



AND THE LORD SPOKE TO
MOSES, SAYING, "I HAVE HEARD
THE COMPLAINTS OF THE
CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. SPEAK
TO THEM, SAYING, 'AT TWILIGHT
YOU SHALL EAT MEAT, AND
IN THE MORNING YOU SHALL
BE FILLED WITH BREAD.
AND YOU SHALL KNOW THAT
I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD.'"

EXODUS 16:11-12

DELIVERANCE

FOR TODAY

DATE

February 15 & 16

WEEK

3 of 4

KEY VERSE

Exodus 16:11-12

SETTING THE STAGE

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, dismantling the institution of slavery and setting free all American slaves. Deliverance from oppression was – and is – to be celebrated. However, there was an unintended consequence. Slaves did not know where to go or what to do next.

Many slaves chose to stay with their masters simply because it was all they knew. Under their masters, slaves retained some level of certainty. At least they had food and shelter. Freedom and individuality might mean a better life, but there was no guarantee. The journey would involve new challenges and uncertainties. Those who stepped into freedom decided it would all be worth it.

We will see today that the Israelites found themselves in a similar situation. Over the last two weeks, we have followed the story of how God miraculously freed them from slavery and led them in their exodus out of Egypt. Now we will find out what happens next in their journey.

Like the American slaves, the Israelites did not immediately find themselves in the Promised Land. They faced new challenges that they had not anticipated. Without homes or resources, they found themselves wandering in uncertainty through the wilderness. At least in their slavery, they had some degree of security and stability. But now, in their independence, they struggled with how their immediate needs would be satisfied in a land of scarcity and desolation.

It seemed that God had abandoned the Israelites. But God had a glorious purpose for bringing His people into the wilderness instead of immediately into the Promised Land. As we join the Israelites in the wilderness, we will observe that the journey involves the temptation to look back, the faith to look up, and the patience to look forward. What might seem like a story of the people's daily grumbling is actually a story about God's daily grace.¹

LESSON OUTLINE

1. The Temptation to Look Back
2. The Faith to Look Up
3. The Patience to Look Forward

THINGS TO KNOW

- Manna: miraculous bread from heaven; literally means, "What is it?"
- Omer: an ancient Israelite unit of dry measure equal to about nine cups

DELIVERANCE

FOR TODAY

1. THE TEMPTATION TO LOOK BACK

This week we will spend some time walking alongside the Israelites, observing how they handled their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land. As they packed up their camp in Elim and traveled through the Wilderness of Sin, we see that they began to feel insecure by the new uncertainties.

EXODUS 16:1-3 *And they journeyed from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came to the Wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they departed from the land of Egypt. ² Then the whole congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. ³ And the children of Israel said to them, “Oh, that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the pots of meat and when we ate bread to the full! For you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”*

Skepticism of the future can cause us to look back at the past through rose-colored glasses.

The wilderness made for a miserable trek. As the desert took its toll on the nation of Israel, the people were starving and parched. God had delivered them from Egypt, but now they feared they were left to fend for themselves and die in the wilderness. The desolate desert did not have enough natural resources to sustain a nation of 2 million and counting. The Promised Land was nowhere in sight. The Israelites grumbled and cried out to God on account of their thirst and hunger. Their greatest needs were food or water (*Exodus 15:24*).

Feeling an acute sense of uncertainty and insecurity with their basic needs, they did the unthinkable: They missed Egypt. They remembered the “pots of meat” and “bread to the full.” They missed the slight degree of certainty and security they had as slaves. The Israelites longed to be back in Egypt to satisfy their singular desire for food. Their lack of trust in God distorted their memory of the past so that it seemed better than it actually was. Their memory became selective. When they looked at their immediate circumstances, Pharaoh seemed to be a better leader than God.

They remembered Egypt through rose-colored glasses, forgetting it was an objectively horrible place. Under Pharaoh, they had been oppressed, slaughtered, enslaved, and manipulated. The Israelites had cried out to God constantly because of their plight (*Exodus 3*). But the wilderness presented a new, unfamiliar difficulty that made them want to turn back, even with the promise of Canaan ahead.

During their period of transition, the Israelites were tempted to look backward instead of forward because they could not see the future, with all of its prospects and opportunities. It was easier for them to miss, reminisce, and dwell on the past that they knew. But skepticism of the future can cause us to look back at the past through rose-colored glasses.

