

Murmuring at Marah

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Exodus 15:22–26 gives the account of Israel’s murmuring at the bitter waters of Marah. At this very beginning part of their journey from the Red Sea toward Canaan, their water supplies were exhausted. They had hardly ceased their songs of thanksgiving and triumph before they raised a new cry – murmuring and complaining. This was but the first of several times they would so behave. Their repeated, faithless complaints became so displeasing to God that He would later send a plague to destroy 14,700 of the ungrateful wretches (Num. 16:41–49). Still later God sent the fiery serpents to kill many others because for their murmuring (21:4–6).

After a journey of three days from the Red Sea, they came to the waters of Marah, but they were too bitter to drink. The people murmured and complained. Moses brought the complaint of the people before God, who pointed Moses to a certain tree, which, when cast into the water made it sweet. Could Moses have sweetened the water by any other tree than that selected by God? I think not. Had Moses’ attitude been that “one tree is as good as another,” two results would have obtained: (1) Moses would have been disobedient and disrespectful toward God, and (2) the water would have remained bitter. Note the following practical lessons:

1. When God specifies his choice or His desire for men in any circumstance, they dare not presume to make changes or substitutions. Most people who claim to believe in the Bible deny this sacred principle. “One church is as good as another,” “One baptism is as good as another,” “One doctrine is as good as another,” “One kind of music is as good as another,” and like statements are proofs of this denial. Just as Moses was content to use the tree of God’s choice, so must we be content with God’s choices in all matters. God’s command to Noah to build the ark out of gopher wood allowed no addition, no substitution, and no alteration of any sort (Gen. 6:14). When God specifies any element, He simultaneously **includes** what He desires and **excludes** everything else in the same class of items.
2. It is appropriate also to discuss God’s attitude toward murmuring. Paul used those very occasions of Israel’s murmurings in the Wilderness as warnings against such behavior in God’s people in the Christian age (1 Cor. 10:10–11). Those murmurings sorely provoked God so that He shut them out of the land of promise (Heb. 3:8–11).

The root of the complaining, gainsaying, murmuring spirit is unbelief, which leads to rebellion (Heb. 3:16–19). We are to serve the Lord without murmurings (Phi. 2:14).

This ugly trait will keep us out of the promised land of Heaven.

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