

## UNIT 29

# MANNA FROM HEAVEN (Exodus 16:1-36)

### INTRODUCTION<sup>25</sup>

#### Text and Textual Notes

---

<sup>25</sup> Exodus 16 plays a very important part in the development of the theme of the book. It is part of the wider section that is the prologue leading up to the covenant at Sinai, a part of which was the obligation of obedience and loyalty (Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr., "The Manna Narrative of Exodus 16:1-10," *BETS* 18 [1975]:191-199). The record of the wanderings in the wilderness is selective and not exhaustive. It may have been arranged for propaedeutic reasons. Cassuto describes this section of the book as a didactic anthology arranged according to association of both context and language (p. 187). Its themes are: lack of vital necessities, murmuring, proving, and providing. All the wilderness stories reiterate the same motifs. So, later, when Israel arrived in Canaan, they would look back and be reminded that it was Yahweh who brought them all the way, in spite of their rebellions. Because He is their Savior and their Provider, He will demand loyalty from them.

So in the Manna Narrative we have: murmuring over the lack of bread (1-3), the disputation with Moses (4-8), the appearance of the glory and the promise of bread (9-12), the provision (13-22), the instructions for the sabbath (23-30), and the memorial manna (31-36).

**16:1** When<sup>26</sup> they journeyed from Elim, the entire company<sup>27</sup> of Israelites came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their exodus<sup>28</sup> from the land of Egypt. **16:2** And the entire company<sup>29</sup> of Israelites murmured against Moses and Aaron in the desert. **16:3** And the Israelites said to them, “O that we had died<sup>30</sup> by the hand of Yahweh in the land of Egypt, when we sat by<sup>31</sup> the pots of meat, and when we ate bread to the full;<sup>32</sup> but you have brought us out into this desert to kill<sup>33</sup> this whole assembly with hunger.

---

<sup>26</sup> The sentence begins with a preterite and the *waw* consecutive, which can be subordinated to the next clause with the preterite and the *waw* consecutive. Here it has been made a temporal clause.

<sup>27</sup> The word is normally rendered “congregation,” but the modern perception of congregation is not exactly what is in mind in the desert.

<sup>28</sup> The form in the text is *l'tse'tam*, “after their going out.” It clearly refers to their deliverance from Egypt, and so it may be vividly translated and graphically displayed by this translation.

<sup>29</sup> Literally, “the whole congregation”

<sup>30</sup> The text reads: *mi-yitten mutenu*, “who will give our death,” meaning, “If only we had died.” *Mutenu* is the *qal* infinitive construct with the suffix. This is one way that Hebrew expresses the optative with an infinitive construct. See Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 546.

<sup>31</sup> The form is the *qal* infinitive construct being used in a temporal clause; and, the verb “when we ate” is the exact same structure.

<sup>32</sup> That the complaint leading up to the manna is unjustified can be seen from the record itself. They left Egypt with flocks and herds and very much cattle, and about 45 days later they are complaining that they are without food. Moses reminded them later that they lacked nothing (Deut. 3:7; for the whole sermon on this passage, see 8:1-3). Moreover, the complaint is absurd because the food of work gangs was far more meager than they recall. The complaint was really against Moses.

It is interesting that they crave the eating of meat and of bread. And so, God will meet that need; he will send bread from heaven and quail as well.

<sup>33</sup> The word *l'hamit* is the *hiphil* infinitive construct showing purpose. The people do not trust the intentions or the plan of their leaders and charge him with bringing them out to kill them.

**16:4** Then Yahweh said to Moses, “I am going to rain<sup>34</sup> bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out<sup>35</sup> and gather a certain amount day by day, that I may prove them,<sup>36</sup> whether<sup>37</sup> they will walk in my law<sup>38</sup> or not. **16:5** And on the sixth day<sup>39</sup> they shall prepare that which they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather day by day.”<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> The particle *hin<sup>e</sup>ni* before the active participle indicates the imminent future action--“I am about to rain.”

<sup>35</sup> This verb and the next are the *qal* perfect tenses with *waw* consecutives; they follow the sequence of the *future instans* participle, and so are equivalent to the imperfect tense nuances. The force here is instruction--“they shall go out” or “they are to go out.”

<sup>36</sup> The verb in the purpose/result clause is the *piel* imperfect of *nasah*, *'anassenu* – “in order that I may prove them [him].” The giving of the manna will be a test of their obedience to the detailed instructions of God as well as a test of their faith in Him (if they believe Him they will not gather too much). In chapter 17 the people will test God, showing that they do not trust Him.

<sup>37</sup> This is a use of an interrogative clause serving as an indirect question--to prove them “if they will walk . . .” (Literally, “will they walk . . .”). See Williams, *Hebrew Syntax*, par. 542.

<sup>38</sup> The word “law” here properly means “direction” at this point (Driver, p. 146); but their obedience here would indicate also whether or not they would be willing to obey when the Law was given at Sinai.

<sup>39</sup> Literally, “and it shall be on the sixth day”

<sup>40</sup> There is a question here concerning the legislation--the people were not told why to gather twice as much on the sixth day. In other words, this instruction seems to presume that they knew about the sabbath law. That law will be included in this chapter in a number of ways, suggesting to some scholars that this chapter is out of place, placed here for a purpose. Cassuto thinks the manna episode comes after the revelation at Sinai. But it is not necessary to take such a view. God had established the sabbath in the creation; and if Moses has been expounding the Genesis traditions in his teachings then they would have known about that.

