

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

The Sin of Murmuring

By Glendol McClure

“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:10, KJV).

When the apostle Paul penned his first letter to the brethren in Corinth, he addressed numerous problems among them. For example, he rebuked them for being divisive and contentious (1 Cor. 1 and 3); for being fleshly minded (1 Cor. 2-3); for tolerating fornication (1 Cor. 5); for going to law one against another (1 Cor. 6); for despising the church and polluting the Lord’s supper (1 Cor. 11); for their doubt of the resurrection (1 Cor. 15), to name a few.

In our text, Paul reminds the Corinthians of the murmuring of the Israelites in the wilderness (Num. 14:1-2). He mentions numerous sins committed by the Israelites during this time and twice reminds the Corinthian brethren with these warning words – **“Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted”** (vs. 6). In verse 11 he wrote, **“Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”** Of course, the examples the Israelites, left for all to study and heed, are examples NOT to follow! Consider the rebuke he issues concerning their murmuring – **“Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”**

There is much said about the sin of murmuring in the Old Testament scriptures. The harm caused by murmuring is often not realized or regarded by those who take part in this evil. This article aims to help us understand God’s hate for murmuring and the damage that can result and encourage those who are guilty of this sin to repent.

In the beginning chapters of Deuteronomy, Moses looks retrospectively at events that occurred during the forty years journey from Sinai to Moab. He recalls the Lord’s call to the Israelites to take possession of the land of Canaan and how they refused to enter the land to take it because of the evil report of the ten spies who feared the sons of Anak. Only Joshua and Caleb gave a good report saying, **“Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not”** (Num. 14:9). In Deuteronomy 1:26-38 Moses recalls this period of rebellion which stemmed from their murmuring. From this text of scripture, there are many lessons which show that murmuring is sinful and results in destruction (1 Cor. 10:10).

First, murmuring is rebellion against God! In Numbers 14:26, Moses wrote, **“Notwithstanding ye would not go up, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD your God.”** Rebellion is a common practice among most people and a serious matter, especially when it is against God. King Saul rebelled when he disobeyed God’s command to **“...go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and donkey”** (1 Sam. 15:3). Instead of obeying God, **“Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly”** (1 Sam. 15: 9). When Samuel went to Saul to rebuke him at the Lord’s direction, Samuel said, **“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king”** (1 Sam. 15:22-23). Remember, murmuring is **“against the Lord”** (Exod. 16:8)!

Second, murmuring can be practiced privately or secretly! In Numbers 14:27, Moses said, *“And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.”* The Israelites were guilty of murmuring in their tents (privately), which generated an evil imagination about the Lord’s plans for them, even though He had promised to bless them and give them the land. When brethren murmur, they often do it “under their breath” or in a private setting among others who agree with them. Often, they do not have all the facts of the particular situation for which they are murmuring, and the result is sowing sinful seeds of discord (Prov. 6:14, 19; 16:28). Remember, we reap what we sow, and if the seeds of discord and strife are sown, discord and strife will be produced (Gal. 6:7, 8). Rather, sow righteousness, and you will reap a sure and certain reward (Prov. 11:18; James 3:13-18).

Third, murmuring doubts and misunderstands God’s purpose! In Deuteronomy 1:27, the text says, *“And ye murmured in your tents, and said, Because the LORD hated us, he hath brought us forth out of the land of Egypt, to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.”* This text reveals a notable assumption of the Israelites – *“the Lord hated us.”* No, He loved them! He heard their crying, sighing, and groaning while in Egyptian bondage (Exod. 2:23-25). Because of His love, He delivered them from the bondage of the Egyptians. Likewise, God, in His love for man, has revealed a plan whereby we can be delivered from the bondage of sin through faith in Christ. Many today murmur and complain about God’s plan of salvation by denying the necessity of water baptism *“for the remission of sins”* (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mk. 16:15-16; Rom. 3:24, 25). Be content with God’s way and obey Him. Remember the words of Solomon, *“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Prov. 16:25; 14:12).

Fourth, murmuring discourages others! In Deuteronomy 1:28, the text says, *“Whither shall we go up? our brethren have discouraged our heart, saying, The people is greater and taller than we; the cities are great and walled up to heaven; and moreover we have seen the sons of the Anakims there.”* The spies that doubted were a discouragement to their brethren. In Numbers 13:30, Caleb said, *“Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.”* But the murmuring spies that went with Caleb said, *“We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we”* (Num. 13:31). Verses 32-33 of this chapter records the *“evil report of the land”* these murmurers brought forth.

Fifth, murmuring is caused by a lack of contentment! God’s people were not content to be free of Egyptian bondage. Having been delivered and now free from Pharaoh’s rule, the murmuring of God’s people caused them to lose faith in Moses as a leader and doubt God’s protection and sovereignty. There are numerous cases of murmuring on the part of the Israelites. In Numbers 12, Miriam and Aaron murmured against Moses because he married an Ethiopian woman. Miriam was struck with leprosy (vs. 10), and Aaron confessed their sins and pleaded to Moses for her to be cleansed (vss. 11-15). In Numbers 16, Korah and his company of cohorts murmured and rebelled against God when they made false accusations against God’s appointed leader, Moses. It is evident from the rebellion of Korah that they were not content with their assigned Levitical duties. The rebellion that stemmed from this murmuring resulted in severe punishment when God caused the ground to open up and swallow them. The two-hundred and fifty men who offered incense were consumed by fire from the Lord (vs. 35). As we read further into this chapter, the next day, the people murmured against Moses and Aaron and fourteen thousand died by the plague before it was stayed (vss. 46-50).

The lesson to learn is, murmuring causes the reputations of good, faithful people to suffer lasting damage and results in discord among God’s people! Is there any wonder why Jesus warned of evils which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart (Matt. 15:18-20)? James also warned of the dangers of the tongue (James 3:1-12).

Finally, nothing profitable comes from murmuring! Can you see how harmful murmuring is and why God’s word warns against this sin? May we all obey Jesus’ words – *“murmur not among yourselves”* (John 6:43). Consider the admonition of the apostle Paul who wrote, *“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Phil. 2:14-15). *“Think on these things.”* ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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