

# Manna in the Wilderness (Exodus 16)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Exodus

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## I. Review from Previous Lessons

- a. Moses has led the Israelites out of Egypt, following centuries of captivity and bondage. They have escaped through the miraculous parting of the Red Sea and rejoiced with song at God delivering them.
- b. In the first test, the Israelites are lacking water. When they come to the water of Marah, they find it is bitter (undrinkable), and they complain.
- c. Moses cries out to the Lord, who provides him with a tree (or piece of wood). When Moses throws it into the water, the water miraculously becomes “sweet” (drinkable).

## II. More Complaining – This Time About Food

- a. Read **Exodus 16:1-12**.
- b. Storyline:
  - i. It says the “entire community” complained against Moses and Aaron, once again.
  - ii. Israelites get hungry and reminisce about the “good old days” in Egypt, when they “sat by pots of meat and ate bread to the full”.
  - iii. God says He will “rain bread out of heaven”, but this will not be just a gift for the people. The way in which the Lord does it also provides *a test of the people*.
    1. The Lord will give specific instructions, to see if the people will obey what He tells them to do (how to collect the food).
    2. They are to gather a daily quota. However, on the sixth day they are to gather a double portion.
  - iv. Moses tells the people that God heard them: they will be provided with meat in the evening and bread in the morning.
  - v. Moses says that the complaints were not just against Moses and Aaron; they were complaints *against the Lord*.

- c. The people are looking fondly back on their time in Egypt, and the food they enjoyed back there.
  - i. Reality vs. selective memory of the Israelites:
    1. Reality: under oppression, forced labor, beaten slaves crying out to the Lord for deliverance.
      - a. Read **Exodus 1:13-14**
      - b. Read **Exodus 1:22**
      - c. Read **Exodus 2:23-25**
      - d. Read **Exodus 3:7-10**
      - e. Read **Exodus 5:10-14**
    2. Selective memory: a great banquet, with abundance of delicious food
      - a. Read **Exodus 16:2-3**
      - b. “We sat by the pots of meat and ate bread to the full.”
  - ii. One of the great tactics of Satan is to twist our memory of the past, tempting us by pulling on our fleshly desires.
    1. **Questions:** How do you think of your old life (before becoming a Christian? How do you view the lives of others who are without God? Do you ever entertain desires to go back there, to enjoy the old pleasures of the flesh?
    2. Consider what Jesus and Peter said regarding how we should view our old life of sin.
      - a. Jesus said, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (**Luke 9:62**, NKJV)
      - b. “For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own

vomit,' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.'" (**2 Peter 2:20–22**, NKJV)

- i. Here Peter is quoting from **Proverbs 26:11** to make a rather graphic illustration.
  - ii. The version of this passage in the Septuagint (which is the version of the Old Testament that Peter and the other apostles generally quote from) includes a more robust explanation than the passage in the Masoretic Text. Let us consider the LXX version of the passage from **Proverbs**.
    1. "As when a dog returns to his own vomit and becomes despicable, so is a man without discernment who returns to his own evil by his own sin." (**Proverbs 26:11**, LXX, OSB)
  - iii. For Peter, returning to the old life is not a banquet; rather, it is returning to lick up one's old vomit!
  - iv. Peter also uses the analogy of a washed pig returning to the mud. Perhaps this is a reference to baptism, where our sins and spiritual filth are washed away (**Acts 22:16, Romans 6:1-12**).
- d. About complaining, once again.
- i. Last lesson we spoke about the dangers of complaining. We will see again and again in the Wilderness how many times the Israelites fell into complaining.
  - ii. This is an indication of faithlessness and ingratitude toward God.
  - iii. Paul warned the Corinthian Christians of this in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**. This is one of the four sins that kept them out of the Promised Land. The point Paul makes is that likewise, *these same sins will keep us out of heaven*.
  - iv. When Paul admonished the Philippians to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" (**Philippians 2:12**), he told them to "do *all things without complaining*" (**Philippians 2:14**).
  - v. **Question:** Following up on the prior lesson, how have you been doing this past week, regarding complaining?