**16:6** And Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening<sup>41</sup> you will know that Yahweh has brought you out of the land of Egypt. **16:7** And in the morning you shall see<sup>42</sup> the glory<sup>43</sup> of Yahweh, because He heard<sup>44</sup> your murmurings against Yahweh. And what are we,<sup>45</sup> that you should murmur against us?”

**16:8** And Moses said, “You will know this<sup>46</sup> when Yahweh gives you<sup>47</sup> in the evening meat to eat, and bread in the morning to satisfy you, because Yahweh heard your murmurings which you are murmuring against Him. And what are

---

<sup>41</sup> The text simply has “evening, and you will know.” Gesenius notes that the perfect tense with the *waw* consecutive occurs as the apodosis to temporal clauses or their equivalents. Here the first word implies the idea “[when it becomes] evening” or simply “[in the ] evening” (GKC, par. 112oo).

Moses is very careful to make sure that they know it is Yahweh who has brought them out, and it will be Yahweh who will feed them. They are going to be convinced of this now. This is the force of his statements here.

<sup>42</sup> Literally, “morning, and you will see”

<sup>43</sup> Kaiser says that this refers to “the sheer weight, gravity of his divine presence.” He adds that the presence of Yahweh is also termed “the face of Yahweh,” “the angel of Yahweh,” and “the name of Yahweh” (Kaiser, p. 404). It may rather be that the power and importance and greatness of God will be revealed to Israel by the miraculous provision of manna (Driver, p. 147).

<sup>44</sup> The form *b<sup>e</sup>shom‘o* is the *qal* infinitive construct with the preposition and the suffix. It forms an adverbial clause, usually of time, but here a causal clause.

<sup>45</sup> The word order places special emphasis on the pronoun: “and we--what?” The implied answer to the question is that Moses and Aaron are nothing, merely the messengers.

<sup>46</sup> “You will know this” has been added to make the line smooth. Because of the abruptness of the lines in the verse, and the repetition with verse 7, Childs thinks that verse 8 is merely a repetition by scribal error--even though the versions render it as the MT has it (p.273). But Jacob suggests that the contrast with verses 6 and 7 is important for another reason--there Moses and Aaron speak, and it is smooth and effective, but here only Moses speaks, and it is labored and clumsy. “We should realize that Moses had properly claimed to be no public speaker” (p. 447).

<sup>47</sup> Here again is an infinitive construct with the preposition forming a temporal clause.

we? Your murmurings are not against us,<sup>48</sup> but against Yahweh.”

**16:9** Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to all the community<sup>49</sup> of the Israelites,

‘Come<sup>50</sup> before Yahweh, because He has heard your murmurings.’”

**16:10** And as Aaron spoke<sup>51</sup> to the whole community<sup>52</sup> of the Israelites, they looked toward the desert, and there the glory of Yahweh<sup>53</sup> appeared<sup>54</sup> in the cloud.

**16:11** Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, **16:12** “I have heard the murmurings of the Israelites. Speak to them saying, ‘During the evening<sup>55</sup> you shall eat flesh,<sup>56</sup> and in the morning you shall be satisfied<sup>57</sup> with bread, that you

<sup>48</sup> The word order is “not against us [are] your murmurings”

<sup>49</sup> Or, “congregation”

<sup>50</sup> The verb means “approach, draw near.” It is used in the Torah for drawing near for religious purposes to where Yahweh manifests Himself. When the people of God draw near for service, they sense the presence of God more powerfully. It is possible that some sacrifice might have been involved here, but no mention is made of that.

<sup>51</sup> Literally, “and it was as Aaron spoke,” the construction uses the temporal indicator and then the *piel* infinitive construct followed by the subjective genitive “Aaron.”

<sup>52</sup> Literally, “congregation”

<sup>53</sup> Driver says, “A brilliant glow of fire . . . symbolizing Jehovah’s presence, gleamed through the cloud, resting . . . upon the Tent of Meeting. The cloud shrouds the full brilliancy of the glory, which human eye could not behold” (see also Ezek. 1:28; 3:12, 23; 8:4; 9:3, et al; Driver, pp. 147,8).

<sup>54</sup> The verb is the *niphal* perfect of the verb “to see”--“it was seen.” But the standard way of translating this form is from the perspective of Yahweh as subject--“He appeared.”

<sup>55</sup> Literally, “during the evenings”; see 12:6.

<sup>56</sup> One of the major interpretive difficulties is the comparison between Exodus 16 and Numbers 11. In Numbers we find that the giving of the manna was about 24 months after the Exodus 16 time (assuming there was a distinct time for this chapter), that it was after the erection of the tabernacle, that Taberah (the Burning) preceded it (not in Exodus 16), that the people were tired of the manna (not that there

might know<sup>58</sup> that I am Yahweh your God.”<sup>59</sup>

---

was no bread to eat) and so God would send the quail, and that the provision of the manna is not presented as being short-termed or seasonal. Numbers also indicates that the quail came later, and that there was a severe tragedy over it. In Exodus 16 both the manna and the quail are given on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the second month.

