

The Book of Exodus, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 11: Manna, Quail, and the Sabbath Given

Exodus 16:1–36

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, Exodus 16 carries two heavy freights, and the teacher should hold them together. The first is daily dependence. God deliberately rationed His provision to a single day so that a redeemed but immature people would learn that they live by every word from His mouth, not by bread alone (Deuteronomy 8:3). This is the soil out of which Jesus' bread-of-life discourse and the Lord's prayer for daily bread both grow. The second is the giving of the Sabbath, which appears here for the first time in Scripture as an institution for Israel, before Sinai but anticipating it. Help the class see the Sabbath as God's gracious gift to His covenant people and as a sign of that covenant (Exodus 31:16–17), without sliding into the error of binding Sabbath observance on Christians.

On the Sabbath, careful teaching is needed. The Sabbath was given to Israel under the Old Covenant; it was never commanded of the patriarchs and is nowhere bound on Christians in the New Testament. Paul calls it a shadow whose substance is Christ (Colossians 2:16–17), and the Old Covenant of which it was a sign has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ (Hebrews 8–10; Colossians 2:14). Christians are not under a Christian Sabbath; we gather to worship on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Yet the Sabbath was never empty; it pointed forward to the deeper rest believers now have in Christ (Hebrews 4:9–10), rest from striving to earn what He freely gives. Teach the shadow, then point to the substance.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims squarely at the anxious, self-reliant heart that most of your class carries into the room. We are a people who hoard, who plan, who build storehouses precisely so that we will not have to trust God tomorrow. Exodus 16 gently dismantles that. It teaches that an ordinary day's provision is grace, that contentment is learned in receiving just enough, and that real rest is not finally a matter of a calendar but of a Savior. Help your students leave not merely knowing the manna story but holding their tomorrows more loosely, trusting the God who feeds them one sunrise at a time.

Question 1

Student Question:

Read 16:1–3. Only weeks after the Red Sea, Israel grumbles against Moses and Aaron and longs for Egypt. Moses says in 16:8 that their grumbling is not against him but against the Lord. What does this teach about the true object and seriousness of complaining against God's appointed provision and leaders?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene with the calendar. The text says it is the fifteenth day of the second month after they left Egypt (16:1), only about six weeks past the Red Sea. The nearness of the miracle to the grumbling is the point. These are not hardened pagans but the redeemed people of God, and already the songs of Exodus 15 have soured into complaint.

Press the seriousness of who they are really complaining against. Moses cuts through it in 16:7–8: your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord. God had appointed Moses and Aaron, so to grumble against His provision through them was to grumble against Him. This is a sober word about how God views complaint against His arrangements and His leaders. Complaining feels harmless to us, a mere venting, but Scripture treats grumbling as a spiritual sin that provoked God in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:10).

Distinguish honest lament from faithless grumbling. The Psalms are full of believers crying out to God in raw honesty, and that is not condemned. What God exposes here is different: a refusal to trust, a rewriting of history, a turning back toward Egypt in the heart. The wilderness did not create this; it revealed it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Grumbling against God's appointed provision and leaders is ultimately grumbling against God Himself (Exodus 16:8; Numbers 14:27).
- How quickly a redeemed people can forget recent deliverance when present comfort is threatened.
- The difference between honest, faith-filled lament and faithless grumbling (1 Corinthians 10:10).
- The wilderness as a place that exposes the heart rather than merely punishing the body (Deuteronomy 8:2).

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Scripture treat grumbling so much more seriously than we usually do?
- How can we bring honest hardship to God without crossing into faithless complaint?
- Where has a recent hardship exposed something in your heart you did not know was there?

Question 2

Student Question:

Israel remembered the pots of meat in Egypt but conveniently forgot the whips and the murdered babies. Where are you tempted to look back fondly on a sinful or empty season of your life, editing out the bondage, simply because the present feels hard?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns on the strange power of selective memory. Israel says they sat by pots of meat and ate bread to the full in Egypt (16:3). They have airbrushed the slavery out of the picture entirely. There were no comfortable suppers in Egypt; there were quotas and whips and a river full of drowned sons. Yet hunger and discomfort rewrote the past into a paradise lost.

Help students see how sin and emptiness are remembered the same way. The drinker remembers the warmth and forgets the wreckage; the one who walked away from God remembers a felt freedom and forgets the chains. Satan is happy to let us keep a flattering, edited memory of the bondage Christ rescued us from.

