

## **WE WANT MEAT!**

### **Written as a Follow-up to “Fresh Manna”**

In the previous article entitled “Fresh Manna,” we explained the nature of manna and its effectiveness in feeding the children of Israel during their 40-year desert journey. We also discovered that God had an overriding purpose for the use of manna – to teach His people. The essence of His lesson is embodied in Deuteronomy 8:3 (NKJV): “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and **fed you with manna**, which you did not know nor did your fathers know, **that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.**”

It will become quite apparent that even God’s chosen people did not learn this lesson very well, if at all. The evidence supporting this observation is as follows:

The children of Israel became chronic complainers very early in their desert experience. They complained about anything that did not go their way, that did not satisfy their every self-centered desire when they thought it should. They complained about being taken from Egypt, about God’s voice at Mt. Sinai being too frightening, about lack of water, about lack of food, and perhaps inevitably about loathing manna while wanting MEAT TO EAT!

Their irrational craving (lusting) for meat will be the main subject of this article.

The congregation of the children of Israel had departed from the Wilderness of Sinai to an encampment that would later be called Kibroth Hattaavah (Numbers 33:16), a name that means “Graves of Craving.” It is important to find out why God gave that name to that encampment.

### **THE PEOPLE CRAVE MEAT**

The Israelites also had among their own people others called “a mixed multitude,” mentioned in Exodus 12:38 and Numbers 11:4. Apparently the “mixed multitude” were non-Jews of various ethnic origins who had become a part of the Israelites. Numbers 11:4 (NKJV) gives a clear indication that this “mixed multitude” initiated the “intense craving” for meat that caused the children of Israel to join them in lusting for meat by weeping and asking God: “Who will give us meat to eat?” This same critical moment in Israel’s history is captured in Psalm 78:18 (NKJV) thusly: “And they tested God in their heart by asking for the food of their fancy.” Psalm 106:14 (NKJV) adds that they “...lusted exceedingly in the wilderness and tested God in the desert.”

### **GOD’S ANGER GREATLY AROUSED**

As if their passionate craving for meat wasn’t enough to kindle God’s anger, the people reminisced about how good they had it in Egypt, plenty of good food. And of course, the inevitable loathing of manna as no substitute for meat – “...But now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!” (Numbers 11:6 NKJV) This complaint really must have been insulting to God. His perfect food for their survival was being unfairly and viciously maligned. If the congregation had collaborated in closed-door conference about how to make God angry with them, they would not have succeeded any more than they actually did without a conference.

There were other specific items about Israel's craving for meat that caused God to be angry and Moses to be displeased. "Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased." (Numbers 11:10 NKJV) Not only were the people asking for meat, they also wept for it and insulted manna as inferior to meat. Worst of all, they even goaded and provoked God Himself to obtain it, as seen in Psalm 78:19-22 (NKJV): "Yes, they spoke against God; they said, 'Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?' Therefore the Lord heard this and was furious; so a fire was kindled against Jacob, and anger also came up against Israel, because they did not believe in God, and did not trust in His salvation." "But without faith it is impossible to please Him (God).... (Hebrews 11:6 NKJV) And God was not pleased with Israel in this situation!

How displeased and furious was God at this point in time? Enough to promise His people that He would stuff meat down their throats for ".,.,a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you, because you have despised the Lord who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, 'Why did we ever come up out of Egypt?'" (Numbers 11:20 NKJV)

### **GOD DELIVERS THE PROMISED MEAT**

God's angry promise of enough meat for the people to eat for a month did not include any mention of the type of meat He would give them. Even Moses was told to wait and see what kind of meat God would provide in the quantity that would be necessary to fulfill His promise. (Numbers 11:21-23) It must have been somewhat of a surprise when God chose to bring ".,.,quail from the sea and left them fluttering near the camp" (Numbers 11:31 NKJV) they were in piles of birds about 3 feet high reaching approximately 7 or 8 miles each way from the camp. The very least amount of quail gathered by anyone was still ten homers, an amount that would be 100 omers, or 200 quarts (or 200 liters). As a matter of interest, the quota for manna collection was 1 omer (2 quarts/2 liters) per person per day.

Psalm 78:26-28 summarizes the same arrival of meat in this way: "He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens; and by His power He brought in the south wind. He also rained meat on them like dust, feathered fowl like the sand of the seas; and He let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their dwellings."

### **GOD JUDGES THE PEOPLE**

God finally allowed the people to eat meat. "But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So He called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving." (Numbers 11:33-34 NKJV) Now it should be clear why God chose Kibroth Hattaavah as the name given this place, referred to also in Numbers 33:16, "Graves of Craving." Psalm 78:29-31 (NKJV) also closes Asaph's report on Israel's craving for meat by these words: "So they ate and were well filled, for He gave them their own desire. They were not deprived of their craving; but while their food was still in their mouths, the wrath of God came against them, and slew the stoutest of them, and struck down the choice men of Israel." Finally, Psalm 106, in speaking of the same incident in which the people lusted intensely for meat, concludes its report by saying: "And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul." (Psalm 106:15 NKJV)

## CONCLUSION

Israel's ongoing attachment to Egypt even after God delivered them from its slavery and bondage proved to be a loyalty of heart that caused them as much trouble with God as their craving for meat. It was possibly the ultimate slam against God for them to talk about Egypt as a place of better and more plentiful food. After all, they were slaves in Egypt as their ancestors had been for the previous 400 years (Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6) making their claims about Egypt questionable. Boasting about Egypt was nonetheless as much a reason for God's fierce anger toward them as their lust for meat. (Numbers 11:18) Israel's position of unbelief identified them as having turned back to Egypt in their hearts. (Acts 7:39) Theirs was a loyalty of heart to Egypt that had never been cut off; just as many modern-day converts to Christ have failed or refused to sever the ties to their past life of sin. Neglecting to do so will eventually result in a desire to return to those sins.

And finally, the persistent, unbridled complaining by the Israelites about manna as being undesirable and inferior to meat only served to increase their craving for meat. So in time, the children of Israel got what they wanted; but soon found out they would have been much better off without it. As a very wise man once said: "Be careful what you want – you will get it." (Dr. Walter Johnson, Greenville College, 1957)