

## Complaining in the Wilderness

By Jani Lynn Warner

Oftentimes we don't realize how serious complaining truly is. Complaining about the Lord's direction and provision amounts to accusing Him of being faithless to us. We see this illustrated during the Exodus with God's holy wrath coming against those who spoke against the Lord.

We read in Numbers 21:6-9 that *"the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, 'We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us.' And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.' And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived."*

What did the people say against God for Him to send the judgment of fiery serpents in their midst? In Numbers 14:22, the Lord said that although they had seen His Glory and His signs in Egypt and the wilderness, they had put Him to the test ten times and had not listened to His voice. Consequently, the generation that spurned Him would not see the Promised Land. (See Exodus 5:21, 14:11, 15:24, 16:2, 17:2-3, 32:1, and Numbers 11:1-4, 12:1, 14:2, 16:11, 17:5 for what these complaints against God were). Caleb, however, had a different spirit, following God fully, and he was allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Often we sin and show a lack of Faith when we encounter adversity, just as Israel did during the Exodus. We read in Numbers 11:1a, "Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard *it*, His anger was kindled...." We know they complained about lack of water (Exodus 15:24, 17:2-3), lack of food and variety (Exodus 16:3), fear of enemies and dying by the sword (Numbers 14:3), and lack of leadership (Exodus 32:1). Yet God had provided water, food, protection, and leadership.

We may not know the seriousness of what we say sometimes, especially in adversity. Jesus said, *"Hear and understand. It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles the man"* (Matthew 15:10b-11). James describes our tongue as *"a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell...no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison"* (James 3:6&8). Paul says both Jews and Greeks, all under sin, have *"the poison of asps under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness...there is no fear of God before their eyes"* (Romans 3:13b-14&18). Psalm 140:3 states: *"They sharpen their tongue as a serpent; poison of a viper is under their lips."*

How was Caleb different? Caleb followed God by telling the truth about the Promised Land that God had shown him. He did not slander God by complaining. Caleb was obedient and faithful, entering adversity to overcome the giants of the land with God's help, in order to enter into the promises of God. The other spies (besides Joshua) used speech to deceptively justify and cover their cowardice and disobedience by refusing to battle the giants. They did not believe God, and they slandered Him through their disobedience and were not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their faithlessness.

I pray that we who are bitten by the fiery serpents of adversity in our own lives would look to Jesus and follow Him fully with a different spirit, the Holy Spirit, who will guard our hearts and

minds in Christ through the tribulations and adversities that are in the world. I pray that we will soon see the Coming of the Lord, who will gather us to our true home in Heaven.