

Bread from Heaven

Bible Background • EXODUS 16

Printed Text • EXODUS 16:1–8, 13–15 | Devotional Reading • 2 CORINTHIANS 8:9–15

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **CONTRAST** God’s provision in the wilderness with Israel’s former slave masters in Egypt, **CONSIDER** the times we have complained about God’s provision, and **EXPRESS** thanks for the many ways God takes care of us.

In Focus

Hot days, warm evenings, or cool breezes were easier for outdoor living than harsh winters. Mr. and Mrs. George had lost their jobs and home, and their three children—twin girls and a boy—were in foster care. They would stay there until the Georges found jobs and a place to live. It was a terrifying and extremely tearful day when the social workers came and took the children away.

The cold winter snow and storms had begun. Mr. and Mrs. George had both found part-time jobs, but finding a place to live was hard. One evening, they decided to stay at a shelter because the bitter cold air and winds were too much to endure. The family shelter was filled with children, teens, adults, parents, and even some grandparents. This particular evening, the shelter provided light snacks and hot chocolate for an event everyone was invited to attend about job training, legal assistance, and housing opportunities. The best part was that the legal program would help them with having their children returned to them after finding them housing and jobs. The Georges talked about things and prayed. They accepted the offers and were counting the days until they would hold and kiss their children again.

Why do you trust God to answer your prayers? How do you respond when God does not answer your prayers the way you want?

Keep in Mind

“The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. “What is it?” they asked each other. They had no idea what it was. And Moses told them, “It is the food the LORD has given you to eat” (Exodus 16:15, NLT)

Words You Should Know

A. Murmur (v. 2) *lun* (Heb.) — To stubbornly complain

B. Manna (v. 15) *man* (Heb.) — Bread God provided the Israelites in the wilderness, meaning “what is it?”

Say It Correctly

Manna. MAN-uh.

Jochebed. JAH-cuh-bed.

Elim. EE-lim.

KJV

Exodus 16:1 And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt.

2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt:

7 And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?

8 And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.

15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

NLT

Exodus 16:1 Then the whole community of Israel set out from Elim and journeyed into the wilderness of Sin, between Elim and Mount Sinai. They arrived there on the fifteenth day of the second month, one month after leaving the land of Egypt.

2 There, too, the whole community of Israel complained about Moses and Aaron.

3 "If only the LORD had killed us back in Egypt," they moaned. "There we sat around pots filled with meat and ate all the bread we wanted. But now you have brought us into this wilderness to starve us all to death."

4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Look, I'm going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions.

5 On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual."

6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "By evening you will realize it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

7 In the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaints, which are against him, not against us. What have we done that you should complain about us?"

8 Then Moses added, "The LORD will give you meat to eat in the evening and bread to satisfy you in the morning, for he has heard all your complaints against him. What have we done? Yes, your complaints are against the LORD, not against us."

13 That evening vast numbers of quail flew in and covered the camp. And the next morning the area around the camp was wet with dew.

14 When the dew evaporated, a flaky substance as fine as frost blanketed the ground.

15 The Israelites were puzzled when they saw it. "What is it?" they asked each other. They had no idea what it was. And Moses told them, "It is the food the LORD has given you to eat.

The People, Places, and Times

Aaron. The son of Amram and Jochebed, and brother of Moses and Miriam, Aaron was Israel's first high priest. Aaron's family was descended from the Levites, Israel's first priests. Later all Levites were subordinated to Aaron and his descendants within their tribe. God commanded Moses to set apart Aaron and his sons from among the Israelites to serve God as priests by a perpetual ordinance. Moses ordained Aaron and his sons as God had instructed to make sacrifices, offerings, and atonement at the altar in the sanctuary. Prior to being consecrated as the high priest, Aaron served as Moses' spokesman before Pharaoh in Egypt, as Moses had protested that he was not able to speak directly to Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10–14). One of Aaron's shortcomings was yielding to pressure from the Israelites to make a golden calf for worship at Mount Sinai, also called Mount Horeb (Exodus 32:1–4).

