

## Exodus 16 - “Manna From Heaven”

In the previous chapter, the Israelites were enjoying a time of singing and praise. The Lord had delivered them! Yet the Lord then brought them through a bit of a trial. They experienced the sweet times by the seaside, but as they journeyed on they experienced some bitterness that life can sometimes hand out. Was God not leading? Was He not providing for them? Sure He was, but the Israelites were going through one of many tests that they would face. You see, God, through this trial, was going to teach them a bit about themselves. Each trial we endure reveals who we truly are. This experience was like an x-ray that examined their hearts. They were singing enthusiastically one minute, then complaining miserably the next. It was to reveal to them that they still needed to trust the Lord in faith and commit their ways to Him (Deuteronomy 8:2).

- And so it is with us. We go through tests so the Lord can reveal to us what is really inside. What areas need work. We're like sponges – until we're squeezed we don't really know what's inside. If life were sweet all the time, we would have no desire to press in to the Lord. Trials cause us to draw close to God and long for things eternal!
- Elim was a picture of that fruitful Christian experience. The place of comfort the Lord leads us to after we go through trials and see His provision. Israel was sitting pretty for now. But the Lord still had work to do in them.

And as we get into chapter 16, we'll see another test given to the Israelites.

**16:1-2 - *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. <sup>2</sup> Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.***

Remember, Elim was an oasis for Israel after the bitter waters at Marah. Elim had 12 wells of water and 70 palm trees. This place was luscious.

But now they continue their journey and they come to the Wilderness of Sin.

- Isn't this the way we often experience things? We have a great time of refreshment in the Lord thinking that we're never going to sin again, then we're suddenly hit by temptation and difficulty, and we begin to complain and whine.
- These experiences aren't meant to destroy or hurt you, but they're meant to show you that we can't live off mountain top experiences. There are times

we need to do life in the wilderness. But in order to deal with the highs and lows of life, we need to be daily grounded in the Word of God and know the God of this Word.

- This chapter is going to illustrate well for us the need for this daily practice of being fed with the Word and trusting in the Lord. This is what secures us and gives us a good foundation that we might be able to handle the highs and lows we encounter in this life.

They've been on the move now for one month since leaving Egypt (Exodus 12:6, 18). It's quite possible that the Israelites were not even getting hungry at this time. They've got a lot of animals with them that would have provided good eating. It's possible that they began to see the barrenness of the wilderness and thought that their livestock would begin to die off from lack of food. Again, they've seen the miraculous hand of the Lord many times already. Is it too much for the Lord to provide for them this time?

But Israel isn't looking through the lens of faith. And as a result, what do they begin to do? Complain! They became masters in the art of grumbling.

- A monk joined a monastery and took a vow of silence. After the first year his superior called him in and asked, "Do you have anything to say?"

The monk replied, "Food bad."

After another year the monk again had opportunity to voice his thoughts. He said, "Bed hard."

Another year went by and again he was called in before his superior. When asked if he had anything to say, he responded, "I quit."

His superior said, "It doesn't surprise me a bit. You've done nothing but complain ever since you got here."

Our complaining is never really about our outward circumstances, but rather they reveal what's going on inwardly. The Bible says, *"in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"* (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**). By faith we can give thanks no matter what we go through because we have a loving God who is for us, and He will see us through. A thankful attitude is not to be circumstantial but rather fundamental as we walk by faith and not by sight.

- When we begin to doubt the Lord and stop walking by faith, we allow fear and panic to creep into our life. Joy is squeezed out and we begin to be compulsive complainers. Trust in God and know that He is taking care of you; it will relieve you of much stress (and grumbling)!

Notice it was the whole congregation that began to complain. I can't imagine what over 2 million people all heckling you would be like. Not very enjoyable that's for sure.

**16:3 - *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."***

The devil loves to distort the past and make it much more appealing in the present than it ever was. Have you ever looked back on a time in your life and thought it was so wonderful compared to what you're dealing with in the present? You may be struggling in your marriage and you think you made a mistake breaking up with an ex-girlfriend. You begin to look back longingly for the good old days, but you forget that your ex-girlfriend was a basket case, emotionally unstable, and drove you nuts. The devil has a way of twisting things around deceptively to make you think the former things were better.

- **Ecclesiastes 7:10**, *"Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this."*
- The grass is often greener on the other side of the fence because that's where the septic field is.

