

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 16:1-20

To understand more about the quail and manna from God.

Read the Text:

They set out from Elim, and all the congregation of the people of Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. 2 And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, 3 and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to 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 they will walk in my law or not. 5 On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." 6 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, 7 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?" 8 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." 9 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.'" 10 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. 11 And the LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. 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.'" 13 In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. 14 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. 15 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. 16 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.'" 17 And the people of Israel did so. They gathered, some more, some less. 18 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. 19 And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over till the morning." 20 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. (Exodus 16:1-20, ESV)

Study the Text:

Hangry

Upon entering into the wilderness, the people of God quickly learned that God would provide for them in their need. They were thirsty, had found no water in Shur and bitter water in Marah, and so the LORD instructed Moses to throw a log into the water to make it drinkable (Ex. 15:25). He then established a relationship with the Israelites by promising to never afflict them with the same plagues with which He afflicted Egypt in exchange for their obedience (Ex. 15:26). After setting the expectations among the people, He led them to Elim where there was not only spring water, but shade (Ex. 15:27). However, the Israelites will continue to be stubbornly disobedient. Chapter 16 begins with them grumbling yet again, this time not because of a lack of water, but food. In verses 1 through 20, the people learn about God's provision of both quail and manna, perfect for each day and not a day longer than what is needed, forcing them to rely upon Him daily. Below is a breakdown of important concepts.

NOSTALGIA IS A MIRAGE

Much has been made of the location of “Sin” (a word that is transliterated from Hebrew and bears no connection to the English word *sin*), but no answer is convincingly sufficient. What we know for certain is that it is somewhere between Elim and Sinai, and that roughly a month has passed since the initial Exodus began. Given the length of the time that had passed, the Israelites were likely short on food, which prompts them to “grumble against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness” (Ex. 16:2) as they look back with nostalgia on how life was better in Egypt. They complain in verse 3: “Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” There are a few things to note about this. For one, consider that the prospect of dying in Egypt, in their own words, would have come from the LORD, not Pharaoh. Pharaoh, of course, was the oppressor and the one who made life “bitter” for them (Ex. 1:14), but in their nostalgic memory, all they remember is “meat pots” and “bread.” Moreover, the motives of Moses and Aaron are described as malicious, not salvific. Moses and Aaron served the people of God by risking their lives as they spoke and acted in the LORD’s power against Pharaoh, but now they are seen as the enemy.

GRUMBLING AGAINST WHO?

Because it was not Moses and Aaron, but God, who made their journey out of Egypt possible, Moses and Aaron remind the Israelites: “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” (Ex. 16:8). To complain against the prophets of God is to complain against God Himself.

NOT ABANDONED

There is also an implication that the LORD was no longer with them, and so God speaks to the people through Moses (and through Aaron, Moses’ spokesperson) in a supernatural manner which included “the glory of the LORD” appearing “in the cloud.” This visual representation of the presence of God would have served as a reminder that the Israelites were being led by not only the words of God, but the presence of God. God manifested His presence to His people in a visual manner so as to get their attention.

QUAIL AND MANNA

The response to the grumbling is full of grace. In light of their complaints, God said to Moses: “Behold, I am about to 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 they will walk in my law or not.” Even though the LORD had already laid out expectations concerning obedience to His “statutes and laws” (Ex. 15:25), He does not meet them with anger in their continued grumbling. The LORD is truly “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Ps. 103:8). Instead, He sets out to test them yet again, this time by providing them meat “by twilight” and bread “in the morning,” so that they “shall know that I am the LORD your God” (Ex. 16:12). Verses 13 through 15 then expound upon God’s design to feed His people in the wilderness. Verse 13 says, “In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp.” The quail were plentiful enough to “cover the camp.” After the morning dew had come and gone, “there was on the face of the wildness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground” (Ex. 16:14). Unaware of what it was, Moses explained to them that this was bread from heaven (Ex. 16:15). One need not attempt to make sense of what the manna actually was. It was not even known to the Israelites, much less us. The point is not what substance it was made of, but from whom it came and for what purpose it came. It came from *God*, and it came *for the purpose of feeding His people*.

