

Exodus 16 - The Provision of Bread from Heaven.

The occasion of the “flesh” driving Israel to desire slavery again.

The narrative:

- 1-3 Journeying from **Elim** they come to the **wilderness of Sin**. Here they murmur about the lack of bread
- 4-8 The Lord promises bread from heaven, which they must gather in six days, taking a double portion for the seventh day. Moses and Aaron, thinking of themselves as just the servants of the Lord, warn the people that the murmuring is against Him. They promise them flesh in the morning.
- 9-12 The Lord, in the glory of the cloud addresses them that in the evening they shall eat quail and in the morning be filled with bread.
- 13-22 In the morning they gather and eat the manna. But some, disregarding Moses, try and store it. It goes foul.
- 23-30 They gather for six days, taking a double portion for the seventh, which does not go foul. The holy Sabbath is introduced.
- 31-36 They call it manna and describe its taste. They set aside an omer [= 1/10 of an ephah] in a jar as a memorial. It never stops for the whole of the 40 years.

On the 15th day of the second month since their departure from Egypt, the people are found grumbling against Moses and Aaron [16.2], but really it was against the Lord Himself [16.7-8].

1 - The “way” of dying pre-occupied them.

Their objection is that they are in a wilderness, and that they would rather have died by the Lord's hand in Egypt than to be die by hunger in the desert [16.3]. What their mind is focussed upon is that in Egypt it was a quick death for those who died that Passover night; here in the desert it will be slow. They are thinking about what death means for them: and therefore on the manner of the death, its method and occasion.

2 - The meaning of death they had forgotten.

What this comes to mean is that they have forgotten that any "dying by the Lord's hand in Egypt" was to have come under his wrath as a judgment. That was a judgment they have already been saved from. In focussing upon the way people can die and choosing one way or another, they have forgotten to see why it is that people die at all. The Passover was a death that was associated with an expression of God's wrath: it was something which spelt out the meaning of death itself.

And further, they had forgotten why the Egyptians had died - they had stood in the way of the people of God worshipping their God. They had thwarted the plan of God to save his people who were groaning under slavery; and His ultimate plan was to save them that He might dwell among them.

3 - The problem of the flesh - it is immediate gratification.

What they were thinking of, in their immediate hunger was a comparison with their current position as saved people in the desert. They compared the time when they were in slavery but with food to eat. And they preferred the satisfaction of their immediate needs as a possible exchange with their salvation experience of hunger. This was a problem of the flesh.

Such a problem looks to the desires being currently met. But in such a way that ultimate meaning of the situation is blurred or lost. The treasuring of freedom from slavery can be the only underlining corrective to immediate set backs and needs taking the centre stage.

The issue of the “flesh” will be taken up later in this series. Significantly, it will be seen that the flesh is always something which is considered to have been dealt with in the death of Jesus [Colossians 2, Galatians 5]. It is seen to be an issue which is involved in considering what we are saved “from”; whereas what we are saved “to” is the risen life of Jesus: which is to share in His life by union with Him.

When Paul is considering the death of Jesus he will think on “the flesh” which Jesus assumed at His incarnation: when he thinks of His resurrected life Paul will speak of the “body” of Jesus. “Flesh”, in this sense, comes to a death; a “body” is concerned with rising.

4 - The provision of bread from heaven.

The Lord makes a promise to Moses and Aaron [16.4-5] that He will rain bread from heaven for them. This bread from heaven:

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[a] must be gathered everyday. It is “daily bread” - it is “given” every day and it must be “taken”, gathered every day.

[b] in needing to be gathered daily will constitute a test for them. It is a test as to whether or not they will “walk in My instruction” [16.4].

[c] It will display that God has put into their hearts that they must daily feed on what He provides. And this will demonstrate that they will walk as He instructs. It will show His Lordship over them.

[d] shall not be gathered on the Sabbath. Rather, they shall find that as they prepare it on the day before the sabbath that it will be enough for two days.

Notice that this whole matter is a provision of grace - it is something which the Lord provides for them as a gift. Just as rain is a gift from God which comes down upon the earth in a way that its coming [or its being giving] is not within the control of the recipients; so the bread is said to be rained “from heaven”[16.4].

What the people of God must do is gather it, take it to themselves. Their action is to be a response to grace - and it is food for them only as it is that. The supply is not in their hands, the receiving is.

5 - God’s constant supply of the bread from heaven is a provision against the return to slavery to which our flesh will drive us.

Moses' response makes clear that the Lord does not want them desiring Egypt on the basis of hunger. At evening they will know that the Lord has brought them out of Egypt and He will provide for them here in the wilderness. That is, God's provision for us once He has saved us is itself a corrective to us ever wanting to return to slavery because of the desires of our flesh.

6 - The memorial as a witness. Not just an event, but a constant witness.

There was a provision for generations to come to have an opportunity to “see the bread that I fed you in the wilderness”.

There is here a provision for the generations to come to know that the Lord fed their forefathers in the wilderness.