Critical scholarship simply assigns them to two different sources, because complete reconciliation seems impossible. Even if we argue that Exodus has a thematic arrangement and “telescopes” some things to make a point, there will still be difficulties in harmonization. Two considerations must be kept in mind: 1) First, they could be separate events entirely. If this is true, then they should be treated separately as valid accounts of things that appeared or occurred throughout the period of the wanderings. Similar things need not be the same thing. 2) Secondly, strict chronological order is not always maintained in the Bible narratives, especially if it is a didactic section. Perhaps Exodus 16 describes the initiation of the giving of manna as God’s provision of bread, and therefore placed in the prologue of the covenant, and Numbers 11 is an account of a mood which developed over a period of time in response to the manna. Numbers 11 would then be looking back from a different perspective.

<sup>57</sup> The verb means “to be sated, satisfied”; in this context it indicates that they would have sufficient bread to eat--they would be full.

<sup>58</sup> The form *wida‘tem* is the *qal* perfect with the *waw* consecutive; it is sequence with the imperfect tenses before it, and so this is equal to an imperfect nuance. But, from the meanings of the words, it is clear that this will be the outcome of their eating the food, a divinely intended outcome.

<sup>59</sup> This verse supports the view taken in chapter 6 concerning the verb “to know”; Surely the Israelites by now knew that Yahweh was their God. Yes, they did. But they had not experienced what that meant, they had not received the fulfillment of the promises.

**16:13** And in the evening the quail<sup>60</sup> came up and covered the camp; and in the morning a layer of dew was all around the camp. **16:14** When<sup>61</sup> the layer of dew had gone up,<sup>62</sup> there was on the surface of the desert a small round thing,<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> These are migratory birds, said to come up in the spring from Arabia flying north and west, and in the fall returning. They fly with the wind, and so generally alight in the evening, covering the ground. If this is part of the explanation, the divine provision would have had to alter their flight paths to bring them to the Israelites, and bring them in vast numbers regularly.

<sup>61</sup> Literally, “and [the dew . . . ] went up”

<sup>62</sup> The predicate with the *waw* consecutive is here subordinated as a temporal clause to the main clause; since that clause calls special attention to what was there after the dew evaporated, this should be made a past perfect.

<sup>63</sup> The translations usually refer to the manna as “bread.” In actual fact it appears to be more like grains, because it could be ground in the hand-mills and made into cakes. The word involved says it is thin, flake like (if we accept an Arabic etymological connection). There does not seem to be much warrant for saying it was round.

What we know about it from the Bible in Exodus is that it was a very small flake like substance, it would melt when the sun got hot, if left over it bred worms and became foul, it could be ground, baked and boiled, it was abundant enough for them to gather an omer a day per person, and they gathered it day by day throughout the wilderness sojourn. Numbers 11 says it was like coriander seed with the appearance of bdellium, it tasted like fresh oil, and it fell with the dew. Deuteronomy 8:3 says it was unknown to Israel or her ancestors; Psalm 78:24 parallels it with grain.

Biblical scholars compare it to other ancient references of honeydew that came from the heavens (see T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* [NY:Harper and Row, 1969], p. 243); Hesiod, *Theogony*, 581; and Aristotle, *Historia animalium* 22,4). Others try to find some natural cause for the “miracle”: F. S. Bodenheimer says that it was a sudden surprise for the nomadic Israelites because it provided what they desired--sweetness. He says that it was a product that came from two insects, making the manna a honeydew excretion from plant lice and scale insects. The excretion hardens and drops to the ground as a sticky solid. He notes that some cicadas are called *man* in Arabic (“The Manna of Sinai,” *BA* 10 [1947]:2). This view accounts for some of the things in these passages: the right place, the right time, the right description, and a similar taste. But there are major difficulties: Exodus requires a far greater amount, it could breed worms, it could melt away, it could be baked into bread, it could decay and stink. The suggestion is in no way convincing. Bodenheimer argues that “worms” could mean “ants” that carried them away, but that is contrived--the text could have said ants. The fact that the Bible calls it “bread” creates no problem. *lekhem* is used in a wide range of meanings from bread to all kinds of food including goats (Ju. 13:15,16) and honey (1 Sam. 14:24-28).

small like the frost on the earth. **16:15** When<sup>64</sup> the Israelites saw it, they said to one another,<sup>65</sup> “What is it?” because they did not know what it was.<sup>66</sup> And Moses said to them, “It is the bread<sup>67</sup> that Yahweh has given to you for food.<sup>68</sup>

**16:16** This is what<sup>69</sup> Yahweh has commanded:<sup>70</sup> ‘Each person is to gather<sup>71</sup>

Scripture does not say that manna was the only thing that they ate for the duration. But they did eat it throughout the forty years. It simply must refer to some supernatural provision for them in their diet. Modern suggestions may invite comparison and analysis, but they do not satisfy or explain the text.

<sup>64</sup> The preterite with the *waw* consecutive is here subordinated to the next verb as a temporal clause. The main point of the verse is what they said.