Land this with honest self-examination. Ask the class, gently, where their present difficulty is making some old, empty, or sinful season look better than it was. The cure is not to suppress memory but to remember truthfully, the whips along with the cooking pots.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The deceptive power of selective memory to romanticize past bondage (Numbers 11:5).
- How present hardship can make an old, empty, or sinful life look better than it was.
- Remembering truthfully as a spiritual discipline, including the cost of what we left behind.
- The contrast between the freedom God gives and the slavery the heart sometimes craves (John 8:34–36).

Discussion Prompts

- What old season of your life are you tempted to remember more fondly than it deserves?
- Why does hardship so often make the past look better than it was?
- How does remembering the truth about our former bondage help us treasure our freedom in Christ?

Question 3

Student Question:

Read 16:4–5. God says He will rain bread from heaven and that the people are to gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. How does daily provision become a daily test of faith and obedience, and what was God trying to grow in them through it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God frames the manna as a daily test: that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not (16:4). The provision and the testing are the same gift. By giving only one day's supply, God built a daily exercise of faith into the rhythm of Israel's life. Every sunrise asked the question again: will you trust Me today?

Teach what God was growing. Deuteronomy 8:2–3 gives the inspired commentary: God humbled them and let them hunger and fed them with manna to teach that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. The point was never merely full stomachs; it was hearts shaped to depend on Him. Provision that comes daily keeps us looking up daily.

Connect to the prayer Jesus taught. Give us this day our daily bread (Matthew 6:11) is the manna prayer. Jesus deliberately teaches His disciples to ask for one day's provision, not a guaranteed stockpile, training the same daily trust. God still, ordinarily, provides one day at a time, and that is a mercy, not a deprivation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Daily provision deliberately designed as a daily test of faith and obedience (Exodus 16:4).
- Man does not live by bread alone but by every word from God's mouth (Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4).
- The Lord's prayer for daily bread as the continuation of the manna lesson (Matthew 6:11).
- God growing dependence by withholding stockpiles and giving just enough.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God deliberately give only enough for one day rather than for a year?
- How does praying for daily bread shape a heart of dependence?
- What does it look like, practically, to trust God for today without anxiously securing tomorrow?

Question 4

Student Question:

God gave just enough for one day and no more. Think honestly about your relationship with money, food, time, or security. Where do you crave a stockpile that lets you feel independent of God, and what is that craving really about?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question exposes the hunger to be independent of God. The manna allowed no stockpile, and that is exactly what our hearts resist. We want enough cushion, savings, status, or control that we never have to feel the precariousness of needing God tomorrow.

Help students name their particular storehouse. For one it is money, for another it is a calendar packed so full it leaves no room for surprise, for another it is a reputation carefully guarded. The craving under all of them is the same: a quiet wish to not be dependent, to be self-secured.

Be careful and balanced. Scripture commends prudent planning and saving (Proverbs 6:6–8); the issue is not having resources but trusting them. The ant gathers, yet the believer's confidence

rests in God, not in the barn (Luke 12:16–21). Help students discern the difference between wise stewardship and the self-reliance that crowds God out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart's craving for a stockpile that makes us feel independent of God.
- The difference between wise stewardship and trusting in our resources (Luke 12:16–21).
- Idols of security: money, time, control, and reputation.
- Contentment as learned trust in God's daily sufficiency (Philippians 4:11–13).

Discussion Prompts

- What is your personal storehouse, the thing you build up so you will not have to need God?
- How do you tell the difference between wise saving and faithless hoarding?
- Where is God inviting you to hold your security more loosely and trust Him more?

Question 5

Student Question:

Read 16:13–21. Those who gathered much had nothing left over, and those who gathered little had no lack, yet when some hoarded manna overnight it bred worms and stank. What is God teaching about contentment, greed, and trusting Him for tomorrow rather than hoarding today (compare Matthew 6:11; 6:34)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The gathering of the manna is full of wonder. Each gathered as much as he could eat, yet when measured, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack (16:18). Paul later cites this exact verse as a principle of generous equality in the church (2 Corinthians 8:15). God's provision met everyone's true need.

The hoarding is the warning. Some kept manna till morning against Moses' command, and it bred worms and stank (16:20). The lesson is pointed: manna hoarded out of distrust rots. What God gives for today does not keep for a faithless tomorrow. Greed and anxiety spoil the very gift they try to secure.

Connect directly to Jesus' teaching. Give us this day our daily bread, and do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself (Matthew 6:11, 34). The manna preaches contentment: enough is enough, and tomorrow's bread is God's business. Teach the class to receive each day's provision with gratitude rather than grasping for more.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's provision proving exactly sufficient for each person's need (Exodus 16:18; 2 Corinthians 8:15).