**16:4-5 - *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. <sup>5</sup> 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."***

It's amazing that the Lord is not angry with Israel. They're complaining, distorting the truth, but the Lord still says, *'I will take care of you.'* God's grace is so boundless.

But in all of this, there will be an opportunity of testing. It will show whether Israel will trust God and obey Him, or lean on their own understanding.

Two requirements are given here:

- 1) Pick only what you need for that day (vs. 4)
- 2) On the sixth day pick twice as much and don't pick anything on the seventh day (vs. 5).

**16:6-8 - *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. <sup>7</sup>***

***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?”<sup>8</sup> 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.”***

God hears their complaints and graciously comes to their aid. But He works in a way to demonstrate His glory. This again is not because Israel is so good, but because God is good. And He moves the affairs of this world along, and our very lives as well, for the glory of God. That’s why when we encounter times of struggle or need, look to what God is going to do in it. He works through these things to reveal His great glory.

Now Moses reveals something very fundamental and true. When we complain, we’re not complaining against our situation or another person that we like to blame, we are complaining against God. If God is at work moving all things along for His glory, then when we find something bothersome to us that we grumble against, we are taking issue with God; we’re finding fault with Him! When we complain we are essentially saying: *‘I’m not happy with what You have allowed here God.’*

- A grumbling heart really reveals a problem with trusting God. This is what the Israelites are going to have to learn. Throughout their journey to the Promised Land they are going to continue to struggle with complaining. So much so that an entire generation would be denied entrance into Canaan. What was the sin that led them in complaining and being excluded from the Promised Land? Unbelief! (Hebrews 3:19).

“The word “grumbling” hardly does the Israelites justice. The Hebrew word was “not designed to express a disgruntled complaint. Quite the contrary, it describe[d] an open rebellion.”<sup>1</sup> When the people murmured against Moses, it was mutiny against Almighty God. They were repudiating their relationship with him. In fact, they wished that they were dead (Exod. 16:3). The way they figured, if they were going to die anyway, it would have been better to die back in Egypt. Starving in the desert was a fate worse than death. In effect, they were saying that they wished they had never been saved.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), p. 249.

<sup>1</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* (pp. 424–425). Crossway Books.

**16:9-10 - *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.’ ”<sup>10</sup> 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.***

If God hears our complaints, how much more does He hear our prayers of need and concerns that we bring before Him.

“God’s glory is his reputation. It is his honor, the weightiness of his character, the sum total of all his divine perfections. To know that he is the Lord, therefore, is to know him as the God of glory.”<sup>2</sup>

And God gives them a glimpse of His glory through the cloud that had been leading them. Perhaps as they looked toward the cloud it began to thunder and produce lightning. Whatever it was, they had a sense of awe at the glory of God.

**16:11-16 - *And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying,<sup>12</sup> “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.’ ”<sup>13</sup> So it was that quails came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup> 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.’ ”***

God provided two great miracles that would reveal God’s power and glory. He brought quail in the evening that provided meat for them, and He provided manna in the morning that was like bread.

Now there’s always been people that like to try and explain away the miraculous by attributing it to some natural occurrence.

<sup>2</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God’s glory* (p. 428). Crossway Books.

Quail are migratory birds and each year they pass over this area of the Sinai in the spring and fall. Due to the long distance of flight, they often become so wearied that they would come to rest on the ground and could be easily caught by hand. Egyptian paintings show people catching quail by throwing nets over the bushes they were nesting in.

- Yet these Quail came at just the time that God said they would. Plus there was so much quail that it was enough to provide meat for this numerous nation.
- **Psalm 78:26–28**, *"He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; And by His power He brought in the south wind. <sup>27</sup> He also rained meat on them like the dust, Feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; <sup>28</sup> And He let them fall in the midst of their camp, All around their dwellings."*

With the manna, many theories have emerged to explain what this potentially was. "F. S. Bodenheimer claimed that the "liquid honeydew excretion of a number of cicadas, plant lice, and scale insects speedily solidifies by rapid evaporation. From remote times the resulting sticky and often times granular masses have been collected and called manna."<sup>3</sup> Another "widely accepted view is that the manna was identical with the lichen *Lecanora esculenta*. This lichen grows on rocks and produces pea-sized globules which are light enough to be blown about by the wind. They are well known for their sweetness and are often collected by the natives of central Asia."<sup>4</sup> But at present the most popular view associates manna with the tamarisk."<sup>3</sup>

- Yet these explanations do not balance with the Biblical account we see. First, we see that this manna came for 40 years. Many of these natural phenomena were seasonal. It wouldn't have sustained them daily over these years.