<sup>65</sup> Literally, “a man to his brother”

<sup>66</sup> The text has: *man hu' ki lo' yad'u mah hu'*. From this statement the name “manna” was given to the substance. *man* for “what” is not found in Hebrew as far as we know, but appears in later Syriac as a contraction of *ma den*, “what then?” In Aramaic and Arabic *man* is “what?” The word is used here apparently for the sake of etymology. Childs follows the approach that any connections to words that actually meant “what?” are unnecessary, for it is a play on the name (whatever it may have been) and therefore related only by sound to the term being explained (p. 274). This, however, presumes that a substance was known prior to this account--a point that Deuteronomy does not seem to allow. Driver says that we do not know how early the Aramaic contraction came into use, but that this verse seems to reflect it (p. 149). Probably we must simply accept, as Cassuto says, that in the early Israelite period *man* meant “what?” There seems to be sufficient evidence to support this: see the reference in the KBL lexicon for Amarna (EA 286,5), Cyrus Gordon's *Ugaritic Textbook* (p. 435) for the use in Ugaritic, and the Jean-Hoftijzer dictionary of western Semitic languages for early Aramaic (p. 157).

<sup>67</sup> Jacob suggests that Moses was saying to them, “It is not manna. It is the food Yahweh has given you.” He comes to this conclusion based on the strange popular etymology from the interrogative word, noting that people do not call things “what?” (See pp. 454,455).

<sup>68</sup> For other views see G. Vermes, “‘He Is the Bread’ Targum Neofiti Ex. 16:15,” *Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity* 8 (1975):139-146; and G. J. Cowling, “Targum Neofiti Ex. 16:15,” *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 2/3 (1974-75):93-105.

<sup>69</sup> Literally, “the thing that”

<sup>70</sup> The perfect tense could be taken as a definite past with Moses now reporting it. In this case a very recent past. But in declaring the word from Yahweh it could be instantaneous, and



from it what he can eat, an omer<sup>72</sup> per person<sup>73</sup> according to the number<sup>74</sup> of your people;<sup>75</sup> each one shall take for whoever dwells<sup>76</sup> in his tent’.” **16:17** And the Israelites did so; and they gathered, some more, some less. **16:18** When<sup>77</sup> they measured with an omer, the one who gathered much had nothing left over, and the one who gathered little lacked nothing; each one gathered what he could eat.

**16:19** And Moses said to them, “Let no one<sup>78</sup> keep any of it<sup>79</sup> until morning.”

**16:20** But they did not listen to Moses, and some<sup>80</sup> kept part of it until morning. It<sup>81</sup> was full<sup>82</sup> of worms and began to stink. And Moses was angry with them.

**16:21** So they gathered it morning by morning,<sup>83</sup> each person according to what

receive a present tense translation--here and now He commands you.”

<sup>71</sup> The form is the plural imperative: “Gather [you] each man according to his eating.”

<sup>72</sup> The omer is approximately two quarts or two liters.

<sup>73</sup> Literally, “for a head”

<sup>74</sup> The word “number” is an accusative that defines more precisely how much was to be gathered (see GKC, par. 118h).

<sup>75</sup> Traditionally: “souls”

<sup>76</sup> “dwells” is added

<sup>77</sup> The preterite with the *waw* consecutive is subordinated here as a temporal clause.

<sup>78</sup> The address now is for “man” *’ish*, “each one”; here the instruction seems to be focused on the individual heads of the households.

<sup>79</sup> Or, “some of it,” from it”

<sup>80</sup> Literally “men,” this usage is designed to mean “some” (see GKC, par. 138h, N).

<sup>81</sup> Literally, “and it”

<sup>82</sup> The verb *wayyarum* is equivalent to a passive--“it was changed”--to which “worms” is added as an accusative of result (GKC, par. 121d, N).

<sup>83</sup> This is an example of the repetition of words to express the distributive sense; here the meaning is “every morning” (see GKC, par. 121c).

he could eat; and when the sun got hot, it melted.<sup>84</sup> **16:22** And<sup>85</sup> on the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers<sup>86</sup> per person;<sup>87</sup> and all the leaders<sup>88</sup> of the community<sup>89</sup> came and told<sup>90</sup> Moses. **16:23** And he said to them, “This is what Yahweh has said: ‘Tomorrow is a time of cessation,<sup>91</sup> a holy sabbath<sup>92</sup> to Yahweh. Whatever you want to<sup>93</sup> bake, bake today;<sup>94</sup> and whatever you want to boil, boil today; and whatever is left put aside for yourselves to be kept until morning’.” **16:24** So they put it aside until the morning, just as Moses had commanded, and it did not stink, neither was there any worm in it. **16:25** And Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to Yahweh; today you will not find it in the area.<sup>95</sup> **16:26** Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the

---

<sup>84</sup> The perfect tenses here with *waw* consecutives have the frequentative sense; they function in a protasis-apodosis relationship (GKC, par. 159g).

<sup>85</sup> Literally, “and it happened/was”

<sup>86</sup> This construction is an exception to the normal rule for numbers 2-10 taking the object numbered in the plural. Here is it “two of the omer” or “the double of the omer” (see GKC, par. 134e).

<sup>87</sup> Literally, “for one”

<sup>88</sup> The word suggests “the ones lifted up” above others, and therefore the rulers or the chiefs of the people.

<sup>89</sup> Or, “congregation”

<sup>90</sup> The meaning here is probably that these leaders, the natural heads of the families in the clans, saw that people were gathering twice as much and they reported this to Moses, perhaps afraid it would stink again (Cassuto, p. 197).

<sup>91</sup> The noun *shabbaton* has the abstract ending on it: “resting, ceasing.” The root word means “cease” from something, more than “to rest.” The Law would make it clear that they were to cease from their normal occupations and do no common work.

<sup>92</sup> The technical expression is now used: *shabbat qodesh* “a holy sabbath” meaning a “cessation of/for holiness” for Yahweh. The rest was to be characterized by holiness.

