

Is It Okay To Complain To God?

Did you know that the word “why” is used 533 times in the Bible? Some of you may have had children who use that word 533 times a day! From Genesis to Revelation the word “why” is used a lot. Many of the scriptures containing the word “why” are legitimate questions. For example the one time the word “why” is used in Revelations is in **Revelation 17:7** ⁷ But the angel said to me, “Why are you so amazed? I will tell you the mystery of the woman, and of the beast with seven heads and ten horns that carries her. In fact most of the time when the word “why” comes up in the New Testament, it is to ask a legitimate question. But in the Old Testament, “why” is mostly used for complaining and whining to God. The most often occurrence of why is in the book of Jeremiah where it comes up 37 times. It’s easy to understand why the word is used so much in that book. The Israelites had been taken captive and were in exile in Babylon. The book of Psalms is a close second with 32 “whys”. It is fair to say that in the Bible, we complain to God about as often as God warns us that we are heading for trouble if we don’t trust God.

So why bring all this up? I think it is important to try to gain some understanding of what the scriptures say about the nature of God. It is also important to not focus on just one facet of God’s being as described in the Bible. If for example we only had this one little snippet of scripture from the book of Numbers 21: 4 – 9, then we would believe that God is a cruel impatient God who punishes first then asks questions later. Think about it. If this were the only scripture we had to base our belief in God on we would have a religion based on fear. We would be afraid to do anything that might set God off and

have him sending poisonous serpents among us. Instead of songs like “How Great Thou Art”; we would sing hymns like How Fearful Great Eternal; Hold Your Tongue God May Hear; Or the classic, If the Serpents after you Don’t Stand By Me. A god like this would not be one who would put up with complaints, whining, and impatience. Now let’s go to the other extreme, what if we only had John 3:16 as a scripture upon which to base our religion. We would certainly understand that God loves us, and that God wants to save us. But from what does God want to save us? We would have no concept of sin. We would have no knowledge of murder, or stealing or lying. We would not feel the need to be kind to each other. We would know that God loves the world so much that God gave us his son so that everyone who believes in the son would not perish but have everlasting life. We would not know who the son is. So how could we really believe in the son, if we don’t know whom the son is? We really wouldn’t know who God is accepting that he or she loves us. Fortunately we do have more in the Bible about God than just this one scripture. And because we have so much information about God we can make some pretty good assumptions about what God likes and what God doesn’t like. For example we can be pretty sure that God does not like it when we worship other things more than we worship God. We can be fairly certain that if we have two coats and we give one away to someone who doesn’t have a coat at all then that will please God.

Back to the main subject and hence the title of my sermon “Is it okay to complain to God?” The answer is both yes and no. It all depends on our attitude. In the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus we have the story of God parting the Red Sea so that Israel can cross over. Then the

water pours back onto the pursuing Egyptian army and destroys it. Three days later Israel comes to a place where there is bitter water. They turn and complain to Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" God performs a miracle for them and sweetens the water, then he gives them this warning: **Exodus 15:26** ²⁶ He said, "If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you."

So it's okay to complain when you have a legitimate complaint. They had been walking for three days; they probably were out of water that they might have carried with them, so they needed water. God knew that and God gave them water. Their attitude was simply one of concern. They couldn't see God's hand taking care of them and they were afraid they were going to die. Any of us might feel the same way given the same circumstances. Also consider that in the previous 400 years Israel had been enslaved in Egypt and had forgotten their God. So God here is patient and gentle with them, because they are just getting to know each other again.

Now let's look again at the story in Numbers 21. Here the people are again complaining about the lack of water, also there is no food and they detest "this miserable food" which is a reference to manna. God's response is swift and deadly. What is the difference? Here in Numbers the people of Israel have seen the power of God demonstrated time after time. God has led them to military victories, given them water from a rock, provided manna everyday and guided them through God's physical presence in a cloud during the day and a fiery pillar at night. God has given them the commandments and

statutes to live by and has clearly shown them God's favor, yet they still have not learned to trust God. So this time, people die by snakebite. It was then and is now a matter of trust. When the people repent of their impatience then God has Moses make a replica of one of the snakes and put it on a tall pole so that anyone who is bitten simply needs to look at the snake image and they will be healed. They needed only to trust in God enough to look at an image of a snake on a pole and they would live.

Now skip ahead in history to the time of Jesus and the scripture in the book of John chapter three where Jesus makes reference to this very story to show how simple it is to be saved by your belief in him. Do you see it all comes down to a matter of trust and faith? Someone who knows God well through constant prayer, bible study and worship is going to have a better relationship with God than someone who does not know God that well. Let's look at the scripture again. **John 3:14-20** ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.

It seems to me that God is trying to help us to understand that everything is under control even when things surround us that can hurt us. And the only kind of complaining that God will not tolerate is the kind that seems to say that we think we can do it better than God can. It was only when the Israelites rebelled against God that God punished them with illness or death. Rebellion shows a complete lack of faith. So yes it is okay to complain to God, just don't try to take over the throne. It's okay to ask why. Just don't ask why don't you move over and let me run the universe for a while.