1. Many were convicted last week that they needed to repent of this sin. If so, were you able to go an entire week without complaining?
2. Did you find any new things to complain about, since last Sunday?
3. When you have heard other Christians complaining, do you join in, ignore it, or address it?
  - a. Do you see complaining as a serious sin (like idolatry or sexual immorality) that will cost us our eternal life if we don't repent?
  - b. We should be like "iron sharpening iron" (**Proverbs 27:17**) in our relationships with other Christians, if we see them in this sin of complaining.

### III. Manna in the Morning

- a. Read **Exodus 16:13-36**.
- b. Storyline:
  - i. Quail come down in the evening, covering the camp. So the people have abundant meat to eat.
  - ii. In the morning, dew is on the ground around the camp. When the dew lifts, flakes of an unusual food remain on the ground, like frost. (Perhaps these were the original "frosted flakes"?)
  - iii. They call this bread "manna". (I believe in Hebrew the term means "What?" or "What is it?")
    1. The flakes were small, like coriander seeds.
    2. It was white, tasting sweet like wafers made with honey.
    3. Later in the journey, the people will tire of the manna and complain about it. Read from that account in **Numbers 11:1-9**, which provides more detail regarding the characteristics of the manna.
      - a. One could grind it like grain or beat it to make a flour.
      - b. You could cook it in pots or bake it like a cake.
      - c. The manna tasted like pastry made with oil and honey.
    4. The manna would appear each morning, until the heat of the morning sun melted it away.

5. It appeared every morning for six days in a row, but not on the morning of the Sabbath.
  6. It would not keep overnight; it would spontaneously breed worms and stink (except on the night before the Sabbath).
  7. The Lord gave very specific instructions regarding how to collect this food:
    - a. Collect it in the morning, just enough for each family for the day (one omer per person per day: about two quarts or two liters).
    - b. Don't keep any overnight (except on the Sabbath).
    - c. Don't go out to collect on the morning of the Sabbath.
- iv. Some of the people break the two rules that the Lord gave regarding the manna.
1. They try to store some overnight (it breeds worms and stinks).
  2. They go out on the morning of the Sabbath to gather more (and it isn't there).
- v. This special food will sustain them for all 40 years in the Wilderness.
- vi. They are to never forget this, including in the future when they enter Canaan. Aaron was told to preserve one homer in a golden pot, to be kept along with the 10 Commandments and the Ark of the Covenant, for future generations.
1. This manna provides an important lesson that God wants them to never forget.
- c. More on the manna.
- i. People have tried to explain this as some natural phenomenon (sap from plants, something exuded by insects, etc.) However, there is no way to explain this by normal means. Clearly, based on the details of the account, this was *miraculous*. Consider:
    1. The warm rays of the sun would melt it, yet it could be baked or boiled.
    2. It appeared for six days in a row, but not on the Sabbath. This cycle repeated for 40 years, then stopped.
    3. It could not be kept overnight, or it would spoil (stink, worms), *EXCEPT*:

- a. On the Sabbath it could be kept overnight without spoiling.
  - b. One homer could be kept for generations in the golden jar.
- ii. Read **Psalm 78:23-25** (designated Psalm **77:23-25** in the LXX).
    1. God gave men “the bread of heaven”
    2. “Men ate the *bread of angels*”
      - a. What a beautiful and mysterious description of the manna!
      - b. (I think of “*angel food cake*”, which I had on my birthdays growing up.)
- d. Notice that the Lord said he would test the people (whether they would obey His commands).
    - i. The people were 0-for-2 on this test (they failed on both counts).
    - ii. They stored some overnight, and also went out on Saturday morning to gather.
    - iii. **Question:** *Why* would someone attempt to store up manna for an additional day?
      1. Perhaps they doubted the Lord would provide more manna on the following day?
      2. Consider what Jesus taught regarding trusting the Lord to provide for us each day.
        - a. Read **Matthew 6:7-13**.
          - i. Jesus said we should pray each day, “Give us this day our daily bread”.
          - ii. This prayer reminds me of how the Lord provided daily bread for the people in the Wilderness.
        - b. Read **Matthew 6:19-21** and **6:24-34**.
          - i. Don’t lay up treasure on earth; rather, lay it up *in heaven*.
          - ii. Do not worry about tomorrow.

