

Lesson 4
Quail and Manna
Exodus 16:1-16

God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt by His power and blood through the Passover Feast. He led them across the Red Sea by a miraculous intervention. Then God guided the Jews out into the wilderness to test them. He brought one crisis after another in order to prepare them to live by faith and fight future battles. When in the desert, the first test was no water and then bitter water. The people grumbled against Moses for leading them into the desert; yet Moses was just obeying God's orders. At Marah, they found plenty of water, but it was bitter and undrinkable. The people griped, complained, murmured and grumbled. God, being gracious and patient with this infant nation, performed another miracle for the people by changing the bitter water into sweet water, and they had their thirst quenched.

Then God moved the Israelites to Elim (the place of trees) where they camped for about a month. After the testing of no water and bitter water, which they flunked in high style because of their unbelief, God took them in grace to Elim where they could learn more truth about God, carry on an active prayer life and grow in grace during this time of refreshment. However, most of these Israelites did not absorb biblical truth while at Elim. They failed to learn God's Word when they were given the opportunity, for when another testing would come, they would need to call upon the truth of God they had stored in their heads.

All Christians go through testings, but these testings come in spurts and pass away. However, when in a time of testing, one cannot absorb doctrine, learn promises, or sometimes even pray. A person at this time must call on the truth he has stored in his mind during a time of refreshing. If a person has not learned, he cannot apply truth he does not know.

MOVEMENT OF ISRAEL Exodus 16:1

“Then they set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the sons of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, . . .” This verse tells us that the next stop was the Wilderness of Sin which is the whole extensive sandy plain that runs along the Red Sea to the southern end of the Sinaitic Peninsula. It is a dreary, desolate place, lined by chalk hills on the east and bordered by the Red Sea on the west. To the west, across the Red Sea, was the rich and fertile Egypt, which the Jews, in their minds, never left behind. They always wanted to go back to Egypt. Numbers 33:10 tell us they camped one place before entering the Wilderness of Sin. Apparently they camped by the Red Sea, which may refer to the Sea of Reeds or to the Gulf of Suez. It if refers to the Sea of Reeds, then God marched them back to the Sea of Reeds, which was the northern end of the Red Sea, where they originally made the crossing, or it may refer to the Gulf of Suez. Whatever, God took them to the Red Sea to remind them that He had delivered them from Egypt and brought them miraculously across the Red Sea.

Christians must constantly remind themselves of all the good things God has done for them. The mind must be trained to think positive thoughts because we are so quick to forget the multitude of things God has done for us in grace.

“. . .on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departure from the land of Egypt.” They left Egypt on April 15 (our calendar), the first month in the Jewish calendar, and now it was May 15, one month later. For thirty days God had supplied every need these Israelites had, and He performed two miracles in these thirty days, the opening of the Red Sea and the sweetening of the bitter waters. God also made a law that He would take care of them all the time they were in the wilderness (Exodus 15:25). Now after thirty days, their food supplies they brought out of Egypt were running short. The emptiness and privation of the desert was staring them in the face. They had food to some degree because they had livestock, but it was used mostly for milk and cheese and not for eating {Exodus 12:38; 17:3}. However, they were running out of meat

and bread. They wanted their wants met more than their needs. They could have temporarily survived on what food they had, but they wanted more and better.

The lust for more will always bring the Christian into a state of complaining, for it is impossible ever to have enough when we desire to have God meet our wants rather than our needs. The lust for more can never be satisfied.

MURMURINGS OF ISRAEL Exodus 16:2-5

“And the whole congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” Because they did not have adequate supplies of food (meat and bread), the Jews began to murmur and complain. Everyone became upset and disgusted with Moses and Aaron. Perhaps, even at this time, Joshua and Caleb complained as well, but we cannot be sure of this. The Jews had no reason to question God’s faithfulness and goodness, but they did because their eyes were on self rather than God. The Israelites, instead of having a stronger faith, actually retrogressed. Because of unbelief, their faith grew weaker instead of stronger. Whenever these Jews encountered a problem, they grumbled, showing their inability to trust God for the future.

“Yet they still continued to sin against Him, to rebel against the Most High in the desert. And in their heart they put God to the test by asking food according to their desire. Then they spoke against God. They said, ‘Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?’” (Psalm 78:17-19)

A Christian who complains all the time is just like the children of Israel. He has forgotten the great things God has done for him in salvation. A complainer is always short on memory of God’s faithfulness in the past. Just as Israel had been delivered by God, protected by God, and blessed by God and had forgotten it all after thirty days, so the Christian can have a very great lapse in memory about God’s grace in his life.

