

EXODUS

THE GOD WHO RESCUES

SESSION OBJECTIVE: EXODUS 16:21-36

To understand more about the Sabbath day of rest.

Read the Text:

Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. 22 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, 23 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.'" 24 So they laid it aside till the morning, as Moses commanded them, and it did not stink, and there were no worms in it. 25 Moses said, "Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none." 27 On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none. 28 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 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." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey. 32 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.'" 33 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." 34 As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the testimony to be kept. 35 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. 36 (An omer is the tenth part of an ephah.) (Exodus 16:1-20, ESV)

Study the Text:

A Double Portion

We learned in the previous session that God's people, no matter how little or much they gathered of the manna from heaven, ended up with equal portions at the end of the day (Ex. 16:18). We also saw that those who disobeyed Moses and saved some of their manna for the next day discovered that their manna had "bred worms and stank" (Ex. 16:20). In verses 21 through 36, the LORD tells Moses why they were to gather "twice as much as they gather daily" on the sixth day (Ex. 16:5). There will be on the seventh day, "a day of solemn rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD" (Ex. 16:23), in which there will be no manna from the LORD. Below is a breakdown of the passage with some key details and concepts.

NOT ROTTING

Verse 21 says, "Morning by morning they gathered it, each as much as he could eat; but when the sun grew hot, it melted." Interestingly, there are two different ways the manna becomes inedible at the end of the day. In verse 20, it "bred worms and stank" if it was in the possession of the people and been hoarded away. On the other hand, verse 21 indicates that if it was left in the field and not collected, "it melted." While the text doesn't explain why, it might be that the *natural* way in which manna is recycled out is by growing "hot" because of the midday sun and melting, and that the manna becomes putrid as an act of *judgment* on the people because of their disobedience to keep some for themselves after being specifically commanded not to. Again, it's speculation, but it's a sensible explanation.

A HOLY SABBATH

The reason God commanded the Israelites to collect a double portion of manna on the sixth day is, as we briefly mentioned last week, because of the Sabbath rest on the seventh day. Because God intended for His people to rest, He did not want them going out to collect manna. This means that the first mention of the collection of a double portion in verse 5 was information given to Moses by God, but not necessarily communicated to the people. Think of verse 5 (and the whole of that first communication to Moses) as an overview that verses 9 through 26 will make clear. Also note the mentioning of “baking” and “boiling” on this day. This is in reference to the manna and quail. The indication is that the manna needed to be baked, and was not intended to be eaten raw, and that the quail was likely boiled. All of the cooking then, for Sunday, was done on Saturday (*the invention of meal prep, perhaps?*).

Verses 25 and 26 say: “Moses said, ‘Eat it today, for today is a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.’” The command to preserve a double portion of the manna takes on a new weight as Moses reveals to the people that not only will they not be permitted to gather manna on the seventh day, but that the LORD will not even provide any on that day. This is a significant detail for at least one reason. The LORD commands the people not take something for themselves, and also prevents it from even being available from them so as to not tempt them. It would be seemingly cruel (although perfectly with God’s right) to tell the people not to take the manna on the seventh day and yet still provide it for them, almost as if to tempt them. But God does not tempt His people. James 1:13 reminds us: “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.”

BREAKING THE COMMAND

The people of God, predictably, do not obey God’s commandment yet again: “On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found none” (Ex. 16:27). Even though God has not tempted the people to take the manna on the seventh day, they are still lured by their own desires (Ja. 1:14). James 1:15 notes: “Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.” The picture that James paints for us is that desire becomes pregnant with sinful lusts, and that in the same way an infant grows into adulthood, sin grows from infancy into “death.” This is an accurate picture of the Israelites in the book of Exodus. The Israelites, through no temptation of God, simply and sinfully desire to collect more manna than they need, and they go out to collect even in spite of being told that they were not allowed to and that God would not provide any on that day. God responds in verses 28 and 29: “And the LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 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.” This seems like a minor infraction. One might think: “What’s so wrong with going out and looking? It’s not like there was any manna to be taken anyways?” But this strikes at the heart of why obedience to God is so important and how even minor infractions against God’s law are serious threats to our own personal holiness. *Any small, seemingly harmless infraction against what God has commanded is sin against a holy God.* Sometimes Christians read the judgments of God on His people in the Old Testament and think that these judgements are overblown or “not loving,” and the reality is that any sin against God is punishable by death (Rom. 6:23). Anything *less than death* is grace. Anything *resulting in death* is justice. It’s not that God’s punishment is too harsh, but that our understanding of the severity of sin is too lacking.