Background

The Israelites were delivered from 400 years of bondage in Egypt and escaped with great wealth because of the power of God and His judgment against the Egyptians and their false gods (Exodus 15:1–21). They sang a song of God's glory and mercy toward them and celebrated as God now traveled with them as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night on their way to Mount Sinai where they would worship God as free people. On the journey, they had seen God part the Red Sea to allow them to walk through on dry land while the Egyptians pursued them. Yet when the Egyptians arrived at the sea, it closed, drowning Pharaoh and his armies. On the other side of the sea, they traveled for three days without water and stopped at a place called Marah. The water there was bitter, unfit for drinking, and they complained to Moses that God is going to have them die of thirst. God set up an agreement there that if they obey Him, He will continue to provide for them and make the bitter waters drinkable. They leave there and then set camp at a huge oasis called Elim where they can get water and rest before they continue their travel.

How has God shown His provision in your life? Did any provisions feel miraculous?

At-A-Glance

1. The Complaint (Exodus 16:1–3)
2. The Response (vv. 4–8)
3. The Provision (vv. 13–15)

In Depth

1. The Complaint (Exodus 16:1–3) It has only been a month since the Children of Israel had been miraculously delivered from Egypt. After a rest at the oasis of Elim, they begin the journey into the wilderness on their way to Mt. Sinai where God has appointed them to meet Him. Yet only a short time into the journey, they begin to complain against Moses and Aaron, their leaders. Even though their complaint against their leaders and God is ridiculous, the whole community joins in the despair. They are hungry. But rather than asking the all-powerful God who just delivered them from 400 years of slavery for provision, they complain. They cry out that God should have killed them in Egypt because while they were enslaved, at least they could eat when they wanted. Now that they are free, they are hungry, and that is a fate worse than death. Their temporary hunger makes them feel it would be better to be well fed in bondage to Egyptians than to be hungry and free in a relationship with God.

Why might some people choose bondage over freedom whether physically, mentally, or spiritually?

2. The Response (vv. 4–8) The Lord hears the cries of the Israelites and responds with provisions. God is willing and able to provide for His people, but he will give them instructions to obey in order to receive the provision. The Lord will provide only enough food for the day, so no one can hoard or store it up and become dependent upon themselves. They will all be dependent on God alone for their daily bread. Yet they will also keep the Sabbath, so God will miraculously allow them to have enough for two days every six days, so no one has to work on the Sabbath. Moses and Aaron clarify for the Children of Israel that God will do this as a display of His power to provide. God hears their complaints and will respond; Moses and Aaron are just the messengers. The Israelites do not need to seek multiple gods as other nations do in order to have their needs met. The same Lord who is their deliverer is also their provider.

Why do we sometimes complain about our situations rather than rely on God who is able to deliver us from them?

3. The Provision (vv. 13–15) Quail is an available source of wild poultry in the wilderness. Yet it is an act of God that so many quail show up in the camp for the Children of Israel to have meat. In addition, God sends dew that produces a flaky substance that acts as flour for the Children of Israel to make bread. They are confused by what they are seeing and call it “manna,” which means “what is it?” in Hebrew. God responds to their complaint with His own word that He will provide food for them in the wilderness. God is faithful to His Word: He provides meat and bread daily for the Israelites. Moses serves again as an interpreter when the Children of Israel are confused about what they are seeing. Although they complained and God answered before, they still do not understand God’s provision. Moses informs them that what they are seeing is food that the Lord had promised.

How has God intervened or provided for your life in unexpected ways?

Search the Scriptures

1. How soon do the Israelites begin complaining after being freed from slavery? Why might they make such an extreme complaint?
2. Why does the Lord make it so the food from heaven or manna only lasts for one day?

Discuss the Meaning

1. God is able to provide for those who seek His provision. What keeps us from seeking God for provision?
2. How can we shift our focus from what we don’t have to be grateful for what we do have?