Second, if this was such a natural occurrence, why were they all asking, **What is it?** This was quite new to them. This is where the term *manna* comes from.

Third, this manna rotted the day after, unlike these excretions.

- The only way to look at this was to see it as a genuine miracle of God. It's referred to in Scripture this way:
- Psalm 78:24 – *bread of heaven*

<sup>3</sup> F. S. Bodenheimer, "The Manna of Sinai," *Biblical Archaeologist*, Vol. 10 (1947), pp. 1–6.

<sup>4</sup> John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in the Book of Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1971), p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Ryken, P. G., & Hughes, R. K. (2005). *Exodus: saved for God's glory* (p. 426). Crossway Books.

- Psalm 78:25 – *angels' food*
- 1 Corinthians 10:3 – *spiritual food* (ie. supernatural food)

The Lord was going to meet their physical need by providing this manna, but more than that, He wanted to teach them a spiritual lesson as well through it.

**Deuteronomy 8:3**, *“So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”*

This eternal lesson they would be taught was to be dependent upon God alone.

“An omer was six pints. Therefore, if the children of Israel numbered even two million—a conservative estimate—God would have provided 4,500 tons of bread daily—or enough to fill ten trains with thirty boxcars each. Our God is a God of abundance.”<sup>4</sup>

**16:17-22** - *Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said, “Let no one leave any of it till morning.” <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted. <sup>22</sup> 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.*

As the manna came the Israelites did what they were instructed to do (for the most part). Some of them felt like they needed to keep some of it until the next morning so as to make sure they were provided for. But they were needing to learn to live in daily dependence on the Lord.

- The manna that was kept began to breed worms and it stank. There is a definite picture of the Word of God with this manna. And we can at times try to go a while on a couple verses that we read a day earlier or the week before, and as we hope this will sustain us, we soon find out that we can get very wormy and very stinky as a result of lacking in the Word. Instead of

<sup>4</sup> Courson, J. (2005). *Jon Courson's application commentary: Volume one: Genesis–Job* (p. 283). Thomas Nelson.

living lives of fruitfulness that comes by abiding in Jesus and His Word, we can show signs of rottenness if we are not being fed daily by a fresh Word.

Notice it was something too that had to be done early. If they waited, it would be gone. We too need to start our day with that fresh nourishment of the Word. If we put it off the heat of the day will often zap away the time and energy to do so.

- **Psalm 63:1**, *“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water.”*
- **Mark 1:35**, *“Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.”*
- **Psalm 143:8**, *“Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust; cause me to know the way in which I should walk. For I lift up my soul to You.”*

**16:23-26** - *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.’ ”<sup>24</sup> So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it.<sup>25</sup> Then Moses said, “Eat that today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord; today you will not find it in the field.<sup>26</sup> Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.”*

The Sabbath is introduced for the first time now. The Sabbath was to be a day of rest, rejuvenation, and refocus on the Lord.

Many have a real misconception of the Sabbath. It becomes a legalistic thing to some, or an excuse to not do anything and be lazy. But as Jesus said, *“The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”* (**Mark 2:27**). This day is an opportunity for you to rest from a busy week. Not waste it away, but in a sense get refuelled in the Spirit. It’s a holy day because we are stopping our normal routine and focussing our sights back on Jesus, if perhaps things have begun to get out of focus.

**16:27-31** - *Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none.<sup>28</sup> And the Lord said to Moses, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.<sup>31</sup> 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.*

How stubborn we can be. We often think our ways make more sense, but we often come up empty handed when we choose our way over God’s way.

- People often go looking for sustenance and fulfillment in places where God says they will find none. All our satisfaction and contentment is found in Him.

**16:32-36** - *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.’ ”<sup>33</sup> 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.”<sup>34</sup> As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Now an omer is one-tenth of an ephah.*

This manna would be put in the soon to be made ark of the covenant which would hold this manna, the tablets with the 10 commandments, and the rod of Aaron that budded.

This manna would sustain them in their wilderness journey until they move into the Promised Land. After that, they would never eat manna again.

