

God's Provision of Manna

Exodus 16

Exodus 16 - *"And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. ² Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ And the children of Israel said to them, "Oh, that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." ⁴ Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. ⁵ And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily."*

⁶ Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, "At evening you shall know that the Lord has brought you out of the land of Egypt. ⁷ And in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord; for He hears your complaints against the Lord. But what are we, that you complain against us?" ⁸ Also Moses said, "This shall be seen when the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the Lord hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the Lord." ⁹ Then Moses spoke to Aaron, "Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for He has heard your complaints.'" ¹⁰ Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud.

¹¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ¹² "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'" ¹³ So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground. ¹⁵ So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. ¹⁶ This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: 'Let every man gather it according to each one's need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.'"

¹⁷ Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. ¹⁸ So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one's need. ¹⁹ And Moses said, "Let no one leave any of it till morning." ²⁰ Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them. ²¹ So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.

²² And so it was, on the sixth day, that they gathered twice as much bread, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. ²³ Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord has said: 'Tomorrow is a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. Bake what you will bake today, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all

that remains, to be kept until morning.”²⁴ So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it.²⁵ Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field.²⁶ Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”

²⁷ Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none.²⁸ And the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?²⁹ See! For the Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread for two days. Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.”³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.³¹ And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

³² Then Moses said, “This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: ‘Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’”³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the Lord, to be kept for your generations.”³⁴ As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.³⁵ And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.³⁶ Now an omer is one-tenth of an ephah.”

Background Notes

Soon after the children of Israel left the pleasant oasis of Elim, they began to grumble in the wilderness of Sin. Notice -- the people didn't say that they would like to go back to Elim -- they wanted to go all the way back to their slavery in Egypt! Can you believe it? What a slap in the face to the Lord! And yet God graciously provided meat and bread for the people. The quails for meat (v13) were not given every day, but bread was provided every day. They called it *manna*, meaning, “What is it?” (vv.15, 31).

Skeptics have attempted to explain the manna in a naturalistic way, such as the edible product of a plant or a tree, but all of these attempts fail to explain what the Bible says about the manna. The Bible says it was “bread from heaven.” According to Psalm 78:23-25, Psalm 105:40, and John 6:31, as well as here in Exodus 16, the manna fell from the sky. It wasn't gathered from a bush or tree -- they called it “bread of heaven.”

The manna fell every morning for 40 years, regardless of where the children of Israel were as they traveled the wilderness -- and regardless of where they were in their spiritual condition. The manna fell on the day that they worshiped the golden calf -- and on the following days as well. What a lesson for us on the grace of God! God's provision of the manna was a miracle for which there is no natural explanation.

At the end of Exodus 16 we have the first mention of the Sabbath in the Bible. We know from the creation account in Genesis that God worked for six days and rested on the seventh day. God wanted His people to follow this same pattern. God promised to provide enough manna on the sixth day to last for two days, and He promised to prevent it from spoiling so that they could rest on the seventh day. The seventh day was given to them as the Sabbath, a day to rest (v29). So God gave his people the Sabbath -- not a hardship, but rather as the blessing of a day of rest.

Doctrinal Points

1. The manna was given to provide for God's people.

God graciously gave manna to provide food for His people. Manna was a very versatile food. It could be baked or boiled, as we see in verse 23. Its color was white like coriander seed, which is an herb, and it tasted like wafers with honey.

In verses 16-18 we see that the people could gather and eat as much manna as they wanted or needed each day, but it would go bad if they tried to hoard it overnight! On the sixth day, however, they could gather enough for the Sabbath day as well.

In John 6 the Lord Jesus taught that the manna is a type or picture of Christ Himself: *"I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world"* (John 6:48-51).

As the manna was given to provide for the physical needs of God's people, so Jesus Christ, who is the true Bread from heaven, was given by God to provide for the spiritual needs of His people. Christ is God's provision for our salvation, and He is God's provision for our spiritual sustenance as well.

Notice that the children of Israel had to gather the manna every day, not every other day, or just once a week. In the same way, we must gather our spiritual food every day -- not just once a week on Sunday, for example. How do we go about gathering our spiritual food every day? It's obvious -- as we spend time in the Word of God each day, we are spiritually fed. This is the way we "feed" on Christ as our spiritual nourishment.

It's great to go to church every week and be spiritually fed with good weekly ministry, but we need fresh intake every day. How would your physical condition be if you ate a good meal only once a week? You certainly wouldn't be fit to function properly every day, would you? And just as physical food can spoil if it's not used, so spiritual food can go stale if it's not regularly and properly used. All of these lessons come to us from God's provision of the manna. The manna was given to provide for God's people.

2. The manna was given to test God's people.

Verse 4: *"Then the Lord said to Moses, 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow My instructions.'" The manna was a very good and staple food that God provided to meet the needs of His people. It wasn't steak, and it wasn't ice cream, and it wasn't candy, and it wasn't the tasty foods of Egypt! Why not? We see here in Exodus 16:4 and in Deuteronomy 8:3 that the manna God provided was a test to see if the people would obey God.*

The way the manna was gathered was also a test. Would the people of Israel obey God's commandments? Would they be satisfied with what God provided, or would they be discontented and grumble? Would they long for and crave the foods of Egypt? We know the answer, don't we? God's people failed the test.

What about us? The Word of God is sufficient to meet all our spiritual needs. As we feed on the Word of God, we feed on Christ, the true Bread. But some Christians are not satisfied with the Word of God as their spiritual food. In fact, some Christians have told me that they get bored when they read the Bible. They would rather feed on experiences and feelings, or even on the foods of Egypt – the foods of this world! Are we satisfied with the spiritual food that the Lord has given us? The manna was given not only as provision for God's people, but as a test of God's people.

We know from the biblical record that the children of Israel failed the test. We read in Numbers 11 that the people murmured and complained about the manna, the food that God has graciously given to them. I trust that we will not fail the test of the manna, because the Word of God is sufficient to meet **all** our needs! The manna was given to test God's people.

Practical Application

Tell your children about the manna!

In verse 32 we read that the people of Israel were to keep an "omer" of manna (that's probably about 2 quarts), so that future generations could see the bread that God had provided for His people in the wilderness. Hebrews 9:4 tells us that a golden jar of manna was kept in the Ark of the Covenant, along with the two tablets of the law and Aaron's rod.

Do you see the practical application? As the children of Israel were to show the manna to future generations and tell their children how God had provided for his people, and tested their obedience, so we should share with our children how God has provided for us and tested us with His provision in Christ, the true Manna. When was the last time you shared some spiritual food that God gave you from His Word with your children? When was the last time you told your family how God has tested you with the truth of His Word? As Christian parents and grandparents we have a responsibility to do this.

This past week we played "Bible charades" with our grandchildren, Callie and Connor, and last night we read Bible stories to our grandson Jonathan. It gave us an opportunity to share the lessons and applications of the Bible stories with them. This is good! Tell your children – and grandchildren -- about the manna!