Liberating Lesson

Hunger is one of the greatest problems in our world today. An estimated nine million people die of starvation every year all over the world. Yet, research shows that there is more than enough food in the world for everyone to have enough to eat. The problem is not a lack of resources but the distribution of resources that leaves places like North America and Europe wasting more food in a day than other places in Africa and Asia consume in several months. God is able to provide food for all people on earth. But those who hoard it up for themselves instead of sharing it with those who have none cause their brothers and sisters to face starvation daily. We are called as followers of Jesus Christ to do what He did. Not only should we pray for daily bread for all of God’s children, but we must use what we have individually and systemically to feed the multitudes. Some people feel the poor and hungry are in situations of their own making. They should work harder, so they would have more to eat and live better lives, but God recognizes the needs of all people despite their economic status. God treated even ungrateful, complaining Israel not with contempt, but with mercy, feeding them even though they were complaining. How much more so should we believe that God wants to feed all those who hunger? God is able to take what seems like enough for our own lunch and feed five thousand with more than enough left over. We are the body of Christ in the world, and the world is hungry. Will we feed them today and use our wisdom and resources that have produced abundance to help them eat for a lifetime?

Application for Activation

Take some time this week to journal or write down some things God has provided for you in the past year. How has God provided for you in ways that really impacted you? Are there any situations you are facing now where you are more focused on what you need than who God is? Pray for God's provision and then use wisdom to manage and be thankful for what you have to do for today rather than worry about what you need for tomorrow. God will be the same providing God tomorrow that He was yesterday and is today. How can you show your gratitude to God this week instead of complaining?

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Exodus 16:1–8, 13–15

The book of Exodus contains a major part of Israel's history and their relationship with God. It records God's acts of faithfulness and grace as He leads them to the Promised Land in fulfillment of His promise to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The book presents a series of problems the people face and God's solutions. Repeatedly during their wilderness wanderings, the Children of Israel grumble against Moses and Aaron whenever they face a crisis (Exodus 15:24, 16:2, 17:3; Numbers 14:2, 29, 16:41). However, in reality, they grumble against the Lord (Exodus 16:8). Nonetheless, each time God demonstrates His sovereignty, faithfulness, and grace. God always comes to their rescue and solves their problem in spite of their unfaithfulness and lack of trust. The book is summed up as "God's faithfulness and grace in dealing with His people."

For instance, Israel witnessed God's sovereignty and the act of deliverance (Exodus 14). He miraculously parted the Red Sea (one of the greatest obstacles on their way) and made the whole multitude (about 600,000 men, besides women and children, 12:37) of Israel walk through on dry land while the whole Egyptian army drowned (14:21–31). This resulted in praise and worship (15:1–21). They then journey through the wilderness of Shur. After the three day journey, they arrived at Marah and were thirsty. They found the water there undrinkable—bitter (which is what Marah means). They complained, and God turned the undrinkable bitter water into drinkable, "sweet water" (15:25). They arrived at Elim. In contrast to Marah, in Elim were twelve sources of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there for some time before proceeding in their journey (15:27).

1 And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

The people leave Elim and come to the wilderness of Sin. The English phrase, “they took their journey” is the Hebrew word, *nasa’* (naw-SAH), which means “to pull up” and is used often when referring to pulling up tent stakes, as in the start of a journey. That indicates that they camp in Elim for some time, perhaps several days. The word Elim (Heb. ’Eylim, ay-LEEM) means “palm trees.” They camp and rest there because of the presence of the oasis and trees, which provides water and shelter—a proper place for rest (Exodus 15:27). After leaving Elim, the people arrive at the “wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai.” The wilderness’s name is a transliteration of the Hebrew Sin (SEEN), which means “thorn” or “clay.” The area is not named “Sin” because of the people’s rebellious or sinful acts, nor should it be interpreted in its English meaning, as if the people were traveling through a “sinful” place. Rather Sin is a place, a stretch of desert land along the way across the Sinai Peninsula. It is a vast expanse of sand and stone which tests the faith of the Israelites. It should be noted that sometimes God uses our “wildernesses” to test our faith and trust in Him. He often uses the crises we face to display His faithfulness and to demonstrate that He cares for and is in control of our affairs.