- iii. God knows what you need.
  - iv. Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you as well.
  - v. **Questions / Challenges:** Do we worry about tomorrow to a point where are being anxious and disobedient to God? Do we believe God will take care of us?
  - vi. God was teaching His people day after day, for forty years, that *He would provide for them*.
3. David said the same thing, that the Lord will look after the righteous man, who is generous toward others.
- a. Read **Psalm 37:21-28** (designated **Psalm 36:21-28** in the LXX).
  - b. The righteous man is compassionate and generous, and the Lord takes care of him.
  - c. David said, "I was young, but indeed I grew old. Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread".
    - i. David is not saying, "This *can't* happen." (the righteous lacking food). He *is* saying "I have *never seen* this happen, in my entire life; and now I am an old man."
  - d. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215), teacher in the church in Alexandria, Egypt, had an interesting way of looking at this. I assume he had this passage of David in mind when he wrote the following:
    - i. "For he who has the almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing, and never is in straits for what he needs. For the Word is a possession that wants nothing, and is the cause of all abundance.
    - ii. "If one say that he has often seen the righteous man in need of food, this is rare, *and happens only where there is not another righteous man.*"
    - iii. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, book 3, chapter 7; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, p. 281)

- iv. The interesting points made by Clement here in this passage:
  1. First, Christians have everything they need, they are content.
  2. Second, it is rare that a righteous man would be lacking food and basic things.
  3. Third, a righteous man going hungry could only happen if there were not a second righteous man around (since, of course, the second righteous man would provide for the first one who was in need).
  4. Keep in mind that a righteous person (by definition, in the Scriptures) is hard-working, honest, and charitable toward others in need.
  
- iv. The other sin is not following instructions regarding the manna: going out to look for manna on the Sabbath.
  1. **Question:** *Why* would someone do that?
    - a. They had been told to store enough for two days on the previous day. So, why would they go out to see if there was manna on the seventh day?
    - b. It seems to me that they might have been curious and wondered what they would find.
    - c. Curiosity is not always bad. I suppose I am a rather curious person and wonder about all sorts of things. Curiosity can be a first step toward learning and insight.
    - d. However, curiosity in areas where the Lord says, “don’t go there” has gotten people into all kinds of trouble, from the very beginning.
      - i. There is an old and well-known proverb, “Curiosity killed the cat”. This refers to a dangerous (bad) type of curiosity.
      - ii. I think of Eve’s sin in eating the forbidden fruit.
      - iii. Today, the first step toward all kinds of sins is often curiosity toward something that is

forbidden. Examples: internet pornography, drug addictions, the occult, and various forms of sexual immorality, including homosexuality.

- iv. So many times, the first step toward serious sin begins with *curiosity*: “I wonder what *that* would feel like?”
2. The importance of self-control when we are curious about things God says are sinful.
    - a. “Now as he reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and answered, ‘Go away for now; when I have a convenient time I will call for you.’” (**Acts 24:25**, NKJV)
    - b. “Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” (**1 Corinthians 9:25**, ESV)
    - c. “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (**2 Peter 1:5-8**, NKJV)
    - d. Some may protest, “Self-control? That sounds so unspiritual, like we are trying to attain salvation *through our own effort*, like pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps! What about living *by the Spirit*? What about being saved the *grace of God*?”
      - i. Paul said, “But the *fruit of the Spirit* is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (**Galatians 5:22-23**, NKJV)
      - ii. Paul also said, “For the *grace of God* that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” (**Titus 2:11-13**, NKJV)

