

Exodus 16: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Exodus chapter 16 Then the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people will go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not.

On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily. So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord.

For what are we that you grumble against us? And Moses said, When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat, and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him, what are we?

Your grumbling is not against us, but against the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.

And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord said to Moses, I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel.

[1 : 5 8] Say to them, At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God. In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.

And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people 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, It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded. Gather of it, each one of you, as much as he can eat.

You shall each take an omer, according to the number of the persons that each of you has in his tent. And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less.

But when they measured it with an omer, whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. Each of them gathered as much as he could eat.

[3 : 0 5] And Moses said to them, Let no one leave any of it over till the morning. But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.

Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat. But when the sun grew hot, it melted. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much bread, two omers each.

And when all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, he said to them, This is what the Lord has commanded. Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord.

Bake what you will bake, and boil what you will boil. And all that is left over, lay aside to be kept till the morning. So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them.

And it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. Moses said, Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the Lord. Today you will not find it in the field.

[4 : 04] Six days you shall gather it. But on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none. On the seventh day, some of the people went out to gather, but they found none.

And the Lord said to Moses, How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? See, the Lord has given you the Sabbath. Therefore on the sixth day, he gives you bread for two days.

Remain each of you in his place. Let no one go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day. Now the house of Israel called its name Manna.

It was like coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. Moses said, This is what the Lord has commanded. Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.

And Moses said to Aaron, Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the Lord to be kept throughout your generations. As the Lord commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept.

[5 : 16] The people of Israel ate the manna forty years, till they came to a habitable land. They ate the manna till they came to the border of the land of Canaan. An omer is the tenth part of an ether.

In Exodus chapter 16, the hypernaturalism that has been a feature of the story of the Exodus to this point continues. It begins with a complaint about the lack of food. They look back with longing upon the food of Egypt.

There is a food crisis, but there is an attendant faith crisis. Would they rather be in the service and employ of Pharaoh where they have reliable food and they can build up and accumulate food day by day and not have any concern about not having food for the next day?

Or would they rather trust upon God, their deliverer, the one who cares for them, and rely upon his provision? God is continuing to test his people. Note that the point of the Exodus is not just the mere deliverance of people from oppression.

It is a revelation of God's character for the end of proper relationship with him. It's not just about deliverance. God is testing his people to see whether they will trust him in a difficult situation.

[6 : 30] Will they trust him when they need to depend upon him? And there is a discipline of trust that they must learn that will be taught in large part through the giving of the manna which occurs in this chapter.

The pattern of the Sabbath will be established and revealed along with the gift of the manna. It involves a relationship between God's foundational work in the creation itself and Israel's dependent work upon God's foundational work in the providence that he exercises within his creation and Israel's dependent work as they depend upon the good gifts of creation to gather what they need for themselves.

It's going to be a sign of reliance upon the God who works in all things. And the introduction of the Sabbath at this point is also important as a contrast to the lack of rest in Egypt.

They are going to serve a new master. They need to depend upon this master, to trust this master, not to see themselves as at odds with this master. They complain, but Moses makes clear that they are complaining against God himself.

God is the one who brought them out of Egypt. He is the one who established the Exodus. Moses is his servant. It wasn't Moses who achieved this. It was God. And it's an impugning of God's character to suggest that he wouldn't provide for the people that he has delivered.

[7 : 50] The glory of God appears in the cloud at this point. And something about the appearance of the cloud presumably changed to indicate that God was gloriously present within it. At the evening, God provides quail as food.

And in the morning, he provides manna. The focus is particularly upon the manna, but that evening morning pattern might draw our mind back to creation itself. God is providing over six days and then on the seventh, he's going to give rest.

He's establishing the creation pattern that we see back in Genesis chapter one. And he's teaching his children to operate with the same pattern. He's teaching them to act as their father acted.

He's treating Israel as his firstborn son to the training to work in the pattern of their father. Manna is provided in a way that requires and necessitates radical dependence.

There's an omer given per head, a particular quantity that is enough to feed them, but no more than that. They have this omer given to them of a substance that is mysterious.

[8 : 56] What is it? They don't know what it is. It's not clear. It's not something that fits into their regular categories. It has a honey-like flavour. And maybe we're supposed to see here a foretaste of the land that will be given to them, a land flowing with milk and honey.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul can speak about this as all eating the same spiritual food. There is something about what is given to them in this manner that anticipates something of the land that they're going to enter.

It also maybe points to a feeding upon God in a deeper sense. We have the manner of the Lord's Supper. The point of the manner is to give us a foretaste of the kingdom that we will enter into in the future.