<sup>93</sup> The two verbs in these noun clauses (direct objects) are desiderative imperfects--”bake whatever you want to bake.”

<sup>94</sup> “today” is implied from the context.

<sup>95</sup> Literally, “field”

sabbath, there will not be any.”

**16:27** And on the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, but they found nothing. **16:28** So Yahweh said to Moses, “How long do you refuse<sup>96</sup> to keep my commandments and my instructions? **16:29** See, because Yahweh has given you the sabbath, that is why<sup>97</sup> He is giving you on the sixth day food for two days. So<sup>98</sup> each of you stay where he is;<sup>99</sup> let no one<sup>100</sup> go out of his place on the seventh day.” **16:30** So the people rested on the seventh day.

**16:31** So the Israelites<sup>101</sup> called its name “manna”;<sup>102</sup> now it was like coriander seed, white, and its taste was like wafers and honey.

**16:32** Then Moses said, “This is what<sup>103</sup> Yahweh has commanded: ‘Fill an omer with it to be kept<sup>104</sup> for generations to come,<sup>105</sup> so that they may see<sup>106</sup> the food

---

<sup>96</sup> The verb form is *me’antem*; it is plural, and so addressed to the nation and not to Moses. The perfect tense in this sentence would be the characteristic perfect, denoting action characteristic of the past and the present.

<sup>97</sup> Jacob has an interesting comment based on the rabbinic teaching that the giving of the sabbath was a sign of God’s love--it was accomplished through the double portion on the sixth day. He says, “God made no request unless He provided the means for its execution” (p. 461).

<sup>98</sup> “So” is added

<sup>99</sup> Literally, “remain, a man where he is”

<sup>100</sup> Or, “Let not any one go” (see GKC, par. 138d).

<sup>101</sup> The text has “the house of Israel,” which is very unusual in this context.

<sup>102</sup> Hebrew *man*

<sup>103</sup> Literally, “This is the thing that”

<sup>104</sup> Literally, “for keeping”

<sup>105</sup> Literally, “according to your generations” (see 12:14)

<sup>106</sup> In this construction after the particle expressing purpose or result, the imperfect tense has the nuance of final imperfect, equal to a subjunctive in the classical languages.

which I fed you in the desert, when I brought you out from the land of Egypt’.”

**16:33** Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar and put in it an omer full of manna, and place it before Yahweh to be kept for generations to come.” **16:34** Just as Yahweh commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the Testimony<sup>107</sup> for safe keeping.<sup>108</sup>

**16:35** Now the Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was inhabited; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

**16:36** Now an omer is one tenth of an ephah.<sup>109</sup>

### EXPOSITORY DEVELOPMENT

The sixteenth chapter of the book of Exodus, although plagued with difficulties, plays a rather important part in the theme of the book. This section is part of a wider historical prologue leading up to the covenant at Sinai, a part of which was the obligation of obedience and loyalty (Paul Wayne Ferris, Jr., “The Manna Narrative of Ex. 16:1-10,” *BETS* 18 [1975:191]). The history of the

---

<sup>107</sup> The “Testimony” is a reference to the Ark of the Covenant; so the pot of manna would be placed before Yahweh in the Tent. Kaiser says that this later instruction came from a time after the tabernacle had been built (se 25:10-22)(p. 405). This is not a problem since the final part of this chapter had to have been included at the end of the forty years in the desert.

<sup>108</sup> “for keeping”

<sup>109</sup> The point of this chapter, with all its instructions and reports included, is God’s miraculous provision of food for his people. This is a display of sovereign power that differs from the display of military power. But once again the story calls for faith, but here it is faith in Yahweh to provide for His people. The provision is also a test to see if they will obey the instructions of God. Deuteronomy 8 explains this. The point, then, is that God provides for the needs of His people that they might demonstrate their dependence on Him by obeying His word.

The exposition of this passage must also correlate the Gospel of John. God’s providing Manna from Heaven to meet the needs of His people takes on new significance in the application that Jesus makes of the subject to Himself. There the requirement is the same--will they believe and obey? But at the end of the event John tells us they murmured about Jesus.

wanderings in Exodus is selective, and not exhaustive. It may be arranged for propaedeutic reasons. The purpose is to prepare the reader for the covenant itself. Cassuto's description of the section as a didactic anthology provides a helpful organization (U. Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 187). Its themes are: (alleged) lack of vital necessities, murmuring against Moses and God, proving the power of God, and providing food in the wilderness (with rules and regulations).

So we trace the wanderings discussions from the bitter waters of Marah, to the need for food at Sin, to the lack of water at Meribah, to the fight at Rephidim with the Amalekites, before reading the historical prologue of the covenant at Sinai in which God declares how he has cared for and provided for them. On this basis, Yahweh will demand obedience and loyalty from them. Forever after, when they read this, they would know that they arrived at the land of Canaan, they would know that it was due to the power and care of Yahweh. In addition, they would know that this care came in spite of their unbelief in murmuring. The lessons of the wandering clearly reveal that those who murmur are in violation of the loyalty the covenant demands, for murmuring is the antithesis of praising.

