

WHEN GOD PUT HIS FOOT DOWN

This article will be concerned with one of the favorite iniquities of the children of Israel – complaining! Their incessant complaints were the breeding ground for disobedience to God's commands and often led to all-out rebellion against both God and His chosen leaders. If the downward chain of command for them was from God to Moses to the people, their upward response was from the people to Moses to God. The complaints from the congregation were therefore consistently addressed to Moses and often to Aaron as well. Because the people felt much safer complaining to the two men they could see, they actually seemed to deceive themselves into thinking God could not hear their complaints.

Complaints that were heard most often by Moses (and Aaron) were the following:

- * Why have you brought us out of Egypt?
- * What shall we drink? We have no water!
- * We're hungry! You're trying to starve us
- * You want us to die in the desert. We wish we could have died in Egypt. Apparently there are no graves in Egypt so we must die in the desert.
- * We've got to have more than this manna. Give us meat!
- * We hate this worthless manna.
- * We want to return to Egypt!

These complaints were especially offensive and hurtful to God because they insulted His preparation and ability to take them out of Egypt and safely into the land promised to them – in the sight of the surrounding enemy nations.

But there were other complaints from the congregation that revealed their refusal to draw near to God and their insistence on “worshipping” Him from afar off, content to find out what God said to them **through Moses**. Their second-hand knowledge of God simply could not develop in them a strength of Godly character that would curb their appetite for complaining, murmuring, and grumbling. That being the case, other congregational complaints of a very serious nature surfaced as follows:

- * We don't want to hear God's voice again. We might die.
- * We want Moses to hear God and then tell us what He said. Then we will do it.
- * We and our children will die if we enter the Land of Promise. All reports indicate that we will be annihilated if we go into Canaan.
- * Everyone in the congregation is holy, so let all of us be leaders, too. Don't keep the leadership for yourselves.
- * “You have killed the people of the Lord.” (Numbers 16:41 NKJV)

This last complaint above (Numbers 16:41) saw the people complaining about God's hand in killing many in the quenching of the rebellion of Korah. The people were essentially supporting the executed rebels rather than supporting a very courageous Moses and Aaron. Isn't it amazing, even today, how someone in a church leadership position who is removed from that position because of sin often gains the support of the congregation while the courageous leaders who removed the errant leader have little or no support for doing the right thing!

The rebellion of Korah (Numbers chapter 16) was a very fierce encounter between the rebels, led by Korah, Dathan, Abiiram and On. The rebelling faction wanted some leadership for themselves and insisted that Moses and Aaron yield to their demand. The real showdown came

the next day when God killed 250 leaders of Israel by fire and caused the earth to open up and swallow the rebel families and all possessions thereof into the earth. Only Korah's sons were spared. (Numbers 26:11)

It was at that point that the people complained against Moses and Aaron when they said: "You have killed the people of the Lord." (Numbers 16:41 NKJV) This angered God so much that He told Moses and Aaron to get completely away from the Israelites so He could consume them quickly. (Numbers 16:45) God then began a plague on the people in His wrath. Before atonement could be made to stop the plague, 14,700 people died, in addition to the 250 leaders of Israel and the families of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Nearly 15,000 Israelites died in two days.

Having unleashed His wrath during the rebellion of Korah, God then decided to conduct an unusual test of leadership, designed to stop the "complaints of the children of Israel, which they make against you." (meaning against Moses and Aaron) (Numbers 17:5 NKJV) God was going to settle this leadership matter – in an unusual and convincing way. The complainers would **not** have the last word. God was ready to put His foot down.

This very intriguing test involving God's sovereign right to choose the leadership of the children of Israel and His procedure for the test is explained in its entirety in Numbers 17:1-13. Moses was to gather rods (sticks), one from every tribe of Israel, twelve rods in all. Each rod was to have the name of the tribal leader written on it, with Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. All of the rods were placed in the Holiest of Holies in the tabernacle of meeting overnight and into the next day. The rod which sprouted blossoms overnight would indicate, by name, the person God chose as leader of His people. By conducting the contest in this way, it would be **tangibly evident** to everyone in the congregation that the person identified in this manner was **really God's choice** and in this way silence the critics, the complainers who spoke against Moses and Aaron.

When Moses went into the Holiest of Holies the next day and looked at all the rods, we read the following: "...and behold, the rod of Aaron, of the house of Levi, had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and **yielded ripe almonds**." (Numbers 17:8 NKJV) The proof of Aaron, as a leader of Israel, was double – not only did his rod blossom, it grew ripe almonds. All overnight. Moses took all of the rods from the holiest place to show all the congregation each of the rods for the tangible proof of leadership choice that they needed to see for themselves.

"And the Lord said to Moses, 'Bring Aaron's rod back before the Testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put their complaints away from Me, lest they die.'" (Numbers 17:10 NKJV) The children of Israel seemed to have misunderstood what God said about no more complaints or they die. Their response was as follows: "So the children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, 'Surely we die, we perish, we all perish! Whoever even comes near the tabernacle of the Lord must die. Shall we all utterly die?'" (Numbers 17:12-13 NKJV) They still did not seem to understand that continued complaining would cause them to die, not the vain ideas that suddenly came into their imagination.

Aaron's rod that budded became one of three precious items that God placed in the Ark of the Covenant. This is implied in Numbers 17:10 and is explicitly declared in Hebrews 9:4. The Ark of the Covenant is nowhere on earth but is in the Temple of God in heaven. (Revelation 11:19)

Even as the Ten Commandments represent God's supernatural law and the golden pot of manna represents God's supernatural provision, Aaron's rod that budded represents God's sovereign and supernatural authority.