#### IV. Not by Bread Alone

- a. **Question:** Why preserve this in the golden jar? Why did the Lord want them to never forget this lesson?
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 8:1-3**.
  - i. God caused them to hunger and then fed them with manna for two reasons.
    1. To test them, to find out what was *in their hearts*. How we respond to the commands of God reveal what is in our hearts.
      - a. “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (**1 John 5:3**, NKJV)
      - b. “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” (**John 14:21**, NKJV)
    2. To teach them that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
      - a. Jesus Himself quoted this passage to Satan when He was being tempted to turn the stones to bread (and break His fast) in **Matthew 4:1-11** and **Luke 4:1-13**.
- c. **Wisdom of Solomon** also speaks of lessons to learn from the manna miracle. (For those not familiar with this book, it is found in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles. It was in the original 1611 King James Version as well and remained there at least through the late 1800’s).
  - i. First, the author explains how the Lord decimated the crops of the Egyptians. Then he contrasts it with how He fed His own people in the Wilderness.
    1. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 16:20-29**.
    2. Consider the contrasting treatment of Egypt vs. Israel regarding crops and food.
      - a. The Egyptians grew crops, but the Lord destroyed them.
      - b. The Israelites followed the Lord and were *fed directly by God*.
    3. The lesson: it is not the production of crops that feeds man, but the word of the Lord.

- ii. Second, note that while the manna could be baked in fire, it melted with the rays of sun. According to the author, this is to teach us the importance of *rising early* to give thanks to God.
  - 1. I realize that there is *no one-size-fits-all command or rule* that we rise early to spend devotional time with the Lord. We are all different, and some are more alert and better able to focus later in the day. That noted, for many of us, there is *great benefit* to be found in following this pattern of starting our day by rising early to give thanks to God and to meditate on His word.
    - a. We have the example of Jesus: “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed.” (**Mark 1:35**, NKJV)
    - b. Consider also what David, the “man after God’s own heart” (**1 Samuel 13:14**, **Acts 13:22**) said regarding the importance of seeking the Lord *in the morning*.
      - i. Read **Psalm 5:1-4**.
      - ii. David said, “*In the morning you shall hear my voice.*”
- d. Devotion to the word of God.
  - i. Read **Psalm 1:1-3**
    - 1. The man who meditates on the word of God is like a tree planted by streams of water. It *always flourishes*, regardless of outward circumstances.
    - 2. There is an old Bible inscription I saw once, that I have never forgotten: “This Book will keep you out of sin, *and sin will keep you out of this Book*”!
    - 3. To me, being well fortified with the word of God is analogous to having a strong immune system to fight off diseases.
  - ii. Read **Psalm 19:8-11** (designated **Psalm 18:8-11** in LXX)
  - iii. Read **Psalm 119:1-11; 97-105** (designated **Psalm 118** in the LXX)
    - 1. The word of the Lord is described as being like a lamp to guide our feet, and as spiritual food that is sweet as honey and honeycomb.