The disciples asked Jesus a question when the multitudes were following Him without taking much of a break to eat, *“How can one satisfy these people with bread here in the wilderness?”* **(Mark 8:4)**

Jesus then gave a great message about Himself recorded in **John 6:22-40**. He went on to describe Himself as the bread of life that has come down from heaven.

The manna of Exodus 16 has a wonderful picture and fulfillment in Jesus as the ‘bread of life’ seen in John 6. [Read John 6:26-40; 47-59]

### 3 Pictures of the manna:

#### (1) The manna explains who Jesus is:

- a) **His humility** – the manna was small and “*fine as frost*” (vs.14). Jesus entered the world as a fragile baby clothed in humility. Jesus said I am meek and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29).
- b) **His eternality** – the manna was round (vs.14). A circle spoke of eternity, it has no beginning and no end. The Jews knew what Jesus was saying when He said, “*I AM!*”
- c) **His holiness** – the manna was white (vs.31), speaks of purity and sinlessness.
- d) **His sweetness** – it tasted like honey (vs.31). “*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*” (**Psalm 34:8**) The waters of Marah – our bitter problems become a whole lot sweeter when seen in the light of Jesus Christ.
- e) **His nourishment** – the Israelites ate of this manna for 40 years. Jesus is all we truly need to sustain our lives. **John 6:51**, “*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.*”

#### (2) The manna shows how Jesus came:

- a) **It came from heaven** – the manna wasn’t something they could make or have brought in from somewhere else. It was a gift from God. Jesus Christ also came from heaven. He was not created or made. He was God’s eternal Son, a gift to hungry sinners.
- b) **It came at night** – the manna came when it was dark, speaking of the darkness of the world when Christ came. He came to be the light that shone in the darkness, exposing sin and illuminating the way.
- c) **It came on the dew** – the manna was not made dirty or was defiled for the dew created a blanket for the manna. Jesus was not defiled through human conception but was conceived of the Holy Spirit through a virgin. He was completely clean and holy.
- d) **It fell in the wilderness** – a barren place, filled with a barren people, which is exactly the kind of place and people that Jesus came to rescue. He came to breathe life into man and give Him hope.
- e) **It came to a rebellious people** – manna was given to a complaining group of people. Yet we too were dead in sin and following the course of this world (Eph. 2:1-2), and Jesus came with grace and mercy and made us alive.

- f) **It fell right where they were** – they didn't have to search for the manna, didn't have to jump through any hoops to get it, it was right there in front of them. Jesus is right there for you, you don't have to go on a search to find Him. **Psalm 145:18**, *"The LORD is near to all who call upon Him, to all who call upon Him in truth."* **Acts 2:21**, *"Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*

(3) The manna reveals how we need to respond to Jesus:

- a) **We must feel the need** – people needed to realize they were hungry, they were lacking. Otherwise they would have left the manna. People today need to realize that there is a need spiritually within that can only be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. No substitutes or counterfeit quenchers are going to help.
- b) **We must bow down** – the manna didn't fall into their hands, it fell on the ground and they needed to bend down to pick it up. Many today are unwilling to bend or bow down to the Lordship of Jesus. Pride has kept them from repenting of their sin and experiencing true forgiveness.
- c) **We must take for ourselves** – the Jews were not satisfied when they sat and watched others enjoy the manna, they had to take of it for themselves. Likewise, people today cannot rely on what others are doing or saying to them. We can't just know about Jesus, every person has to respond and receive Jesus inwardly by faith. This is what Jesus meant in **John 6:54**, *"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."* Jesus is saying, let me be a part of you. Let me be in control. Jesus' life will sustain us till we reach our promised land – heaven.
- d) **We must do it early** – the manna disappeared when the sun came out and the day became hot. *"Now is the day of salvation"* (**2 Cor. 6:2**). *"Seek the Lord while He may be found."* (**Isaiah 55:6**). Time will run out for many people. It is not something we can put off. A time of judgment is coming, and you can be spared of that heat by receiving Jesus today!
- e) **We must continue to feed on Him** – it would be insane to think that you can eat a good breakfast on Monday and that will carry you till Friday. It's ludicrous. In the same way we need to continually feed on Jesus daily. How do we do that? By reading, studying, and meditating on His Word. Peter said, after Jesus gave this message on the bread of life, that He has *"the words of eternal life."* (**John 6:68**) The Word of God is more than just words penned on paper, it's the life of Christ! *The Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14). Let the Lord reign in you.