

# The Book of Exodus

## Lesson 11: Manna, Quail, and the Sabbath Given -- Exodus 16:1-36

Six weeks. That is how long the cheering lasted. Six weeks since the Red Sea rolled back and Israel walked out of slavery on dry ground, six weeks since Miriam took up the tambourine and the whole camp sang that the Lord had triumphed gloriously. And now, with sand under their feet and hunger in their bellies, the songs have turned to grumbling. The same people who watched Pharaoh's army drown are wishing they were back in Egypt. It is a sobering picture, and if we are honest, a familiar one. How quickly the miracle behind us fades when the stomach in front of us starts to growl.

Listen to what they actually say. Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and ate bread to the full. Memory is a strange and dangerous thing. They have rewritten slavery into a buffet. The whips are forgotten; the cooking pots are remembered. Hunger does this to all of us. It shrinks our world down to the next meal and makes us forget the God who just split a sea. The wilderness is not punishing Israel here so much as it is exposing Israel, surfacing what was always in their hearts.

Then heaven opens, not with thunder but with breakfast. In the evening quail cover the camp, and in the morning, when the dew lifts, the ground is scattered with something fine and flake-like, white as frost. The people look at it and say to one another, manna, which means simply, what is it? They do not even have a name for God's provision. And every single morning, six days a week, for forty years, they will go out and gather just enough for that day. God could have filled their storehouses for a year. Instead He chose to feed them one sunrise at a time, so that they would learn to need Him daily.

And tucked inside this story of bread is the gift of a day. Before Sinai, before the Ten Words are spoken, God begins teaching His redeemed people to rest. Gather double on the sixth day, He says, for the seventh is a Sabbath, a holy rest to the Lord. Some go out to gather on the seventh anyway, and find nothing. This is the first time Israel is taught the Sabbath, and it matters more than we might think. For in this chapter God is teaching a freed people how to trust Him for daily bread and how to rest in His provision, lessons that reach all the way to the One who would later stand up and say, I am the bread of life.

**Group Discussion:** Israel had seen the Red Sea parted only weeks earlier, yet hunger drove them to grumble and even to romanticize their slavery. What does this reveal about how short our spiritual memory can be, and where do you see that same forgetfulness in the church and in your own walk?

**Personal Reflection:** God deliberately gave Israel only enough manna for one day, to teach them daily dependence on Him. In what area of your life are you trying to store up enough security to avoid needing God tomorrow, and what would real daily trust look like there?

*Read Exodus 16:1–36*

## **Study Questions**

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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)?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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)?
10. 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.

## Digging Deeper

**Reflect on these passages:** John 6:31–35, where Jesus identifies Himself as the true bread from heaven that gives life to the world; Matthew 6:9–13, where Jesus teaches us to pray for our daily bread, echoing the daily manna; Deuteronomy 8:2–3, where Moses explains that God humbled Israel with manna to teach that man does not live by bread alone; Colossians 2:16–17, where Paul says the Sabbath was a shadow of things to come, the substance belonging to Christ; Hebrews 4:9–10, which speaks of the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God, fulfilled in resting from our works in Christ.

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