This chapter (16) records another test for the people of Israel. The occasion provides for the establishment of another statute (the same kind of thing that was in chapter 15). In fact, the development is clearly linked: need, promise of provision, accompanying instructions, and a test of commitment and faith. More specifically, we can trace this general structure through the manna story:

murmuring over the lack of bread (16:1-3),  
 disputation of Moses with the people, promising divine provision (16:4-8),  
 appearance of the glory and promise of bread and flesh (16:9-12),  
     which actually are provided (16:13-22),  
 the instructions about the sabbath (16: 23-30),  
     and about the memorial manna (16:31-36).

So because of the people's cry for food, a wonderful provision is granted; because the provision is granted, a lesson and a memorial are registered.

*I. People with a weak faith are quick to challenge God's abilities when they are faced with difficulties and deprivations (1-3).*

At the base of the record is the characteristic weakness of their faithfulness

to God and their faith in God. They murmur. The Hebrew verb seems to carry a connotation of disloyalty in covenantal terms. It is a breach of trust and refers usually to an unjustified complaint. The psalmist will call it rebellion. In view of this, we may say that these wonderful provisions (sweet water, manna, quail, water) were to show the new covenanters that such a breach of trust is without foundation. Their God would provide all their needs; they needed only be loyal and when in difficulty pray.

That the nature of the complaint leading to the giving of manna is unjustified can be seen from the record itself. They left Egypt with “flocks and herds and a great many cattle” (Ex. 12:38), and approximately 45 days later they complain that they are dying in the desert for lack of food. There would seem to have been an ample supply of food, meat, milk, cheese, and the like; Moses is said to have remarked: “you lacked nothing” (Deut. 3:7).

Moreover, the complaint may be absurd since the food of the labor gangs in Egypt must have been meager (Clements, *Exodus*, p. 5). Perhaps they are simply disappointed in the realization of their freedom and all that it promised. The complaint is really against Yahweh, and therefore disloyalty (see 16:7, 8b,9b). It is in fact a vote of *no confidence* and so unbelief (Ferris, p. 195).

We would have to say that the complaint was unjustified and misdirected (since it went against Moses).

Deut.8:1-3 provides a commentary on the passage, making it clear that the narrative is didactic (or at least open to such use), driving the people to realize all that is involved in covenant loyalty and obedience. It is important to trust God rather than murmur in disloyalty over mundane difficulties:

All the commandment which I command you this day shall you observe to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which Yahweh swore unto your fathers. And you shall remember all the way which Yahweh your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not. And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every thing that proceeds from the mouth of Yahweh does man live.

*II. God promises to provide for the needs of his people (4-12).*

There are two parts here, the initial promise given, and then the appearance of the glory of the LORD and the promise of bread and meat. The mention of both provisions has created some tension with the parallel passages.

One of the major difficulties concerns the comparison of Numbers 11 and Exodus 16—both of which contain manna accounts. On first reading it seems that we have here two different accounts. In Numbers we find that the time was almost 24 months after Exodus 16, that it was after the erection of the Tabernacle, that Taberah, the burning, preceded it (not in Exodus), that the people were tired of the manna (not that there was no bread to eat), and that the provision of manna is not represented as being short termed or seasonal. In addition, according to Numbers the quail came 2 years later and there was a severe tragedy over it.

In Exodus, both the manna and the quail are given each day, morning and evening, beginning with the 15th day of the 2nd month. Precise chronological reconciliation seems impossible, whether we take literary sources (doublets, as Wellhausen did) to be the reason, or a thematic and didactic arrangement to account for the differences (as conservatives do). Two considerations should be kept in mind, however. First, they may be separate events entirely. If this is true, then they should be treated separately as valid accounts of events that occurred throughout the period of the wanderings (and not brought into one harmonious story). Similar things need not be the same thing. Secondly, strict chronological order is not always maintained in Scripture, especially if it is didactic. Perhaps we should describe Exodus 16 as the initiation of the giving of manna as God's provision of bread (and therefore placed in the prologue of the covenant), and Numbers 11 as an account of a mood which developed over a period of time in response to the manna. Numbers 11 would look at the manna from a different perspective, then.

And another thing, how can there be instructions about the sabbath day when the story precedes Exodus 20:8? If we grant that the passage is arranged chronologically, I think we can still account for the presence of this sabbath law here on the basis of the decalogue itself. The commandment makes clear that the ordinance of the sabbath had its roots in an understanding of the creation. Thus, it

is not likely that the idea of a sabbath should be a novel idea at Sinai. They knew about it from their traditions of the material in Genesis, and were instructed in it before it was legislated in the law code. Besides, a sabbath of sorts was held in other countries as well.

Well, these items are certainly things that merit a good deal more discussion than I am giving them; however, my purpose in including them is merely to provide some framework for the discussion to follow, and an awareness of difficulties. I am primarily interested in the giving and the naming of the manna; the solution to these introductory matters will have little effect on the etymological study of the naming. You should have the issues and answers in mind, though, because even if you do not include them in your sermon, some folks will ask.

### *III. The LORD supernaturally provides manna from heaven to meet the needs of his people (13-22).*

I left the expression “manna from heaven” in my expository point because it works in both testaments, here in Exodus 16 and in John where Jesus claims to be the manna from heaven. It will have to be explained in each testament, but as a common heading it is fine here.

Before looking at the naming itself, I should like to further explain some of the ideas about the manna that have been introduced before.

#### *Manna, according to Exodus 16*

Here we read that:

It was a small, round flake, as small as the hoar-frost (v. 14)

It is called the bread Yahweh gave them (v. 15)

It melted away when the sun got hot (v. 21)

If left over it would breed worms and become foul (v. 20)

It could be baked or boiled (v. 23)

It was like coriander seed, white; the taste of wafers and honey (v. 31)

It was abundant; they could gather an omer per person each day, and two on one day of the week (Friday)

They gathered it morning by morning (not all day long)

They did this for the 40 year duration (v. 35)



*Manna, according to Numbers 11*

Here we read that:

The people were tired of it; they had it constantly (v. 6)

It was like coriander seed, the appearance as bdellium (v. 7)

People gathered it, ground it in mills, beat it in mortars, boiled it  
in pots, and made cakes

Its taste was the taste of fresh oil (v. 8)

It fell with the dew (v. 9)

*Manna, in other biblical passages*

Several references may also contribute to our understanding of the substance:

It was unknown food to Israel and her ancestors (Deut. 8:3).

It was described as Yahweh's Manna (Neh. 9:20).

Yahweh “rained down manna upon them to eat, and gave them grain  
(*dgn*) from heaven” (Ps. 78:24).

He “satisfied them with bread (*lekhem*) from heaven” (Ps. 105:40)

Later writers interpreted the Manna spiritually, or at least supernaturally. Wisdom of Solomon 16:20 said that it fit everyone's taste. Paul described it as spiritual food (1 Cor.10:3), and Jesus claimed to be the Manna from heaven (For these involved interpretations, Malina's book on the Manna tradition may be consulted).

*Suggested parallels in pagan traditions*

Gaster records some of the ancient writers discussions about similar materials (Theodor H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament* [New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1969], p. 243). Hesiod (*Theogany*, 581) and Aristotle (*Historia animalium*, 22,4) say “honeydew” comes from heaven. Gaster quotes W. H. Rosche as saying that “honeydew” is what the Greeks called ambrosia and nectar in solid and liquid forms respectively—the food of the gods (*Iliad* 19, 352; Hesiod, *Theogany*, 639, 796). However, this seems to take us nowhere in the understanding.

*Modern critical suggestions*

Bodenheimer says that there are only two views on the Manna that can be taken: 1) it was similar to bread and enough to feed all the people, 2) it was a natural phenomenon that only contributed to their diet (F. S. Bodenheimer, “The Manna of Sinai,” *BA* 10 [1947]:2). He says that only the latter view permits analysis and discussion; but there is a larger matter to disagree on with him. He

says that there is one solution to the manna, and it satisfies the highest culinary desire of the bedouin—sweetness. It comes, he says, from one of two insects; it is none other than the excretion of so many plant lice and scale insects. This substance hardens and drops to the ground as a sticky solid. It served as a honey substitute.

When this “product” is compared with the biblical records, there seem to be some similarities—the phenomenon occurs in the proper place, the time seems right (may or June), the description seems right, the taste similar, and it seemed to fall from heaven. I must stress, there **seem to be** similarities. But there are some serious differences. The biblical account requires far more of it, all year round; it could breed worms; it could melt away in the sun; it would decay and stick; it could be made into bread; it did not come on Saturday; and it stopped when the Israelites came to Gilgal.

So this “solution” is totally unconvincing. The differences, he argues, are later contrived interpretations. When a scholar has to resort to that kind of logic, then he has ceased dealing with the text—he can make the text do almost anything. As far as breeding worms, he says that really means that ants came and carried it away. But that is totally different. Why did the text not say ants? Rather, it says they would breed worms; this seems to go hand in hand with the decaying.

The argument that its being called *lekhem*, and not actually meaning “bread” creates no difficulty. The OT uses the word in a wide sense: equal to the kid of goats (Judg. 13:15, 16), and equal to honey (1 Sam. 14:24-28). So it need not be limited here to “bread.”

Of course it had its appeal because of the sweetness (“It must have been its sweetness which justified its inclusion into the reports of the wilderness wandering” [IDB, s.v. “Manna” by J. L. Mihelic, p. 260]). But the text of Exodus does not imply that Manna was the only thing that they ate for 40 years. It does say it was a regular and substantial part of the diet. But if we take the view that Manna is one or other of two genera of *coccidae* that parasitize the tamarisk tree, then we have some difficulties. That substance is composed of glucose, fructose and pectin. It is very sweet, but it is lacking in protein and therefore very poor staple for a diet. Moreover, this exudiment is seasonal. Finally, it is not enough. A good picker, in a fertile valley, in a good year, can pick a half a pound a day in the peak season.

Exodus is talking about an enormous provision in a dry desert, These phenomena may invite analysis and discussion, but they do not satisfy the biblical data. Either Bodenheimer is correct, that later interpolation from ignorant circles have crept into the text, or the Manna was some other unique phenomenon. But he cannot sustain with evidence that ignorant interpolations crept into the text.

The Hebrew word for Manna is simply *man*. The lexicons list two standard possibilities: either it is related to the Arabic or it is a popular etymology based upon late Aramaic. The text of v. 15 records, “They said, ‘What (*man*) is it?’ For they did not know what (Hebrew *mah*) it was” (Field on Ex. 16:15 cites a Greek version’s *man auto–is that manna*’).

The discussion must be concerned with the interpretation given to this word *man*. Eber attempted to link it with Egyptian *mennu*, of the same meaning, but this is improbable (Eber, *Dutch Gosen*, p. 226). Likewise, the connection to the Arabic word for “lice” is rather unlikely. The word *man*, “what,” is not Hebrew for “what” as far as we know, but appears to be a later contraction in Syriac of *ma den*, “what then?” *Man* in Aramaic and Arabic is “what?” Childs follows the approach that any connections to words that actually meant “what” are unnecessary, for it is a play on the name (whatever it may have been) and therefore related only by sound to the term being explained (Childs, *Exodus*, p. 274). This may suggest that a substance was known by name prior to the story—a fact that Deuteronomy does not seem to allow.

Driver says that while a connection to the contracted form seems likely, still we do not know how early the Aramaic contraction came into use—but the verse seems to reflect it (Driver, *Exodus*, p. 149). The evidence that we have is slim, but certainly worth considering. It has led Cassuto to conclude that in the early generations of Israel the word *mn* was also used of “what?” (Cassuto, *Exodus*, p. 196). So the theories of the origin of the word “manna” do not offer anything really very compelling. Cassuto seems to have the simplest explanation.

But here is the evidence for the existence of the word from the early literature. KBL suggest a possible relation to Amorite *mana*, “what?” All sources list the Amarna Letters (EA 286, 5) as an example of the use in Canaanite (which should be traced for confirmation). Gordon lists *mn(m)* as “who(ever), whatever” (p. 435). Aisleitner (WUS, p. 187) lists *mn* I as meaning “what?” and relates it to Aram, Ar *man*, Akk *mannu*, and Eth *manni*, “Welt?” He then gives *mn* II meaning

“wieviet?” The entry *mnm* he relates to the Akkadian for “what?” Jean-Hoftijzer (p. 157) list the Aramaic sources for it as early as Ancient Aramaic.

It would seem then that there is some evidence that a form *mn* existed that may have carried a meaning “what?” Thus, the Israelites’ reaction in the early times gave the name to the unknown substance. The narrator, using current Hebrew (*mah*) explains that they named it because they did not know **what** it was.

#### *IV. The faithful preserve God’s supernatural dealings in the collective memory of the faith (23-36)*

In the last part of the passage we have two main sections, the ruling for the sabbath day and the preservation of the manna for the commemoration of the event.

For a detailed discussion of the meaning of the sabbath, see my material in *Holiness to the Lord*, my commentary on Leviticus (chapter 23:1-3 is the law of the sabbath). It is important to understand all the aspects of this day so that you will know how to interpret it whenever it comes up in Scripture. It became the sign of the Sinaitic Covenant, and the Israelites were bound to preserve it under the penalty of death. As a sign it looked back to creation. We have a different sign for the New Covenant, because Christ has fulfilled all the holy days of the Old Testament, even the sabbath. The significance of sabbath now pertains to salvation, notably the kingdom of God, and is therefore spiritual and eschatological.

## CONCLUSION

The passage may be divided as follows: first, the crisis of the lack of food and the peoples’ murmuring (16:1-3); second, the promise of food from the LORD and the lesson of God’s sovereignty (16:4-12); third, the provision of the food and the disobedience of the people (16:13-30); and finally, the preservation of the memory of God’s provision (16:31-36). Or, the passages could be aligned differently, 1-3 taken as a unit, 4-22 as the promise and provision, 23-30 the obedience of sabbath laws, and 31-36 the sabbath.

The point of the chapter is God’s miraculous provision of food with instructions for its enjoyment and commemoration. This is a display of God’s

sovereign power that differs from the display of power in the military victory. But once again the story calls for faith, but now it is faith in His ability to provide. But the entire story is also a test to see if the people will obey. It is as Deuteronomy 8 says, that God fed them with manna that they might know that they must live by the word of God and not by bread alone. **The point is that God provides for the needs of His people that they might demonstrate their dependence on Him by obeying word.**

The main thrust will be on the LORD's provision. We could work with three areas of application based on the contextual meaning of the text. For the first part, we can make the point **The faithful should praise the LORD for what he has given them and not murmur about what they do not have.** For the second point, combining the miracle of the manna and the instructions, we can make the point that **Enjoyment of the provisions of God require obedience to his words.** And for the last part, we can say, **Believers must preserve the memory of the great works of God on their behalf.** For each of these points the specific details must be teased out and explained. But the primary area of thinking will be in how the Lord provides for his people, and in the process tests them.

Now, when you add the New testament, especially John 6, the message is elevated. Christ says that He is the manna that came down from heaven, the divine provision for life, spiritual and eternal. And if they believe his words, they will enjoy live forever. The call there would be for people to appropriate the Lord by faith and therefore receive this life. The problem is that in the average Church, most of the people have already done this; so you have to go to the secondary application, that is, now that the Bread has been given and we have received it, to enjoy all the benefits of the Bread of Life requires obedience on our part, obedience to the words of the Lord.

Of course, this is Jesus' sermon, his analogy (= *midrash*) on the tradition, and although it is a valid fulfillment in him, this in no way does away with the point(s) of Exodus 16 in context—a test of the people (as Deut. 8 says). We hear so much about God's testing people with suffering, but this is somewhat different: God tests people with provisions. The same questions arise about obedience: will they continue faithful when they suffer? But now, Will they obey when they receive what they want? He wants Israel to eat, but he wants them to eat knowing that it is he who has provided it. And their compliance with the rules, and their

commemorative naming and preserving the manna, would show that they acknowledged this.