- Hoarded manna breeding worms as a picture of distrust spoiling its own gift.
- Contentment versus greed and anxiety about tomorrow (Matthew 6:34; 1 Timothy 6:6–8).
- Trusting God for tomorrow's provision rather than grasping today's.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the one who gathered little had no lack?
- Why does anxiously hoarding what God provides so often spoil it?
- Where is anxiety about tomorrow stealing your contentment with today?

Question 6

Student Question:

Some Israelites disobeyed and kept manna overnight anyway, hedging their bets against God's promise. Where in your life do you obey God halfway, keeping a private backup plan in case He does not come through?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question targets the backup plan, the half-obedience that keeps manna overnight just in case. Some Israelites heard God's clear word and still hedged, unwilling to stake everything on His promise. Their disobedience was not defiance so much as distrust wearing the mask of prudence.

Help students see the subtlety of this. We rarely refuse God outright; more often we obey while quietly keeping a private insurance policy against His failing us. We tithe but cling to control of the rest; we forgive but keep a ledger; we follow but reserve an exit. The kept manna is the part of our hearts that does not really believe God will provide.

Press toward wholehearted trust. The point is not recklessness but a faith that does not need a hedge against God. He has never once failed His people. Invite the class to identify, honestly, where they obey halfway because some corner of the heart still does not trust Him to come through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Half-obedience that keeps a private backup plan against God's promise.
- Distrust disguised as prudence (Exodus 16:20).
- The call to wholehearted rather than hedged trust (Proverbs 3:5–6).
- Examining where we follow God while reserving an exit or a ledger.

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you obey God halfway, keeping a backup plan in case He does not come through?
- What does your backup plan reveal about what you really believe about God?

- What would it look like to surrender that one held-back corner of your heart?

Question 7

Student Question:

Read 16:13–15, 31. Manna was God’s miraculous bread from heaven, given daily, that Israel had to receive and eat to live. How does this prepare us to understand Jesus’ words in John 6:31–35, where He calls Himself the true bread from heaven, the bread of life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question begins to lift the manna toward Christ. The manna was genuinely bread from heaven (16:4), miraculous, given by God, received daily, and necessary for life. Israel had to go out, gather it, and eat it; merely admiring it would not nourish anyone. All of this prepares the categories Jesus will use.

Turn to John 6. The crowd quotes the manna story to Jesus, and He answers that the manna was a shadow: it was not Moses who gave the true bread, and the fathers who ate it still died. He Himself is the true bread from heaven, and whoever comes to Him shall not hunger (John 6:31–35). The physical bread pointed to the spiritual reality. As Israel had to receive and eat the manna to live, so we must come to and receive Christ to have eternal life.

Teach this as type and fulfillment without binding the Old Covenant feast. The manna is not a ritual we keep; it is a picture God painted in the wilderness so that when the bread of life appeared, His people would have eyes to recognize Him. The daily manna also keeps Christ daily before us: we feed on Him not once but continually, day by day.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Manna as God’s miraculous bread from heaven, received and eaten daily for life (Exodus 16:4, 15).
- Jesus as the true bread from heaven that the manna foreshadowed (John 6:31–35).
- The necessity of personally receiving Christ, as Israel had to gather and eat the manna.
- Type and fulfillment: a wilderness picture preparing God’s people to recognize the Bread of Life.

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific ways does the manna prepare us to understand Jesus as the bread of life?
- Why does Jesus say the fathers ate manna and died, but He gives bread that gives life forever?
- What does it mean, practically, to feed on Christ daily rather than only on Sundays?

Question 8

Student Question:

The manna fell on the undeserving and the grumbling alike, sheer grace for a complaining people. How does remembering that God's daily provision in your life is grace, not wages you have earned, change the way you receive an ordinary day?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the grace of the manna. God did not feed a grateful, obedient people; He rained bread on grumblers who had just wished themselves dead in Egypt. The provision was sheer grace, not wages earned by good behavior. That ought to reframe how we receive an ordinary day.

Help students see their daily mercies as undeserved gift. The food on the table, the breath in the lungs, the roof overhead, the people we love, none of it is owed to us, all of it is grace from a generous God (James 1:17; Acts 14:17). Familiarity dulls us to this; we come to feel entitled to what is actually a daily gift.

Cultivate gratitude as the response. The cure for entitlement is to receive each ordinary day as manna, given freely by a God who is good to the ungrateful (Luke 6:35). Encourage students toward concrete thankfulness, naming the grace in an ordinary morning rather than taking it for granted.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's daily provision as grace given to the undeserving, not wages earned (Luke 6:35).
- Every good gift coming down from the Father of lights (James 1:17).
- Entitlement as the dulling of gratitude through familiarity.
- Receiving an ordinary day as manna, with thanksgiving (Acts 14:17).

Discussion Prompts

- How does remembering that God fed grumblers change how you receive your own daily provision?
- Where has entitlement crept in and dulled your gratitude?
- What is one ordinary grace today that you have been taking for granted?

Question 9**Student Question:**

Read 16:22–30. Here, before Sinai, God first gives Israel the Sabbath as a holy rest, gathering double on the sixth day and resting on the seventh. The Sabbath became a sign of God's covenant with Israel (Exodus 31:16–17). Since that covenant has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10), how should Christians understand the Sabbath

today, gathering instead on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and resting ultimately in Christ (Hebrews 4:9–10)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it requires careful teaching. Here, before Sinai, God first institutes the Sabbath for Israel. On the sixth day they gather double; on the seventh they rest, and the manna that fell six days does not fall on the seventh (16:22–30). This is the first appearance of the Sabbath in Scripture as a commanded institution. It was God's gracious gift to a redeemed people, a rhythm of rest woven into their week.

Establish what the Sabbath was. It was given specifically to Israel and became a sign of the covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:16–17). It was not commanded of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, and it belongs to the Law given through Moses. Help the class see it as part of the Old Covenant package, holy and good for its time, like the rest of that covenant.

Now teach where it has gone. The Old Covenant, with its Sabbath, has been fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 8–10). Paul explicitly names the Sabbath a shadow of things to come, the substance of which belongs to Christ (Colossians 2:16–17), and tells Christians to let no one pass judgment on them regarding it. The New Testament nowhere binds Sabbath-keeping on the church. This must be said plainly and lovingly, because many sincere people teach otherwise. Christians are not under a Christian Sabbath.

Then show the fulfillment, both in worship and in rest. For worship, the disciples gathered to break bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), and Christians set aside their giving on the first day (1 Corinthians 16:2); the Lord's Day is the day of Christian assembly, not because it is a transferred Sabbath, but because it is the day our Lord rose. For rest, the Sabbath pointed forward to the deeper rest that remains for the people of God (Hebrews 4:9–10), the rest of ceasing from our own works to trust in Christ's finished work. So we honor the truth the Sabbath taught, the goodness of God-given rest and trust, while finding its substance in Jesus rather than in a day on the calendar.

Keep the tone pastoral, not polemical. The aim is not to win an argument but to free the class to rest in Christ and to worship rightly, rejoicing that the shadow has given way to the substance.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Sabbath first given here to Israel as God's gracious gift before Sinai (Exodus 16:22–30).
- The Sabbath as a sign of the Old Covenant between God and Israel (Exodus 31:16–17).
- The Old Covenant, with its Sabbath, fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10).
- The New Testament nowhere binding Sabbath-keeping on Christians; no Christian Sabbath.
- Christians gathering for worship on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).

- The Sabbath rest fulfilled in the rest we have in Christ from our own works (Hebrews 4:9–10).
- Teaching this truth plainly yet pastorally, to free the class rather than to win a debate.

Discussion Prompts

- Why was the Sabbath given to Israel, and what did it signify under the Old Covenant?
- How does the New Testament teach us to understand the Sabbath now that Christ has come (Colossians 2:16–17)?
- What is the deeper rest in Christ that the Sabbath was always pointing toward?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over this whole chapter, from grumbling stomachs to bread from heaven to the gift of rest. Name one specific way God is using this passage to teach you to depend on Him one day at a time, and to find your deepest rest not in a day of the week but in Jesus, the bread of life.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole chapter into one personal response. The arc has run from grumbling stomachs, to bread rained from heaven, to the gift of a day of rest, and all of it has been teaching one people how to trust their God one day at a time.

Help students name something specific rather than settling for a vague resolve. The aim is formation, not information: one concrete area where they will practice daily dependence this week, and one way they will rest in Christ rather than in their own striving or in mere religious routine.

Point them finally to Jesus. The manna fed the body for a day; the bread of life feeds the soul forever. The Sabbath gave Israel a day; Christ gives us rest itself. Close by inviting students to find their security and their rest not in storehouses or in a calendar but in the Savior who is the true bread from heaven and the true rest of God's people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from information to daily, practiced dependence on God (James 1:22).
- Trusting God for one day at a time in a specific, named area of life.
- Resting in Christ's finished work rather than in our own striving (Hebrews 4:9–10).
- Jesus as both the bread of life and the rest of God's people (John 6:35; Matthew 11:28–29).

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific area where you will practice depending on God one day at a time this week?

- Where are you striving for a rest that only Christ can give?
- How does feeding on Jesus, the bread of life, change an ordinary day for you?