“And the sons of Israel said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the LORD’S hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat, when we ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into the wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’” They complained against Moses and Aaron, their leaders, because their own souls toward God were rotten. They blamed their condition on someone else rather than examining their own lives to see the problem was really unbelief. Complainers are always short sighted. The Jews were so down and depressed that they wished that God had killed them in Egypt rather than brought them out into the desert. Surely they did not really mean this, but because they had their eyes on circumstances rather than the God of circumstances, everything was out of perspective for them. They had a good case of “self-pity” and were experiencing the “woe is me” syndrome.

Often, when Christians get under the pile, they get blue, discouraged, and depressed and say, “I wish I were dead!” They are full of self-pity, and emotion has taken over their reasoning powers and the capacity for faith. Everything gets out of perspective when one gets a human viewpoint towards life. Just as God never intended to kill one Israelite but intended only to bless them, so God intends to give valuable lessons through the crisis of life.

The Jews had short spiritual memories and long human memories, for their minds flashed back to their days in Egypt as they sat by the flesh pots (pots of meat) and were filled with bread. Because they were operating on a human viewpoint, they magnified their situation all out of proportion in Egypt. They were really not fed that well in Egypt. They were slaves, and the food they ate was lousy, but their sin natures in them told them that their situation in Egypt was really better than it actually was. The good old days were really not that good. They ate Egyptian leftovers, and at best their food was second and third rate, but they remembered it to be much better than it actually was (Num. 11:5). They remembered sitting around the fleshpots. A fleshpot was a big outdoor kettle used to cook the miserable food the Egyptians gave them. Surely, the Israelites were rationed on the amount of meat they could eat as slaves. So they would have to supplement their meat supply with whatever they could find. They might find a rabbit, a gopher, a bird, a lizard, a crow, a snail or two, a couple of worms or grasshoppers. This was mere survival food; yet they

wanted to go back to Egypt. They actually wanted to go back and eat garbage food when just around the corner God had wonderful things planned for them in the future. Yet, when things got a little rough, they wanted to jump right back to the fleshpots of Egypt.

Christian, what is your fleshpot? What makes you want to jump out of your Christian life and go back into the world? Israel never left Egypt mentally and always had a desire to go back. Do you have a desire to go back to live the status quo life of an unbeliever? Perhaps you wish you could throw over Christianity for more money, but you have forgotten how materialism practically destroyed you as an unsaved person. Perhaps you think that if you were not a Christian you could have a premarital affair with someone, but have you forgotten the emptiness sex brings without love? Perhaps you would like to kick over the traces of Christ for the chance to take a man or a woman in adultery, but have you forgotten the misery of guilt and the secret life of hiding truth from your mate? Perhaps you want to return to a party life and long for a good old belt of booze, but have you forgotten the hangovers and the embarrassment that came into your life when you were controlled by alcohol? You may want at times to go back to the world, but remember, the world is cruel, hypocritical, superficial, shallow, lonely, and it never satisfies the deepest longings of the human soul. The sin nature in us tells us that the world is much more attractive than it actually is; to go back to Egypt would destroy us spiritually. Do not be shortsighted, for God has wonderful things planned for you if you will but trust Him. He allows you to be tested so He can teach you to live by faith and bless you. To go back into the world permanently is to renounce Christ and forfeit the benefits of salvation, which is tantamount to apostasy. When the urge comes upon you as a Christian to leave the faith and go back into the world, fight it, crucify it, and run from it. Go forward in faith trusting Christ for future blessing.

Why did these Jews complain? They had their eyes on circumstances. Complainers are always short on faith. They did not see that God is in control of circumstances.

Whenever circumstances change the Christian, something is wrong. Circumstances always change, but God never changes. Whenever a little difficulty throws a Christian into a tailspin, something is drastically wrong. The problem is summed up in one word: unbelief.

“Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.’” God gave a promise that He would make provision for the sons of Israel. Notice that God spoke to Moses, not the people. Perhaps Moses was praying to God for an answer to the problem as the people were complaining to him. If this is true, Moses was only driven closer to the Lord by the complaints of the people. These grippers and complainers caused Moses to go to the Lord for counsel and direction. When did God give the promise of provision to Israel?

When the people were griping, complaining, carping, moaning, and murmuring, God gave the promise of this provision. This was pure grace. God could have threatened great discipline upon these rebels, but instead, He dealt with them in grace, love, and patience.

“Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity and passes over the rebellious acts of the remnant of His possession? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in unchanging love.” (Micah 7:18)

These Israelites were filled with carnal actions and should have been judged, but God dealt with them in grace. When these stinkers were out of it spiritually, God provided for every one of them. When they absolutely deserved nothing, God was full of compassion. Again, this provision did not come from Moses but from God. Everything depended upon God. If it had depended on Israel, they all would have died in the wilderness. Everything depends upon God’s grace and His faithfulness.

If God could be so faithful to these critical Jews, He can be faithful to the Christian under any circumstances. These Jews were real rats and heels, but God dealt with them in grace. The Christian should give God the glory for everything, for everything depends upon God working and not the efforts of man. A Christian must understand that he deserves nothing, and everything he does have is because of the grace of

God.