Later on in the story of the Exodus, we read of the grapes of Eschol, some grapes that are taken from the land and brought into the wilderness so that the people can taste something of the good gifts and fruit of the land before they enter into it.

And here, maybe they're having a foretaste of a greater land that they will enter into at some point in the future. Some commentators upon the book of Exodus have suggested that there is a naturally occurring phenomenon that could account for the gift of the manna.

[10 : 08] And I would not dismiss that out of hand. We've seen throughout the story of the Exodus that there is a hypernaturalism to the story. God uses natural means to achieve his supernatural purposes.

We are not looking for an explanation within the blind events of nature, of a nature that's autonomous, works on its own principles and has no relationship to a creator. Rather, the point is that there are natural processes that the creator God will use for his purposes to achieve his ends for his people.

And so, experiencing the gift of the manna, the point is not necessarily that God can overrule and provide beyond the provision of nature. The point is that the God of nature can provide for everything that they need.

If he's the God of nature, he does not need to provide from some other source. He has great storehouses. He's the God who owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He can find a way to bring his bounty to them and they need to learn to depend upon him.

Manna can't be accumulated. It can't be preserved. You can't gather an excess for trade. It must depend day by day upon provision and they must depend on extra provision on the day before the Sabbath, an extra sense of trust that must come in at that point.

[11 : 28] On the day before the Sabbath, you're not just relying upon the regularity of a natural pattern. You must depend upon the God who establishes those patterns. You must depend upon God to provide over and above what the regular pattern of nature would presume you would be receiving.

There's no assurance beyond the character of God. You cannot have guarantees that release you from the burden of trust. It isn't given in proportion to labour. Those who try and gather a lot end up with just as much as they need.

Those who gather little and struggle maybe have just what they need too. They must work to gather it but it's like the workers on the vineyard in Jesus' parable. They are provided with exactly what they need and no more.

They must be willing to depend upon God completely for provision. We should see connections between the testing of Israel here in the wilderness and the Egyptians being judged with the plagues.

There's hypernaturalism at work in both places. God rained hail upon Egypt and now God rains bread from the heavens upon the children of Israel. The locusts came up upon and covered the land of Egypt.

[12 : 36] The quail come up upon and cover the wilderness. In Numbers 11 the wind brings the quail like the wind brings the locusts. And so there's a symmetry.

The symmetry between the God who is in control of nature and can tear nature apart and use nature as a weapon against his enemies and the God who is the Lord of nature and can use nature to serve his people to protect them to feed them to give them everything that they need.

There are other food tests that we can see in the Old and New Testament that have a similar pattern. Maybe we could think of 1 Kings chapter 19 as Elijah is in the wilderness and he's provided for by God or the story of Elijah where he's given the ravens to give him food.

God can use even these birds of prey and carrion to provide for the prophet who's in need. A similar thing in Jesus in the wilderness. He must be tested concerning food.

Is he going to trust God? Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. God is the one that we trust. God is the one that provides.

[13 : 45] And as a result we can depend upon God in these situations of extremity but also in these situations of the day-to-day provision. This is the pattern that the story of the manna provides.

It's a lesson that's supposed to be taken into the future of Israel's life. Not just as something that is left in the past in the wilderness experience that they grow beyond as they enter into the land.

Manna is a pattern for God's provision more generally. In Leviticus chapter 23 verses 10 to 11 it's recalled in the practice of the sheaf or the omer that's offered.

And it's the same term that's used in the Hebrew. In chapter 23 verses 10 to 11 we read Speak to the people of Israel and say to them When you come into the land that I give you and reap its harvest you shall bring the sheaf or the omer of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest and he shall wave the sheaf or the omer before the Lord so that you may be accepted.

On the day after the Sabbath the priest shall wave it. As in the case of the manna preserved before the testimony this ongoing practice of presenting the first fruits the first fruits that are weighed in the omer or the sheaf that is the same measurement of the manna provided each day Israel was recalling God's fundamental provision in the wilderness as a constant lesson to be recalled in its life in the agricultural system of the land.

[15:15] They depend upon God there too. It's less obvious it's less apparent but it's no less true. They depend upon God for daily provision and in offering up that first fruit that omer they are recalling the lesson that they learnt concerning the manna in the wilderness.

A question to consider in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 13 to 15 Paul writes Paul here quotes from the story of Exodus chapter 16 referencing the words concerning the manna but he's applying it to the practice of Christian charity.

How does his argument work and what can it teach us about the principle of the manna as it relates to our practice as the people of God?■■■