- a. Perhaps this was link between the word of God and honey, sweet to the taste, was foreshadowed by the fact that the manna tasted like honey, as well.
  2. Meditating on the word of God makes me wiser than the elders and wiser than my enemies.
  3. Having the word of God on my heart keeps me from sin. A young man should hide the word of God in his heart (memorize it) to keep his way pure.
- iv. Consider the attitude of Jesus toward the Scriptures.
1. He insisted that the Scriptures cannot be broken (**John 10:35**).
  2. For those who had access to the Scriptures, ignorance of the Scriptures is no excuse!
    - a. Jesus has Abraham telling the rich man who had died and was concerned about his still-living brothers, "They have Moses and the prophets, *let them hear them.*" (**Luke 16:29**)
    - b. Jesus admonished the Sadducees, "You are mistaken, *not knowing the Scriptures...*" (**Matthew 22:29**)
    - c. For those who have access to the Scriptures, ignorance of what it says (due to laziness or otherwise) certainly is *no excuse*.
  3. We must never replace or supersede the word of God with man-made rules. (**Mark 7:1-13**)
  4. Those who know the Scriptures *but do not follow* them get the strongest rebuke from Jesus, especially for those who are leading or teaching others. (**Matthew 23:1-30**)
  5. Jesus personally memorized the Scriptures and brought them to bear by quoting them when He was being tempted by Satan. (**Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13**)
- v. **Challenge:** How is *your own* personal devotion to word of God? This is a great time to take an inventory.
1. Do you read every day? Do you read from throughout Scriptures (all parts of the Old Testament, as well as New Testament)?
  2. Do you actually *meditate* on the word of God (**Psalm 1:1-3**), *mulling it over deeply* rather than simply reading it casually)?

3. Do you memorize Scripture, to “hide the word of God in your heart”, to keep you from sin (**Psalm 119:11**, designated **Psalm 118:11** in the LXX)?
4. Do you love the Scriptures, so that you are devoted to them as one would be toward water, milk (as a child), gold or honey?
5. Or, *have you become bored with the Scriptures*, as those in Wilderness eventually tired of the manna? Would you rather check your iPhone or laptop computer (or magazines or other books) for news, entertainment, podcasts or fiction?
  - a. Be honest with yourself.
- e. Never forget the lesson of the manna in the Wilderness for 40 years.: “*Man does not live by bread alone...*”. (**Deuteronomy 8:3**)

#### V. Another Way that Moses Foreshadowed Jesus

- a. As Eusebius pointed out in *Proof of the Gospel*, book 3 (c. 320 AD), **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** says that the great future prophet to come would be “like Moses”. This was a prophecy about Jesus.
  - i. Therefore, we should expect to see that the miraculous signs performed by Moses foreshadowed *strikingly similar* signs that would be done by Jesus.
  - ii. However, Eusebius said that we should expect to see that the miracles done by Jesus would be in some way *even greater* than those done by His forerunner, Moses.
- b. In **John 6:1-13**, Jesus fed 5,000 men miraculously, with bread.
  - i. Afterward it says, “Then those men, when they had seen the sign that Jesus did, said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.”” (**John 6:14**, NKJV)
  - ii. Clearly, this is a reference to the **Deuteronomy 18:15-19** prophecy, since Jesus had just performed a miracle that was strikingly reminiscent of Moses feeding the people miraculously with bread (manna).
- c. Eusebius indicated we should expect to see the miracles performed by Jesus not only similar to those of Moses, but also in some way *greater than* the corresponding miracles of Moses.
  - i. For example:

1. Moses' first public miracle was turning water to blood, which stank; while Jesus changed water to excellent wine (a similar, *yet greater* miracle).
  2. Moses crossed water (the Red Sea) in an unusual way and brought others along, by parting the sea and walking through the midst of it. Jesus performed a similar but *even greater miracle* by walking on top of the water, on the Sea of Galilee, and bringing Peter to him in the same manner.
- ii. However, Moses fed hundreds of thousands with bread from heaven (manna), while Jesus fed thousands by multiplying loaves and fishes.
  - iii. **Question:** The miracle of Jesus was similar to that of Moses, *but in what way was it greater?*
- d. Jesus explains that *He Himself* is the true bread from God that came down from heaven.
- i. "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" (**John 6:32-35**, NKJV)
  - ii. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. 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." (**John 6:47-51**, NKJV)
  - iii. "This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (**John 6:58**, NKJV)
    1. The bread provided by Jesus was Himself. It was greater than the bread provided by Moses since the bread of Moses fed people physically for a time only (and they all died afterward). However, Jesus provides the true "bread from heaven" which if a man eats it, he will never die. *He will live forever!*