

A SHOULDER TO CRY ON (Read Num. 11:10a-15)  
Text: Numbers 11:13, "They weep on my shoulders"  
(Goodspeed Translation)

INTRODUCTION: We could spend a long time discussing the context of this scripture. But, instead of relating the whole story of Moses and the children of Israel, I would like to take just a slice of the whole and use it to make the point that we all sometimes need a shoulder to cry on.

Moses had led the children of Israel out of Egypt and down the triangle-shaped Sinai peninsula to Mt. Sinai where God gave him the ten commandments. I must ask you first thing to forget about Cecil B. DeMille and Hollywood spectacular films, and think only of what the Bible says at this point. The Israelites had come out, two million strong counting the men, women, and children, and had used up all the water and food they could bring with them in the limited baggage allowance prescribed by their travel agent. They were in the second year of their journey wandering around the desert, and they were tired, hungry, dehydrated, dirty, and sweaty; the babies were crying, the children were bored, and parents were worn out and frustrated. Just when they were about to get used to these conditions in one place, the cloud over the tabernacle began to move toward the Desert of Paran, and they had to pack up quickly and move north up the eastern side of the Sinai triangle in the general direction of Kadesh Barnea and Beer Sheba in the dry southern desert part of the Holy Land.

They got organized as well as they could, with a leader over each tribe or clan, and set up a rear security guard for protection, and no doubt scouts out in front and on each flank. Can you imagine that large a population, former slaves, walking in the dust for miles and miles, not really knowing how far or where they were going?

After three days the people couldn't restrain themselves any longer, and they complained about their misfortunes. Some of them who had developed a sharp and discriminating taste for Egyptian foods remembered the rich flavors, and they discovered they couldn't deny their appetites for such food even there in the desert. So they complained.

And they cried on Moses' shoulder. How can you be sure you, too, wouldn't have complained a little bit, if you had been in their sandals?

And, how did Moses handle the situation? He was not exactly an example the perfect, understanding, non-judgemental counsellor. But he did one thing right. He prayed. And in answer to his prayer, God showed him a way to enlist the help of others to bear his heavy burden.

The one point I want to make from this complex story out of ancient history is that many times we all need a shoulder to cry on. And even when we ~~do~~ <sup>cry</sup> ~~it~~ in frustration, and at the same time showing a lack of perfect faith in God, the Lord still understands and loves us, and he in his own sovereign way will help us and provide for us. We can learn and grow from these experiences.

We make a mistake when we try to live our lives and bear our burdens all alone. We all need the shoulders of loved ones and christian friends to lean on and sometimes to cry on. As Josh Billings said, "Solitude is a good place to visit, but a poor place to stay."

Many circumstances of life drive us to this need for a shoulder to cry on. Sometimes it's that we need a sense of security. It helps so much to be assured that there are loved ones and pastors and close christian friends who understand and care. You know, it never was God's plan to put pastors in the position of complete responsibility for leadership, spiritual ministries, counseling support, and administration, and all the other things that are necessary in the Lord's house and work. Moses prayed to the Lord and acknowledged his limitations, saying "Where am I to get meat and groceries to feed all these hundreds of thousands of people? I haven't seen any shopping centers or supermarkets out here in the desert. I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me" (vs. 13-14). Of course it was! God said, "Gather 70 of the elders of Israel, and let them take their stand there with you...and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone." (Num. 11:16-17).



Some parents tell their little children not to cry. Some people are embarrassed by crying.

Once a little child sitting down in the floor of a department store beside her mother was crying out loudly while the mother kept saying, "hush up now and stop your crying!" Another shopper noticed that someone was standing on the little child's hand, and that was why she was crying so loudly! Yet the mother had been telling her to be quiet and stop crying and disturbing everyone.

It's time some hurting christians began feeling that it's OK to cry. Crying releases the pent-up emotions and feelings that need to be expressed, not repressed. Tears serve a very useful purpose for the emotions as well as for the physical eyes. Tears illustrate the connection between the soul, or mind on the one hand, and the body on the other.

Once a little 5 year old girl and her broken hearted dad came back to an empty house after burying their mother and wife. The anxious child went to bed in her own bed and bedroom as usual that first night, but she didn't stay there very long. She quietly came into her daddy's bedroom and asked if she could get into his bed for awhile. He, of course, understood that she wanted to talk and needed reassurance, and he said, "Sure, come on." She said, "Daddy, this is the darkest night in the world for me." He answered, "Yes, darling, it is for me too. I understand how you must feel." She said, "Daddy, will you always be here with me for all the dark nights like this?" He said, "yes, honey, I'll always be with you during the darkest nights." Wiping away her tears with a tiny trembling hand, she said, "Daddy, this is the loneliest I've ever felt. I'm so lonesome, I don't know what to do. Daddy, will you always be with me for the lonely days and nights like this?" He replied, "Yes, of course, darling, I'll always be with you." She said, "Daddy there's a bad storm coming, I know because I heard the thunder and saw the lightning. Will you always be with me when the bad storms come?" He reassured her through his own tears, with "Yes, darling, I'll always be with you and take care of you whenever the bad storms come." ~~She snuggled~~

She snuggled up close to his big strong shoulders and went to sleep.

That's the way our Heavenly Father promises to be with us and always understand and accept us when we go to him in prayer and weep on his shoulders. Jesus knows what it is to weep, for he wept in a time of great sorrow with grieving friends. We can cast all our cares on him, knowing that he cares for us.

Sometimes we cry because we know we have failed in attempting to do something we should have done, or in not successfully resisting temptation to do something we shouldn't have done. I understand how you want to succeed all the time in living the christian life, and some Christians are too careless in their responsibilities and duties. But I really believe that most sensitive believers carry around much more unnecessary guilt than they should, rather than totally avoid their christian obligations. Perhaps we need to remember that even the best base-ball hitters fail about 70% of the time. But that's no reason for them, or any of us, to give up or feel depressed or guilty. God loves us even when we don't hit a home run! If we trust and love him and seek his will and do our best, he understands and accepts and loves us when we strike out just as much as when we hit a home run.

The Israelites had a sinking feeling when they saw the great task before them. They felt inadequate for this task. They had no military training or experience, and they were vastly outnumbered by a warlike group of nations much stronger than they were. They felt like grasshoppers before an army of giants. Theirs looked like an impossible task. It's no wonder that they cried on the shoulders of their leader. They had some lessons to learn, but their children survived and entered the promised land in victory.

We have God's promise that we too, will someday enter the Promised Land of an Eternal Kingdom where there shall be no crying or weeping; for in that Holy City of God there shall be no tears. The last heartbreak will be experienced here, and the last tear will fall before we leave this physical earth.



There we shall not need a shoulder to cry on, for crying is one of the former things that will have passed away. PRAISE BE TO GOD!