

WHY ME? HELP AND HOPE FOR THE HURTING: SECTION THREE

Three Responses Which Empower the Sufferer/Submission – The Explanation

In our fallen human condition, an attitude of submission doesn't naturally exist within any of us. Instead, apart from saving faith in Christ, an attitude of rebellion rather than submission, is prevalent in all of us. The verb for "rebel" in Hebrew is the word *marad*. Along with its derivatives, *marad* is used in the Old Testament at least fifteen times in order to describe the negative response of the first generation of Israelites who were redeemed from their bondage in Egypt. They were put to the test by God in the wilderness as they travelled from Egypt to the Promised Land; as He allowed them to go through a series of challenging adversities. In the vast majority of instances, these first-generation-out-of-Egypt Israelites failed their time of testing, because they responded to adversity with rebellion rather than submission. The end result was disastrous. Instead of fulfilling their God-given purpose in life, namely, entering the Promised Land and conquering it for God, they were relegated to wandering in the wilderness for forty years, as that entire generation progressively died off.

The culmination of their spiritual failure occurs at Kadesh-Barnea. There, a contingent of spies go into the Promised Land to see what would be necessary to not only enter, but conquer the land. The report they bring back is mixed. Joshua and Caleb emphasize the positive, and encourage the people to trust and obey God in fulfilling this great challenge. However, the rest of the men who spy out the land bring back a negative report, stressing the size of the inhabitants and the dangers of confronting such a people. Guess who the Israelites believe? Of course, those who brought the negative report. It stirs their rebellious hearts to the point where they blame God for wanting to destroy them and their children. In addition, they seek to silence those who advocate obedience to God by attempting to stone them. This event is recorded in Numbers chapters 13-14. Just prior to the attempted stoning, Moses admonishes everyone by saying this in Numbers 14:9 –

“Only do not rebel against the Lord; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them.”

Nevertheless, the people refuse to listen to Moses, Joshua or Caleb. As a result, they fail to experience the blessing of conquering the Promised Land, which would now be reserved for Joshua, Caleb and the children of that rebellious generation. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the author of the epistle to the Hebrews reminds his readership of their ancestors' failure; in order to encourage and warn this group of struggling first-century Jewish Christians. They too were undergoing their fair share of suffering, and were in danger of responding to their time of testing as poorly as that first generation did. If that proved to be the case, the consequence would be the same: missing out on God's purpose (Hebrews 3:7-19; 4:1-11).

What was true of the Israelites, and close to being true of those first-century Jewish Christians, can also become true of us. The wrong response to God during times of adversity is that of rebellion, of resisting what He desires to accomplish in the midst of our suffering. Instead of resisting God, we must submit to Him. Rather than turning away from God, we must draw near to Him.