The people of Israel arrive at the wilderness of Sin precisely one month after their departure from Egypt (12:6). (One month more would bring them to Sinai, Exodus 19:1.) The food supply they carried along seems to have depleted. It is not out of place for the people to run out food, especially given the length of time since they left Egypt and have been wandering in the desert, a dry, sandy, stony place. There is nowhere they could replenish their food supply after leaving Elim because of the nature of the place; no life existed there. They become hungry and in need of food. They again resort to murmuring and complaining bitterly against Moses and Aaron as they did in Marah (Exodus 15:24). It is not unnatural for people to express their need. However, instead of expressing their need to Moses and Aaron, the people murmur and begin to speak evil against them. The word “murmur” (Heb. *lun*, LOON) means to be stubbornly against someone and complain. The whole congregation of Israel grumbles against Moses, though in reality, they are grumbling against God.

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

They charge Moses and Aaron with conspiring to murder them in the wilderness. “If only the Lord had killed us back in Egypt,” they moan. Oftentimes, when faced with certain crises, we forget God’s past work of deliverance, protection, and provision. There is no difference between these people. Within one month of their departure, Israel experienced God’s mighty deeds. He led them through the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21–31); He turned the bitter water at Marah to drinkable, sweet water (15:25). At the desert of Elim, God also provided a place of rest, a camping ground (15:27). They forget that the God who did all of this is capable of supplying them with food. Instead, they crave all the meat (KJV: “flesh pots”) and bread in Egypt. Present predicaments, crises, and discomforts often tend to becloud our memories of past victories and successes. Thus we tend to become ungrateful and unfaithful toward God. This is where we find the people of Israel at this time.

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. 5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare that which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

In spite of our ingratitude and disbelief, God always remains faithful. As He did with the people’s complaint for water at Marah, and consistent with His character, the Lord responds to the people’s cry. He promises Moses that He will provide the people food in an unusual manner: “Behold I will rain bread from heaven for you” (v. 4). Often God provides for us with known resources, and other times He will provide from unexpected sources. In the present circumstance, the provision will come directly from heaven. The phrase, “I will rain bread from heaven for you,” describes not only the source of the food but the quality and quantity. It is from heaven (“angels’ food,” Psalm 78:25), and it will fall down like rain and cover the camp (“bread to the full,” Exodus 16:8).

The promise comes with a definite instruction of obedience and responsibility. The people are to go out daily and gather a certain quantity. This is to test their obedience to God as well as their ability to trust God for their daily bread. Obedience and trust are essential in any relationship; more so with God. We must believe that our God is able to supply our daily needs. Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11; cf. Luke 11:3). By the same token, obedience to the Law of the Lord is vital in our relationship with Him. The test concerns the institution of the Sabbath rest. The people are to go out daily and gather enough for the day, but on the sixth day, “it shall be twice as much as they gather daily” so that they can rest on the seventh day. This is consistent with the written Law to be given at Sinai (Exodus 20:8–11; cf. Genesis 2:2–3). This law also forces the people to trust the Lord to provide enough for them to make it through an extra day even without disciplined daily work. Equally important is the part they are responsible to perform. They are to go out daily and collect as much they can use for the day. The provision is made; it is their responsibility to go and to pick up what they need.

6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt: 7 And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?

