . . with all spiritual blessings in heavenly [things] in Christ." We forget about those blessings each time we begin to complain.

I thought too of an email I received from a brother who cares for orphans in Kenya who has had a very difficult year. He has much more to complain about than many of us, but he is not forgetful of the Lord's blessings:

"When we look back at 2020, there are many things that happened contrary to our prayers to God. Things that could have lessened our faith and trust in God. Things that could have made us doubt the control, power and authority of our Father in heaven.

"But who is God that we should doubt Him? He is the Alpha and the Omega; He is the same yesterday, today and forever. He is the one and only Creator. Our Lord is a faithful God to His faithful children. He never changes His mind. Out of His love for us, His creation, He has freely given us so many gifts that we often do not deserve, epitomized by the gift of life that He has given us through Jesus Christ. Instead of doubting our God, we should know better

that our God knows better than we do. He knows what we need and do not need for our own good.

“In 2021, I entrust my life to God. I ask God to show me what He requires of me this new year. I pray God to use me even more to bring glory to His name. I pray to God to align my 2021 resolutions with His mission and goals. I pray to subordinate self-goals and -visions to those that have been set for and through me by God Himself.

“If we live unto Him this year, He will never leave us; He will be with us in all situations. He will lift us to new blessed levels. I pray this prayer for myself, and I pray this prayer for you too.” This dear brother has remembered well that our God graciously and powerfully brought us up out of the land of our Egypt, our bondage to sin and its destruction. Remembering with him how blessed we truly are will be a sure cure for the temptation to complain.

II. The cruelty of fleshly complaining (vv. 2-3, 7-8).

Illustration: We have been focused on not spreading a contagious disease throughout 2020. We all have been forced to recognize the destructive cruelty of this virus, and our world has done its best to stop it.

Application: One detail I would like to mention about the grammar of this passage is that two forms of the verb *complain* are used in it (the niphil and the hiphil). If we follow the qere reading, the niphil is used when the narration references the complaining, and the hiphil is used when Moses or the Lord reference it.

One of the uses of the niphil is reciprocity, and its use here indicates that when the narration describes this complain-

ing, it is describing something that is being exchanged back and forth among the Israelites. It is something contagious.

Although our governor has issued no emergency orders to stop it, this is a passage about something that is not only contagious, but also very cruel. Like a deadly virus, a complaining spirit spreads leaving spiritual sickness, division, and death in its wake. I want us to see some other cruelties of the sin of complaining here.

1. Complaining is cruel because it is always an attack against the God of our blessings (vv. 2, 8). The preposition *against* follows every usage of this verb. *To complain* is *to speak against*, or what the Bible calls *gainsaying*, and Paul told Titus what must be done when people choose this course of action in a local church (Tit. 1:9-16).

2. Complaining is cruel because it makes God's blessings out to be new death rather than new life (v. 3). Those who grow up in Christian homes and are redeemed at an early age seem especially susceptible at times to this deception. The devastation of life in Egypt is easier to remember for others than it is for them. I grew up with "Christian" young people at a "Christian" school, who wished they did not have to be so "Christian."

Do you find God's will for your life a form of new death or new life? Is worship at church just a kill-joy way to ruin a Sunday morning? For true believers, what appears to the world as death is actually what makes life worth living. Jesus put it this way: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the

glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”

3. Complaining is cruel because it employs God’s blessings to curse Him (vv. 7-8). Moses’s point here is that God’s blessing Israel runs concurrently with Israel’s cursing God. In fact, the latter is dependent on the former.

In the last chapter they had complained about thirst and no water at Marah. God healed the water and gave them Elim with its twelve springs and seventy date-palms. David Rohl counts seven springs and rivers south of there on the way to their camp at the Red Sea. They had the ability to complain against the Lord because they had enjoyed all this water He had provided. They could curse His redemption because He graciously gave each of them breath enough to do so. Our complaining against God is no less cruel. And so what does God do about complainers like us?

III. The proving of fleshly complainers (vv. 4-5, 9-13).

Application: In verse 4 we see God’s method for correcting our complaining flesh. He is going to rain down food from heaven, and so the quail and the manna come. You and I might handle this complaining by taking their water away too. But our Lord does not do this.

With the Lord, it is His grace that proves fleshly complainers and every other sinner as well. He graciously feeds them; he graciously shows them His glory in the cloud; He graciously shows them again that He is the Lord their God. For some, that grace would do what Exod. 20:20 calls being *proved*: “Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not.” Grace proves us to give us godly fear and victory over sin.

Conclusion: The Lord knows our frame and remembers that we are dust (Ps. 103:14). Dear Fellow Dusty Complainer, has not the Lord proved us with His grace, that His fear may be before our faces, that we sin not? Is it not we who should answer verse 4's question with, "Yes, we will walk in obedience to your law, for you have been so gracious!"?

The ultimate provision rained down in grace from heaven for us fleshly complainers is the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not complain about this assignment. Isa. 53:7, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth."

That is the grace that proves us complainers this morning. It was His flesh that was provided for the satisfaction of the true need of every fleshly complainer like you and me. He was our quail, sacrificed to feed us. Will we repent of the unbelieving complaints of our flesh and allow God's proving grace to save us through His sacrifice on the cross?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching