

An Exegesis of Exodus 16:1-20
Pentateuch
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1 The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. 2 In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" 8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." 9 Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" 10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud. 11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'" 13 That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15 When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. 16 This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" 17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. 19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." 20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

I. Introduction

There is a Middle Eastern saying that goes, "When the Lord's hand is in your mouth you're fed generously." With this saying in mind, this writer has an interest in the perspective that this passage of scripture presents. Man's view of God's provision and plan versus God's intention and generosity to man. To be fair, this writer also has a passion for food. The selection of this passage was, in part, based on an interest in the solid meal plan of Quail and Manna that filled the bellies of God's people as they were in

the wilderness. To know that we serve a God who cares if our physical needs of hunger are being filled is a great comfort!

When hungry, the Israelites remembered the fertile lands which Pharaoh had held them captive in (v3). They also “grumbled” (v2) and they questioned why their God had brought His people to such a barren, desolate place. Couldn’t this God of miracles have taken them to this land of milk and honey right away? Why were these people of favor suddenly being inconvenienced, after all, weren’t plagues and hardship only meant for the Egyptians?

Instead of trusting God to reveal His avenue of provision, His people quickly assumed a weakness of planning or lack of foresight. In reading this Biblical narrative, we now can see that this was not the case! In fact, the route the LORD laid out for His people was not a short and direct way to Canaan because they were being taken far south to be provided the Law at Mt. Sinai (Hester, 124). The inconvenience they faced was a part of God’s plan and not an error or oversight; it was intentional. It seems shocking that God’s people had just witnessed wonderful miracles while in Egypt, yet now as they were being led into the Wilderness of Sin, they suddenly became panicked.

As we observe in preceding scripture, it is surprising how quickly a celebration of God’s miracle at the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 15:21) turned into fear at Marah (Exodus 15:24) with grumbling about the lack of water. God provided fresh water for them and even encouraged them to trust in Him for their protection and safekeeping by making a covenant with them. After stopping off at Elim where they camped near twelve springs and seventy palm trees, they were brought once again to the wilderness. One would

expect a greater sense of trust on this next expedition based on God's actions in the previous test; however the results were sadly similar.

Chapter 17 begins with the Israelites leaving the Wilderness of Sin. Again they became thirsty and complain to Moses; yet again a miraculous happening brings them water. The concluding verses of chapter 17 relate to the defeat of the Amalekites through even more miraculous means. Thus in three chapters a pattern of interest emerges: God's destruction of Pharaoh's Army (A), God's provision of water (B), God's provision of food (C), God's provision of water (B), God's destruction of the Amelikite Army (A). This surely highlights the central item (as a Chiastic structure) and displays the importance of this passage.

In selecting the first twenty verses of Exodus 16, this writer's goal was to highlight the initial provision of Manna and Quail and the people's response to it. The beginning of this chapter clearly defines a new link in the journey of God's people and is a solidly defined border within this narrative. While verses 21 to 36 provide a more definite close to this discourse, completing an exegesis of the first twenty verses of this chapter will suffice to fulfill the task at hand.

II. Introduction to Literary Devices and Logical Outline

The following is a catalog of literary devices and a logical outline of Exodus 16:1-20. These steps will be important in locating the focal points of this passage. There can be found a strong call to observe God's leadership and provision in each of these listings.

A. Catalog of Literary Devices

| <i>Verse Location</i> | <i>Biblical Words Comprising Device</i> | <i>Device Name</i> | <i>Significance of Device</i> |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Exod 16:3 | 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around <u>pots of meat</u> and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death." | Hyperbole | The term "pots of meat" would be like us saying "bucket loads of meat;" it is an exaggeration being used to make a point. |
| Exod 16:3 | 3 The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert <u>to starve this entire assembly to death</u> ." | Hyperbole | They had flocks with them and knew that not all people would have been hungry; another exaggeration. |
| Exod 16:4 | 4 Then the LORD said to Moses, " <u>I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.</u> " | Forshadowing / Irony | The contrast being made is between a God that keeps His part of the deal against the foreshadowing of man's failure to do the same. |
| Exod 16:6-7 | 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, " <u>In the evening you will know that it was the LORD</u> who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and <u>in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD</u> , because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" 8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." | Synonymous | You will know, and if there are any doubts you will see... an intensification of the Lord's goodness. |
| Exod 16:6-8 | 6 So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, " <u>In the evening you will know that it was the LORD</u> who brought you out of Egypt, 7 and <u>in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD</u> , because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" 8 Moses also said, " <u>You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning</u> , because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD." | Repetition (of significant concept) | Placing emphasis on the LORD's responsibility in relationship to the provision and the journey. |

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|---|--|--|---|
| <p>Exod 16:6-8</p> | <p>7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. <u>Who are we, that you should grumble against us?</u>" 8 Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. <u>Who are we?</u> You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD."</p> | <p>Rhetorical Question(s)</p> | <p>Posing this question with an obvious answer conveys to readers that the anger of the people was not directed at Moses and Aaron, but at their faith and ultimately at God himself.</p> |
| <p>Exod 16:4 16: 11-12</p> | <p>4 Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. 11 The LORD said to Moses, 12 "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"</p> | <p>Significant Repetition of concept</p> | <p>God is sending provision to His people. It is on the way; are they on their way to Him?</p> |
| <p>Exod 16: 17-18</p> | <p>17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.</p> | <p>Detail</p> | <p>A greater level of detail here on the actions of the people; used to show the writers close observation of this process.</p> |

B. Logical Outline

| Summary Outline | Logical Outline | Explanatory Comments |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Israel Travels to the Desert of Sin | The 'Rations' run out! | |
| 1-2 The whole Israelite community set out...after they had come out of Egypt...the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. | 1-The whole lot of them Grumbled... | Complaining Begins! |
| 3 "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in Egypt! | a) ...God should have killed us in Egypt, | BOO HOO! |
| ...we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted... | b) we ate better there! | NOT! |
| ...you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death! | c) Moses brought us out here to starve us! | Whose fault is it?? |
| 4 Then the LORD said to Moses... | 2-God enacts a plan of rescue, it involves... | Is he helping Moses or the people? |
| I will rain down bread from heaven for you. | a) bread that will rain down from heaven! | |
| The people are to go out each day and gather...I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. | b) There are instructions for use and a test is involved! | God is faithful will you be? |
| 5 On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days. | c) You will be reminded of the Sabbath, and ME!(remember I created everything). | |
| 6 In the evening you will know... | 3. Moses and Aaron point the finger to.. | |
| it was the LORD... | a) the LORD, because... | |
| 7 and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD... | b) ...He heard you and is sending provisions of... | He will provide for us. |
| ...meat to eat in the evening ... | - ...meat in the evening... | |
| ...and all the bread you want in the morning | - and bread in the morning. | |

| | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| 10 they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD | 4. The people see God's glory... | Look and you will see... |
| appearing in the cloud | a) ...in the cloud, then... | In the cloud |
| 11 twilight you will eat meat... | b) there were Quail all over the camp and | Providing meat, |
| 12...in the morning you will be filled with bread. | c) bread all around the camp! | And providing bread |
| 13-17 gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent... | 5. The people are instructed by Moses; the test begins! | Now it's our turn... |
| 18 And when they measured it by the omer... Each one gathered as much as he needed. | a) Gathering the manna seems to be going well until, | Things look good... |
| 19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." | b) failure on the second day, well before the Sabbath! | DOH! |
| 20 some of them paid no attention... Moses was angry with them. | c) Moses is angered at the immediate failure! | |

III. Word Study

The word chosen for word study is the word “filled” as used in Exodus 16:12. “You will be FILLED with bread” or **הִשְׂבַּעְתִּי לֶחֶם** in Hebrew from the BHS, **שָׂבַע** is a verb that means be sated, satisfied, surfeited. More generally, it means to be sated, have desire satisfied, have in excess or be surfeited with. Other words that can describe this Hebrew word are abundance or plenty.

This is a word of interest because it demonstrates that the Israelites were not merely sustained or just barely provided for by God’s provision. They were in fact filled; not just enough to live on, but enough to feel full with. Leaving the table a little bit hungry is the encouraged way we are to be as a self disciplined and healthy living culture. God’s provision was not simply through the Omer of Manna they were to gather (an Omer was about two quarts or a liter and was considered a standard portion or ration). Evidently this ration was designed to do more than just keep God’s children going, it was designed to fill them!

In verse 20, Moses was angry that some gathered more than the single omer and saw that it spoiled. Certainly he was aware that they were being motivated by greed, a desire to hoard the manna for their own gluttony, security or to use it as a bartering tool. He knew first hand that they were not being driven by physical hunger and the desires of the flesh, but rather they had been physically satisfied.

This single word is important as it describes the physical result of consumption. As slaves in Egypt, the Israelites were most likely only fed once a day by their slave masters and this meal would have been meant to merely sustain them and not to “fill” or satisfy the slaves.

Enriched Paraphrase

The LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning your bellies will be fully satisfied with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.'"

IV. Historical Observations

A. Introduction

There are many relevant historical observations to be made from this passage. In researching these observations, one gains a greater familiarity with the people, culture and environment of this narrative. Through the following paragraphs a picture of the overall location in time, place and culture will be drawn.

B. Time

The Israelites arrived in the Wilderness of Sin thirty days after leaving Egypt; many scholars note this as May of 1446 B.C. The Exodus occurred in (or around) 1446 B.C. (Wood, 212). However, this date is strongly debated and scholars who hold to a late date of the Exodus happening between 1290-1225 B.C. have many strong arguments. This writer finds strength in the fact that the early date emphasizes the literal interpretation of the biblical numbers found in Exodus 12:40, Judges 11:26 and 1 Kings 6:1.

It can be helpful to look at some of the events that were occurring in or around the world at that time: in 1423 - Thutmose IV become pharaoh; in 1410 - Amenhotep III became pharaoh (this is known as Egypt's "Golden Age"); in 1400 - the Temples at Luxor were under construction (large lavish temples used to worship the Egyptian Gods);

in 1400 – the Iron Age develops in West Asia and India (previously people were using bronze rather than iron). Several sources also point out that the wheel was beginning to be used in farming and agriculture in or around this time.

Through framing the time of this passage, one can begin to understand that God's people here were indeed leaving an Egyptian culture which was determined to head even further away from acknowledging the God of Abraham, Joseph and Moses. We can also observe that the farming methods were not very sophisticated and working with metal was still a very crude science. These are just a few timepieces to keep in mind as God's people are brought out from an enslavement that had lasted in Egypt for 400 years.

B. Place

אֶל-מִדְבַּר-סִין The Desert of Sin is located between Elim and Sinai and is notably a מִדְבַּר or wilderness area. Some of the basic definitions that can be used to better explain this term are: tracts of land used for the pasturage of flocks and herds; uninhabited land; large tracts of land bearing various names in certain districts of which there might be towns and cities. While these “deserts” are not barren sand bars as we might imagine them to be, there was evidently not enough food found in this place to sustain the lives of the Israelites. The flocks they had brought with them were most likely able to feed and there may have been some sparse fruit trees or other types of naturally occurring foods. Again, however, these were likely not substantial enough to sustain the large mass of people. The exact spot the people camped at is unknown and one source reviewed simply stated that “the location of the Desert of Sin is problematic” (Barker, 93).

C. People / Needs

While there is some debate among scholars regarding the number of people traveling to this wilderness location, those who value the Biblical numbers as accurate estimate the number to be around 2 million. This would include the number of fighting men as reported at 600,000 along with the women, children, the elderly, the infirmed and other groups of people that also fled Egypt. These other people would have included fellow Egyptian slaves from other countries and even Egyptians that had joined the Israelites after they had witnessed God's might during the plagues in Egypt. This large group from diverse backgrounds and cultures may not be what one would perceive upon an informal reading of this text. However, life and history is rarely as clear cut and well defined as we imagine it to be.

V. Theological

A. Introduction

As we saw from a look at some historical observations, these were a people who had been imprisoned for a long time. They were new to governing themselves and caring for all of their own needs without the protection that a ruling slave-owner provided. The initial provisions that they brought along on their journey were undoubtedly exhausted (Barker, 93). They were alone before the countenance of God, now fully dependant on Him for leadership and provision.

To quote from a popular television show, this was the "Real World." This is what happens when people start getting real. The Israelites had now come to a place where they were directly relating to God. Without the Egyptians in the way, God's people were showing us exactly what we all are capable of. Meanwhile, God was observing the

situation of difficulty and listening to the Israelites attitude of complaint. Moses interpreted this situation clearly in Deuteronomy 8:3 and lets us know that God used this as an opportunity for discipleship.

B. God/Humankind

Throughout the scriptures, the sharp contrast between God's faithfulness and Man's unfaithfulness is rarely highlighted as profoundly as in this narrative. The Israelites grumbled about their current situation and we see clearly that, "discontent magnifies what is past, and vilifies what is present, without regard to truth or reason" (Henry, 1491). In fact, as they complain and begin to form angry mobs, "it is indeed astonishing that wretched men, whom their necessity should have humiliated, rose insolently against God and that their hunger, so far from bending their hearts to gentleness, was the very incentive of their arrogance" (Calvin, 171). Rather than ask God humbly for His provision, they become almost arrogant in tone acting as if they had been done a disservice by being freed from their slavery in Egypt, although they had cried out in Egypt to be liberated. Sadly they called into question God's ability to provide in this difficult situation as well as His wisdom for leading them to this place. They failed to consider their own frailty as a people dependant on His leading and did not respond in humility.

What does this show in regard to human nature? This shows our arrogance and the ability of humankind to never be satisfied; regardless of past gifts we always require more. When are people satisfied? When we are truly delivered from the chains of slavery? When our belly is made full by the hand of God? No! Not even then!

In clear contrast, God's unfailing ability to lead, guide and care for mankind is very evident in the passage being scrutinized. Our inability to follow the most basic instructions given by God, along with our inability to appreciate God's leadership and watch care are also clearly illustrated here. God's character is revealed; in the midst of our arrogance and doubt He sees an opportunity to teach us of His goodness and mercy. God sees our failings as an avenue to discipleship and growth!

C. Original Application

Many of the original readers of this text would have been early worshippers in the tabernacle, prophets, teachers of the law and other Biblical writers. Therefore, a solid place to look for the original application is to turn to scripture itself to see how others interpreted this passage.

Moses looks back to this incident as he writes Deuteronomy chapter 8 and he gives the first interpretation of these events in scripture. Deuteronomy 8:3 reads,

“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.”

One can plainly see in this scripture God's intention for the hunger and to bring humility. The desired response was for the people to understand this principal; if you rely on the provision of the LORD you will know that the LORD provides. It is humorous to note that Moses also points out in this passage the fact that the people did not recognize God's provision. This hopefully spoke to the early audience of the importance to ask God to help you to see His provision. Listed below are other Old Testament passages which shed valuable light on how this passage was interpreted by the early church.

Nehemiah 9:14-16 says,

You made known to them your holy Sabbath and gave them commands, decrees and laws through your servant Moses. In their hunger you gave them bread from heaven and in their thirst you brought them water from the rock; you told them to go in and take possession of the land you had sworn with uplifted hand to give them. But they, our forefathers, became arrogant and stiff-necked, and did not obey your commands.

Nehemiah 19:20 says,

"Because of your great compassion you did not abandon them in the desert. By day the pillar of cloud did not cease to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them. You did not withhold your manna from their mouths, and you gave them water for their thirst."

Psalms 78:22-29 states,

"for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance.
Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens;
he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven.
Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.
He let loose the east wind from the heavens and led forth the south wind by his power.
He rained meat down on them like dust, flying birds like sand on the seashore.
He made them come down inside their camp, all around their tents.
They ate till they had more than enough, for he had given them what they craved."

Psalms 105:40 sings,

"They asked, and he brought them quail and satisfied them with the bread of heaven."

Each passage demonstrates the goodness of God displayed through this event and the haughtiness of God's people; certainly a stiff-necked response to a generous gift. To be noted in Nehemiah 9:14-16, a gift separate to the manna and quail is highlighted for the early reader. That of the Sabbath, in Exodus 16:5, God instructs Moses, "On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days." One way to view this instruction would be to see that God in fact was providing the Israelites with a gift in addition to the meat and manna; the gift of rest and a day to worship the LORD. By not gathering God's provision properly, the people were

not only showing their distrust for future provision, but in denial of God's additional gift of rest and were ignoring an opportunity for a closer relationship with Him.

D. Modern Applications

The fact that Jesus quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3 when tempted by Satan after fasting in the wilderness for forty days and nights, should display for Christians the importance of thoroughly understanding and applying the truth of Exodus 16:1-20 to our lives.

When Satan asked Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." Jesus undoubtedly understood that God has good things for His people and that He never intends us harm.

We are not to be misled by our own desires. Jesus did not have to prove to Satan that His father existed, nor did Jesus doubt His father's concern for the health or well-being of His son. Jesus was able to patiently wait on the LORD'S provision with a spirit of humility and not one of haughtiness. Jesus was demonstrating for us the proper way to live, how the Israelites should have lived and how His father's holiness should be respected.

In John 6, we are shown the response of five thousand people to Jesus after He shows a miraculous sign and feeds them bread. They follow Him to the far side of a lake and wish to make Him king. He responds by telling them not to seek after someone who can fill their stomachs. They beseech Him to show them a sign that they might believe. Jesus tells them that He is the bread of heaven and that all that He has the Father has given Him. There are multiple references in this passage regarding the manna. Jesus parallels the story several times repeating the fact that He is God's manna for us and He is the LORD'S provision for all who will believe in Him! Sadly, in verse 66 of this chapter, it says that many of His disciples turned back and no longer followed Him.

VI. Conclusion

We are called as Christians not to be arrogant or haughty in our attitudes. We have been shown in our wilderness that we are to be a people that trust God. We need to know that He sees our needs and will provide in His time the provision that He has for us. Most importantly, we are to look to Jesus as our Manna! We are to gather Him up daily and fill our hearts with love for Him, our minds with the knowledge of Him and our Spirits with praise for Him. We should never grow tired of our Bread, of our wonderful provision from God!

Isaiah 52:12 reads, “The God of Israel will be your reward.” God supplies us with the provisions needed to make any journey that He calls us to a success. “Leave the Irreparable past in His hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him.” (Chambers, 279)

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