

First Light

“Well, that pretty much sums up this day!” Have you ever thought these words or even voiced them out loud? Words spoken after just one more thing that didn't go right lately. Some days and some weeks seem to go against the grain and in a little while, we find ourselves grumbling about the lack of cooperation, or the absence of customer service, or the complete ineptness of a co-worker to follow through on a business project. Chain-link enough of these encounters and we become short-tempered, impatient, and quick to give people a piece of our mind. In short order, we are transformed into professional complainers. Maybe we're stuck in the **Desert of Sin**.

With such a forceful name, it's easy to be tricked. In Exodus 16, we're introduced to this interesting expanse of nothingness after the Israelites have just walked through a very dry Red Sea onto the Desert of Shur. It's there that they had their second exposure to trust management, and they fussed about the lack of good water and likely several other amenities they were missing. As the story unfolds, Moses follows God's leading and uses a piece of wood to miraculously sweeten the water to be potable. Then in an act of kindness, the huge throng of people are led to Elim where there were ample springs, rows of palm trees, and essentially a 7-11 for all to find what they needed. But God didn't want them to stay there forever. He gives Moses the prodding to pick up and move again, just about six weeks after watching the entire Egyptian army wash away in the tides of the Sea. Leaving the security and the abundance of Elim, they enter the Desert of Sin, which actually gets its name from its proximity to Mount Sinai rather than a diabolical motive beneath its surface. Yet, that seems to correctly name the sandy expanse where once again the multitude voices their complaints of hunger and thirst.

Exodus 16: The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. 2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.

“We had it so good where we were before and now we're just going to wither away here! We wish we could die!”

If these words ring a bell, join the club. It's one thing for the kids in the backseat during a long hot road trip to moan these phrases, but do these words sound familiar to us who have so many memories of God's provision, kindness, and healing? We can all think back and remember when we were in a season of complaining or griping and things didn't seem to be working for us. Just like the Israelites, we can find ourselves in the Desert of Sin- hungry, dry-mouthed, tired, frustrated, yearning for something better, and maybe even thinking life was better before we started following Christ. It's a bit of a mirage, isn't it?

As the story continues, God does in fact answer their plea and gives them food to eat. But their complaining doesn't sound like music to his ears- rather like grating fingernails on a chalkboard- he resents their unfaithful attitudes of griping. He then provided manna and quail and some specific rules on its collection, its storage, and the Sabbath. Sadly, this wouldn't be the last time this scenario of discontent played out - for the Israelites or for us.

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In our modern-day living, it is very easy to become lulled into the mistaken luxury that we have what we want. With just a few twists, we find ourselves fussing about the lateness of the meal delivery, the length of the sermon, the apathy of the clerk and so it goes. Pretty soon, we're smack-dab in the hot sands of the Desert of Sin. The moniker is really just geographic, but the picture of a frustrated, faithless crowd who had just witnessed the infinite power of a God who provided, protected, and healed, should remain in our minds. Perhaps we can wait to complain about the waiter bringing the wrong item or the lady who sings off-key at the worship service. Or the person who needs a bath, the slowness of the driver in front of us, the neighbor that won't cut the grass, the friend who always needs a few bucks or a million other little things that try to drag us back to the Desert. Rather, marvel at the myriad amazing ways God has provided for you and cared for you and waited on you and rescued you. The God who hears both our heartfelt prayers and our heartless complaints deserves our continual thanks and love for being so incredibly patient with us during our seasons in the Desert. It's likely that the waiter needs a kind word much more than a harsh correction. Enjoy the meal brought to you even if it's not the right order. Clip the neighbor's yard with a smiling face. Slow down behind the slower driver and use those rare extra moments to thank a loving God for a second to spend with him. Sing a song of praise with a joyful heart right along the mis-pitched congregant.

Truth be told, it's just a lot easier to walk through your day without so much hot, gritty desert sand in your shoes.