This is Satan’s strategy. He wants us to view God through our circumstances, which creates a small, pigeonholed view of God and a too-big view of our circumstances. It results in a faith as shaky and



¹ Peter Enns *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, iBooks p. 838.

temporary as the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves. But God seeks to do the reverse: He wants us to view our circumstances through our view of God, producing a big view of God and a much smaller view of our circumstances.

2. THE FAITH TO LOOK UP

God heard the cries of His people. He provided water for the Israelites when they had none (*Exodus* 15:22-27), and then He rained down bread from heaven, *manna*, so that they would not starve. As the Israelites wandered, God miraculously provided for their immediate needs.

EXODUS 16:4-15 *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.”⁵ And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.”*

⁶ *Then Moses and Aaron said to all the children of Israel, “At evening you shall know that the LORD has brought you out of the land of Egypt.”⁷ And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD; for He hears your complaints against the LORD. But what are we, that you complain against us?”⁸ Also Moses said, “This shall be seen when the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening, and in the morning bread to the full; for the LORD hears your complaints which you make against Him. And what are we? Your complaints are not against us but against the LORD.”*

⁹ *Then Moses spoke to Aaron, “Say to all the congregation of the children of Israel, ‘Come near before the LORD, for He has heard your complaints.’”¹⁰ Now it came to pass, as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.*

¹¹ *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,¹² “I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”*

¹³ *So it was that quail came up at evening and covered the camp, and in the morning the dew lay all around the camp.¹⁴ And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, as fine as frost on the ground.¹⁵ So when the children of Israel saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, “This is the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.*

God wanted the Israelites to trust and depend on Him to meet their every need. In providing manna, He desired to show off His faithfulness if they would only wait, trust, and obey in their circumstance. However, there was a catch. Even more fascinating than *what* God provided is *how* He provided it. Moses explained to God’s people that God intended His daily provision of *manna* to rot by the end of each day.

EXODUS 16:16-21 *This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person, according to the number of persons; let every man take for those who are in his tent.’”*

¹⁷ *Then the children of Israel did so and gathered, some more, some less.¹⁸ So when they measured it by omers, he who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack. Every man had gathered according to each one’s need.¹⁹ And Moses said, “Let no one leave any of it till morning.”²⁰ Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them.²¹ So they gathered it every morning, every man according to his need. And when the sun became hot, it melted.*

Their daily *manna* became more than just daily bread. It became a daily exercise of faith.

It may be difficult to understand the purpose of this peculiar plan of provision. Why would a loving God set a 24-hour expiration date on something as vital as bread? After all, the Israelites were wandering through a desert with absolutely no resources. They were enduring longing, scarcity, discomfort, and displacement – all of the trials that are characteristic of the wilderness and times of transition.

The Israelites reacted by grabbing as much manna as they possibly could in one day, stockpiling it so that they would not have to worry about how much or how little they would have for other days. In other words, their thought was, “If God doesn’t provide tomorrow – for whatever reason – then we’ll be fine because our refrigerator will be all stocked to the brim.” (Although they obviously did not have a refrigerator.)

The reason that God set such a fast expiration on the *manna* is that He desired to grow the muscle of Israel’s faith. God caused the *manna* to rot by the end of each day to combat the temptation to disbelieve in His ability to provide. He did not want His people to become self-reliant. The discomforts served as invitations to rely on Him and know Him more deeply. He wanted them to stop gazing at their circumstances and to start gazing at Him, feeding their faith by affirming the truth of God. He wanted to teach Israel that He would provide enough for them every single day.

Their daily *manna* became more than just daily bread. It became a daily exercise of faith. It summoned their belief that God would take care of them for each new set of 24 hours. God provided exactly what they needed, every single day. In fact, He did more than that. The Israelites’ temptation to stockpile more *manna* than they needed for one day reveals a beautiful truth. If it were possible to take more than what was needed for one day’s provision, then that means God’s daily provision was more than they needed! His mercy was not just **sufficient** for the day; it was **abundant** for the day.

3. THE PATIENCE TO LOOK FORWARD

As we continue to journey alongside the Israelites, we see that God continued to meet their needs until they reached the Promised Land.