MORE ON MANNA

A description of the manna is finally given in verse 31: “Now the house of Israel called its name manna. It was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” Old Testament scholar

Douglas Stuart provides helpful insight on the usage of honey in the ancient world: “In ancient times the refining of sugar had not been invented, and the only means of sweetening foods was to add either fruit compounds or honey to them. Honey is far sweeter than dried, crushed, or minced fruit, being approximately half sucrose and half fructose, and its taste in foods was the apex of ancient flavoring.”¹ Moreover, wafers were seen as a luxury in the ancient world. These are significant details that should not go unnoticed. God does not simply provide rations for his people simply as “fuel” for their bodies, but gives them something not only tasty, but especially rare in their context. He doesn’t provide them gruel, but 3-Michelin-star meal.

AN OMER TO REMEMBER

Verses 32 through 36 highlights the commandment of God to keep an “omer” of manna in a jar “through your generations” for the purpose that “they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Ex. 16:32). This is the only time the measuring unit of an “omer” is used in the Old Testament, which equals “a tenth part of an ephah” according to verse 36. An “ephah” is roughly equivalent to 2.3 liters, or 2 quarts. This manna would eventually be kept in the Ark of the Covenant, which had not yet been built. It would eventually be housed in the interior to the Ark of the Covenant, within the holy of holies, as a testimony of God’s faithfulness (Ex. 25:21-22). This is confirmed in Hebrews 9:4, which also indicates that at some point the manna was transported into a golden jar.

What About Now?

One major takeaway is the stubbornness of the human heart to do what we please, regardless of divine direction. Even though God commands them not to collect manna on the seventh day and doesn’t even provide any in order to not tempt them, they still try! Sin’s stronghold is real and powerful. Another takeaway is the goodness of God to His people. God doesn’t just provide food for His people in order to keep them alive, but He provides something He knows they will enjoy. And sadly, even this will eventually not be enough.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Exodus 16:21. What happened to the manna that wasn’t collected by the people?

2. Read Exodus 16:22-26. Why did they gather twice as much manna on the sixth day? What is the Sabbath, according to verse 23? What does Moses say they will not find in the field on the Sabbath?

Day Two

1. Read Exodus 16:27. What did the people attempt to do on the seventh day?

¹ Douglas K. Stuart, Exodus, vol. 2 of The New American Commentary, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 384.

2. Read Exodus 16:28-30. How did God respond to their disobedience? What did He say to them?

Day Three

1. Read Exodus 16:31. How is manna described? What does this indicate?

2. Read Exodus 16:32-33. What did Moses say to Aaron? What was the purpose of this?

Day Four

1. Read Exodus 16:34. Did Aaron do what was commanded of Him?

2. Read Exodus 16:35-36. For how long did the people of Israel eat the manna? How much was an “omer” of manna?

Discuss the Text!

Week 40 Discussion: Temptationless Sin

One of the startling details in this passage is that even when God takes away the possible temptation to go and gather manna on the seventh day, the people still attempt to do it anyways. They do what their sinful hearts desire, regardless of whether or not it even makes sense. Talk as a group about the importance of recognizing just how sinful your heart actually is in order to fight against it.

1. Icebreaker: Do you think people are, generally speaking, mostly good? Or mostly bad? Or neutral?
2. If God removed every temptation from your life, would you still sin?
3. How does your view of sin shape your view of grace?
4. Who (or what) do you usually blame when you commit a sin?
5. When you are tempted to sin, what do you do to escape the temptation?
6. Have you ever taken a Freedom Group before? If not, why not?

Takeaways:

1. The people of God are told to gather an extra portion of manna on the sixth day in order to rest on the seventh day.
2. God tells Moses and Aaron to keep some of the manna in a jar in order to remember the Exodus.