After receiving the promise from the Lord, Moses and Aaron summon the people to break the news to them. In answer to their murmuring, Moses and Aaron assure them of God’s presence and concern over their affairs. Moses guarantees them that by the evening (KJV: “at even”) they “shall know that the LORD hath brought” them out of the land of Egypt. It will be doubtful to suppose that the people do not know the Lord was the one who delivered them from Egypt. Their experiences of the plagues in Egypt, the Passover, and their deliverance at the Red Sea, coupled with the provision of drinking water at Marah, are enough evidence to the fact. The truth of the matter is that they know the truth—they experienced all these extraordinary occurrences. However, it does not take much to cause an average person or group to complain when confronted with the slightest temporary shortage of life’s essentials: water, food, or shelter.

The verb “know” is the Hebrew *yada’* (yaw-DAH). It is used in different ways and in a variety of senses, figuratively and literally, to mean “to know.” So Moses says to them that in the evening they will really know and be certain that it is God who brought them out of Egypt. In other words, they will be convinced of the fact when they see what the Lord is going to do.

Then in the morning, Moses promises, they are going to see God’s glory displayed. The word “see” is the Hebrew *ra’ah* (raw-AW) and the two verbs *yada’* and *ra’ah* are often used synonymously. “Glory” is the Hebrew word *kabod* (kaw-BODE, weight, heaviness). They are not going to see the glory of the Lord as in His splendor or His enthroned radiance, but in the display of His love, mercy, and grace as He miraculously provides them with food in answer to their complaint. Moses assures them that the Lord hears their murmuring. Moses and Aaron did not bring them out of Egypt, God did. Moses and Aaron are only God’s servants, God’s spokesmen, following His directions.

8 And Moses said, This shall be, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what are we? your murmurings are not against us, but against the LORD.

Moses’ closing remarks emphasize his previous statement (v. 7). Here Moses reiterates the fact that their complaints are in reality not against him and Aaron but against God. To reassure them that their complaint has been heard, the Lord is not only going to rain down “bread in the morning” (vv. 4, 8), He is also going to give them “flesh [meat] to eat” that evening. What an amazing grace. Instead of raining down His fury, fire, and brimstone to consume them for their murmuring, the Lord promises to take care of their problems and rain down food from above. How often do we do wrong toward God, and yet He shows us mercy? Even while we are still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). God’s love is consistent at all times, and His faithfulness never

fails. Indeed He does not treat us as our sins deserve, and He does not reward us or pay us back in full for our wrongs (Psalm 103:10). This is an eternal truth that the people of Israel are about to experience.

13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host. 14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground. 15 And when the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, It is manna: for they wist not what it was. And Moses said unto them, This is the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

That very evening, faithful to His promise and in response to the people's craving for meat, God miraculously provides them with quails. The flock comes in abundance of the supply and provision: it covers the camp. The psalmist describes it thus: "He rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls like as the sand of the sea. And he let it fall in the midst of their camp, round about their habitations. So they did eat, and were well filled: for he gave them their own desire" (Psalm 78:27–29; cf. Psalm 105:40). Likewise and in fulfillment to His promise (Exodus 16:4, 12), the next morning the Lord rains down bread described as "round" and "small as the hoar frost" (v. 14). On seeing these strange elements, the people are puzzled. They ask one another, "What is it?" because they have no idea what it is. Since they do not understand the strange food, the Israelites name it "manna," which means "What is it?" from the Hebrew man (MAWN). It is described as white like a coriander seed, tasting like honey wafers (v. 31). Even though some try to explain away this miracle with natural phenomena, the truth remains that God is a faithful, miracle-working God who supplies our needs at all times in unique ways as He did for Israel. Jesus is the ultimate manna from heaven (John 6:32–35). In Him we have life.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Striking a Fair Balance
(2 Corinthians 8:9–15)

TUESDAY

Believers Depend on One Another
(1 Corinthians 12:18–26)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord Responds to Complaints
(Exodus 16:9–12)

THURSDAY

Conducting Daily Family Duties
(Exodus 16:16–21)

FRIDAY

Observing the Sabbath Day
(Exodus 16:22–30)

SATURDAY

Symbols of Remembrance
(Exodus 16:31–36)

SUNDAY

God Provides for the People
(Exodus 16:1–8, 13–15)