AN EQUAL PORTION

In the same way that the Passover meal was restricted to portions to prevent people from taking more than they needed (Ex. 12:3-4), the quail and manna was restricted to the portion size of an “omer,” a size designated again by God Himself. Beyond designating the appropriate amount, the LORD apparently (and supernaturally) limited the amount that each person had, regardless of how much they actually took: “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” (Ex. 16:18). Beyond limiting the amount of food each family took, Moses also commanded them not to save any so that they could have more in the morning. Relying on God’s provision meant relying on God day-by-day. Even if they did restrict their food intake in an effort to save some for the next morning, they would have been utterly disappointed in their efforts: “Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank” (Ex. 16:20a). With an apparently very short shelf-life, the food needed to be consumed the day of, and not a moment later.

SABBATH FORESHADOWED

In verse 5, God indicates that the sixth day will be unique from the rest of the days: “On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily.” No other information is given concerning why this will be the case in this passage, but more will be explained in Session 40. This is a foreshadowing of the Sabbath, wherein the people of God will cease from work to rest on the seventh day as the LORD Himself rested on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-3). Because they will rest, they will need the day’s portion of food to sustain themselves, and will be thus permitted to gather an extra day’s portion so that they do not have to do so on the seventh day.

DISOBEDIENT

Verse 20 ends rather abruptly, simply stating that: “Moses was angry with them” (Ex. 16:20b). God placed restrictions on them to “test them” and apparently some had failed the test. Testing, in this sense, does not mean God was trying to trick them, but rather He is exposing their disobedience through a simple commandment. What better way to determine one’s commitment to obedience than to give a simple commandment? Moses, the prophet of God charged with communicating these commandments, is enraged by their apparent lack of appreciation for the power and provision of a holy God.

What About Now?

One major takeaway is, yet again, the provision of God. God provides for His people exactly what they need, and not an ounce more or less than what they need. Another takeaway is the allure of greed and the importance of rejecting it. Greed is, in some sense, a rejection of God’s provision. If I am greedy, I am saying, “I need more now than what I believe I will get later. It’s up to me to provide for myself!” Often, in modern culture, greed is camouflaged as wisdom. “I’m not being greedy, I’m being wise and saving!” While there are biblical warrants for saving in preparation of the future, Christians must be careful to not confuse wisdom with a lack of faith in God’s provision for their lives.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 16:1-3. Where did the Israelites end up? Where was this located? What did the people of God begin to do? Why were they doing this? What were they saying?
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- 2. Read Exodus 16:4-5. What did the LORD say to Moses? Why would they prepare to bring in “double” on the sixth day from what they normally gathered on the other days? (Hint: See above notes)

Day Two

- 1. Read Exodus 16:6-8. What did Moses and Aaron say to the people? Summarize it in your own words.

- 2. Read Exodus 16:9-10. What did Moses tell Aaron to say? What happened immediately following Aaron’s words that would have demanded the attention of the Israelites?

Day Three

- 1. Read Exodus 16:11-13. What did the LORD say to Moses? What came in the evening? What came in the morning?

- 2. Read Exodus 16:14-16. How was the manna described? Did the people know what it was? How much of it were they commanded to take?

Day Four

- 1. Read Exodus 16:17-18. What did the people do? Did they all gather the same amount? What did each family end up with in the end?

- 2. Read Exodus 16:19-20. What did Moses tell the people of God *not* to do? Did they listen? What was Moses’ response to their disobedience?

Discuss the Text!

Week 39 Discussion: Greed

One theme in Exodus 16:1-20 is the importance of rejecting greed and trusting that God will provide for His people day-by-day. Talk as a group about the ways in which greed has harmed you (spiritually, emotionally, physically), and how you can work against greed to trust God more.

- 1. Icebreaker: Would you consider yourself greedy? Why or why not?

2. How does greed prevent you from living an obedient life to God?
3. How are greed and wise saving different from one another?
4. Does greed influence the way you give to the church and to other people? How so?
5. Does God still provide for His people today?
6. How does God use the church to provide for His people?

Takeaways:

1. The people of Israel arrive in the wilderness of Sin and grumble because they lack food.
2. God tests them by giving them quail and manna and telling them to only take what they need for that day.
3. Some people disobey and take more than they need only to discover that it has rotted by morning.