God, once again, speaks of testing Israel. The test was not in the giving of quail and manna but in keeping the instructions on how to gather and use the manna and quail. It was a test to see whether the people would follow God's instructions. They could never take the land of Canaan until they learned by faith to follow God's instructions and not their own human reasoning.

“And it will come about on the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” Here is the principle of following God's instructions rather than human reasoning. They were to gather manna each morning, for that day, for five days, but on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much, and they were to gather none on the seventh day. This did not make much human sense, but if they believed God and did what He said, they would always have manna to eat. If they did not obey, they would either have no manna or the manna would rot and stink. If they did not keep God's rules, they had had it.

The principle is obvious. If we keep God's Word, we shall be blessed. If we deny it or pervert it, we shall not be blessed. Every Christian must learn to take his instructions from God's Word and not from human reasoning.

MANNA AND QUAIL Exodus 16:6-16

“So Moses and Aaron said to all the sons of Israel, ‘At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt; and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, for He hears your grumblings against the LORD and what are we, that you grumble against us?’ And Moses said, ‘This will happen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and bread to the full in the morning; for the LORD hears your grumblings which you grumble against Him. And what are we? Your grumblings are not against us but against the LORD.’” God promised the Israelites quail every evening and manna every morning, and they would be full and satisfied. God, instead of disciplining them, graced them with meat and bread far better than anything they ever had in Egypt.

The word “grumbling” is used five times in these three verses. The Israelites were a bunch of gripers, and that is why they wandered in the desert for forty years. They never stopped griping, so God had all the adults twenty and over die in the wilderness. Complaining, murmuring, or griping is sin, and it always is an expression of unbelief. It is a mental attitude that fails to trust God for the future. It doubts the grace of God. It is rejection of God's promises. Yet, God was faithful to His people, and He gave them grace when they were at their lowest ebb spiritually.

“Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Say to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, “Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your grumblings.”’ And it came about as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD spoke to Moses saying, ‘I have heard the grumblings of the sons 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.”’” God made this provision of grace when He should have judged the Israelites because He wanted them to know the truth that ***“I am the LORD your God.”***

God gives the Christian abundant material blessing so as to cause him to know God better. Material blessing should not cause us to be indifferent to God, but extremely grateful for His blessing. He gives us abundance that we might have more time to serve Him.

God should have spanked the Israelites, but instead, He blessed them. Does this mean then that God blesses the Christian when he sins? No, but it does indicate the grace of God in providing for the needs of all Christians, not just the spiritually mature and obedient. ***“And my God shall supply all your needs according***

to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19)

Perhaps there is a dietary truth here, although we cannot be dogmatic. God fed Israel twice a day, and He did the same for Elijah when he was at the Brook of Cherith. Perhaps the principle is that we should eat solid breakfasts and dinners but no lunches.

“So it came about at evening that the quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew evaporated, behold, on the surface of the wilderness there was a fine flake-like thing, fine as the hoarfrost on the ground.” God supernaturally provided millions of quail and thousands of pounds of manna. God promised to provide for Israel, and He always keeps His word. God was true to His promises when Israel least deserved it.

“When the sons 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 which the LORD has given you to eat.’” Manna was God’s supernatural health food, filled with rich vitamins and minerals. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey (Exodus 16:31). It also had the taste of fresh oil (Num. 11:8), a delicacy in that day. This was God’s food from heaven, and it was “angel’s food” (Psalm 78:24). God’s provision for Israel in the desert was better in every way than anything the Jews had in Egypt because God always provides the best for His people.

After conversion, God gives the Christian heavenly food to live on. He creates a hunger for the Word of God, which gives spiritual life to those who partake of it.

“This is what the LORD commanded, ‘Gather of it every man as much as he should eat; you shall take an omer apiece according to the number of persons each of you has in a tent.’” An omer equaled about six pints. Assuming there were two million Israelites, this would mean that they gathered about twelve million pints of manna a day. Think of this tremendous quantity! The magnitude of this miracle staggers the imagination, for God not only provided this for one day but every day for forty years in the desert (Exodus 16:35). The Israelites thought they would starve in the wilderness, but God took care of them abundantly. ***“... No good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.”*** (Psalm 84:11)

CONCLUSION

The Bible tells us that manna is a type or shadow of the person of Jesus Christ. In the same way that God sent manna from heaven to meet the physical needs of Israel in the desert, He sent Jesus Christ from heaven to meet the spiritual needs of sinners.

“Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.’ Jesus therefore said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.’ They said therefore to Him, ‘Lord, ever more give us this bread.’ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.’” (John 6:31-35)

Christ is the bread of spiritual life that always satisfies the deepest hunger in men. How can Christ satisfy you? You must come to him by faith and accept Him as your Lord and Savior. Jesus promises, ***“He who comes to Me shall not hunger.”***