

FRESH MANNA

EXODUS 16:1-35

When the children of Israel were encamped in the wilderness of Sin (see Numbers 33:11), the people “complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.” (Exodus 16:2 NKJV) Their complaint was as follows: “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.” (Exodus 16:3 NKJV)

There were some major flaws in this complaint.

Flaw #1: They did not acknowledge God as their leader, only Moses and Aaron. Their concept of God’s leadership had already been reduced to two men whom they could see, to whom they could readily complain without immediate reprisal (usually).

Flaw #2: The people complained that Moses and Aaron brought them into the desert to kill them by starvation. However, Moses and Aaron appealed repeatedly at God’s request, to Pharaoh to release the Israelites to go into the desert to serve God (not to starve). And later when they camped before Mt. Sinai, God even told Israel through Moses “I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself.” (Exodus 19:4 NKJV) It was clear that God intended for the people to get to know Him and trust Him for the months (and years) ahead. As for their mistaken belief that God wanted to take them into the desert to kill them by starvation, the reality was that God had a special “bread from heaven” all ready for them. It was called MANNA! And it sustained them for forty years.

Flaw # 3: Every time circumstances were fearful or unsuitable to the children of Israel, they looked back at Egypt as the place where they wanted to return. Sometimes they even wished that they had already died there, presumably because that would save them from dying in the desert. They also reasoned that slavery in Egypt would be better than death in the desert. (Exodus 14:12) They were even brazen enough to tell Moses the following: “because there are no graves in Egypt, have you taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you so dealt with us, to bring us up out of Egypt?” (Exodus 14:11 NKJV) The Israelites had come to believe that their destiny was either Egypt or their death in the desert.

They quickly decided that Egypt was more desirable than the uncertainties of desert travel, especially when in the desert they were either afraid or craving meat when none was available. They were simply opposed to God controlling their lives. With Him in charge they reasoned that they would never have what they wanted when they wanted it. In their minds, a return to Egypt offered more control of their lives, although they had conveniently deceived themselves to forget the rigors of slave labor that would await them.

It is plain to see that Israel’s complaints early in their desert journey were based on three major concerns: (1) unpopular leadership decisions, (2) fear of starvation in the desert, and (3) fear of dying in the desert and not in Egypt, their comfort zone. The remainder of this article will address Israel’s fear of starvation while traveling in mostly uninhabited desert land. The people learned that fresh, familiar foods would be conspicuously absent. That discovery was enough for them to accuse their leaders of an ill intention to take them into the desert to kill them by starvation. (See again: Exodus 16:3)

It was at this exact moment in history that God revealed to Moses how He would feed the entire congregation of Israel daily while traveling in the desert enroute to the land promised to them. This revelation to Moses began in Exodus 16:4 and continued through the rest of the chapter.

God introduced Israel to a supernatural food supply that was perfectly suited to their desert situation. It was undoubtedly the most nutritious food ever eaten by human kind and it fell all around the camp in plentiful supply six mornings out of seven. The pattern for the daily arrival of this food from heaven was as follows: "...When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it." (Numbers 11:9 NKJV) (This food came to be known as "manna," meaning "What is it?" The name God used for this food was "Bread from Heaven" when He first told Moses how He would feed the children of Israel.

When the daily supply of manna was still on the ground, the people had to gather it for their families and then prepare it in one of several ways. God established strict rules for gathering manna – no more than one omer (2 quarts or 2 liters) per person. A family of five persons could gather up to five omers (10 quarts or 10 liters) and be within these basic rules of collection. But God also told the children of Israel (through Moses) not to leave any part of their uneaten portion of manna overnight until the next morning or it would breed worms and stink (Exodus 16:19-20). Amazingly there were those who tested that rule and found out how true it was.

The people had no choice but to gather their apportionment of manna in the morning. In the first place, that's when the manna was on the ground, having been there when the dew was also on the ground during the previous night. But secondly, the disappearance of the remaining supply of manna took place as follows: "...When the sun became hot, it melted." (Exodus 16:21 NKJV)

But there was an important exception to the rules of gathering and preparing manna on the day before the Sabbath. On that day, the people were encouraged to gather and prepare twice as much manna (2 omers per person) as on other days. The reason was to allow the people to have food ready for the sixth day (the day preceding the Sabbath) and for the Sabbath day itself. God made this allowance so the Israelites could actually rest on the Sabbath from gathering or preparing manna, as well as from all other work (Exodus 16:23). And wouldn't you know? When they prepared meals for two days as they were allowed to do on the sixth day, the excess manna that would not be eaten until the Sabbath DID NOT BREED WORMS NOR STINK!! (Exodus 16:24)

Another very practical reason that God allowed the people to gather twice as much manna on the sixth day was because He would never cause any to fall on the ground on the Sabbath day. (Exodus 16:25-26) The gathering (and preparation) of extra manna on the sixth day substituted for the absence of freshly fallen manna on the Sabbath. But even after everyone was told there would be no new manna on the Sabbath, there were doubters who went out looking for it anyway. "...But they found none." (Exodus 16:27 NKJV)

PERSPECTIVES

God fed the children of Israel with manna, quite effectively, for forty years until they reached the border of their destination – the Land of Canaan. (Exodus 16:35) But manna represented much more to God than keeping everyone alive. His interest was in humbling them, testing them to know what was in their hearts, and monitoring their obedience to Him – whether or not they would keep His commandments. (Deuteronomy 8:2). Manna played an important part in this plan because by it God humbled His people, allowed them to hunger, then fed them with manna

to make them understand "...that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord." (Deuteronomy 8:3 NKJV)

Why then, the assertion that manna represented more to God than keeping everyone alive? Because it was much easier to keep everyone alive than to keep them obedient. I believe that is probably still true.

Even when the people complained about manna and craved meat, they finally ate the manna against their wishes when nothing else became available. They did not allow themselves to starve, even while expressing complaints to God and Moses about having only manna. (See Numbers 11:4-6 and Numbers 21:5)

On the other hand, thousands of Israelites died because they sinned against God by serious complaining (as noted immediately above), disobedience, rebellion and other violations of the Law and offenses toward God that were deserving of death

BRIEF OBSERVATIONS:

I find it absolutely intriguing that the manna still on the ground in the morning would melt from the heat of the sun shining on it. And yet, we have a clear record that manna could be baked or boiled and still remain a substantive food (Exodus 16:23). Furthermore, the people "ground it on millstones or beat it in the mortar, cooked it in pans, and made cakes of it; and its taste was like the taste of pastry prepared with oil." (Numbers 11:8 NKJV) Its taste was also said to be "like wafers made with honey." (Exodus 16:31 NKJV) But think of it! Manna would melt from the heat of the sun as if there were very little substance to it. But it could be prepared and eaten as a full-bodied substance. And all of Israel lived from its nutrition for forty years of eating it in the desert.

Manna was such an amazing food to have fed so many for so long without a single flaw to be found in it that God decided to keep an omer (2 quarts or 2 liters) of it in a pot to be stored in perpetuity in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 16:32-34; Hebrews 9:4). The amount of manna God collected to show future generations was exactly the amount that was collected for each person per day during the desert journey. I'm fully convinced that the omer of manna God placed in the Ark will never spoil, will never stink or breed worms. It will be perpetually fresh manna.