EXODUS 16:31-35 *And the house of Israel called its name Manna. And it was like white coriander seed, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.* ³² Then Moses said, “This is the thing which the LORD has commanded: ‘Fill an omer with it, to be kept for your generations, that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” ³³ And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a pot and put an omer of manna in it, and lay it up before the LORD, to be kept for your generations.” ³⁴ As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron laid it up before the Testimony, to be kept. ³⁵ And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

Finally, after a difficult period of transition, “they came to the border of the land of Canaan” (Exodus 16:35b). After 40 years of wandering, the Israelites reached the Promised Land. God had kept His promise and had never wavered in His plan to bring them to Canaan. Even when God’s people did not know where they were going or what they were to do next, God kept the Promised Land in His sight. He made sure of their triumph.

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But before the Israelites were to inherit the Promised Land, God wanted to give them something even better: a faith that knew and trusted the Promiser. He certainly cared that the Israelites had food for their physical sustenance, but more than that, He cared about their spiritual sustenance. If Israel had simply received the Promised Land immediately – or even received their resources and provision all at once – then they would never have had

the opportunity to trust Him, rely upon Him, and know Him experientially as the God who counts all their needs and provides for them intimately and daily. It was in love that He would not let His people live on the fat of their circumstances with a crippled faith. He wanted to straighten and strengthen the faith of His chosen people so that they would be able to run in faith in any circumstance.

By walking with Israel to the border of the Promised Land, we see that God's people can trust that He knows where He is leading us, even when we cannot see the destination ahead. And we can trust His heart, even if we have to endure the wilderness to get to our destination. His *omers of manna* remind us that the way He sustained the Israelites is the way He can sustain us today. He wants His people to be set apart from the rest of the world – not because of what God gives but because of who God is. Ultimately, God seeks to develop in us an innate, reflexive faith in Him. He wants to affirm His loving heart towards us, His ability to provide for us, and His loving eagerness to do so – every day, in every circumstance.

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

Today, God's people are still tempted to believe that God will not take care of them. Where do you find yourself in life right now? Based on the lives of the Israelites, we can be assured that our lives have different seasons and chapters. The Israelites walked through a long chapter of wilderness, and many of us have experienced or will experience a chapter of wilderness. Some of us might feel like we have been wandering through a desert of limited provision and scarcity of preference for quite some time.

Regardless of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can learn a lot from the story of the Israelites. As we walk through our own stories, Exodus 16 shows us the futility of looking at the past through rose-colored glasses. God's people can walk toward an uncertain future with confidence, knowing and having faith in our great Provider, resisting the temptation from Satan to long for the past. As John Piper once said, "Stop defining and limiting your future in terms of your past. Start defining it in terms of your God."

We can choose to look to God and trust that the supply for our needs will not run out today, for God's grace will be served hot and fresh again tomorrow, in abundance. So we can take and eat our fill for only today, and then take and share with others. We can go to sleep at night, knowing that His grace will cover the stresses and needs of tomorrow as well. If we begin to feel worn out and spiritually hungry, it is not because there is not enough food to eat and water to drink. It is because we are gazing and feasting on the wrong things. It is no wonder we sometimes feel weak and malnourished.

We see this daily provision and daily grace not just in Exodus but woven throughout the Bible. Jesus is called the very "Bread of Life" (*John 6:35*). He is the daily bread that we need. He is where spiritual sustenance and abundance is found. Be encouraged from these words: *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Continued on page 60 >*

HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE *(Continued)*

In the Lord's Prayer, again we see Jesus invoke God's daily provision for the Israelites in the wilderness when He prays, Give us today our daily bread (*Matthew 6:11*). After the Lord's Prayer, He continues, "*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble*" (*Matthew 6:34*). Sufficient for the day is its own trouble, but the converse is equally true: sufficient for today are God's new mercies. In fact, one of the greatest promises of scripture is that God's mercies are new every morning, just like the manna that was new every morning for the Israelites.

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LAMENTATIONS 3:21-24 *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore, I will hope in him."*

We can trust that God has His reasons for allowing each season. A difficult season is not a deviation of God's plan. It is an invitation to exercise the muscles of our faith in Him. He hears our every murmur, knows our every fear, and provides for our every need. God desires to open our eyes to His deep, tender heart for us and His eager, active hand in our lives. As we trust in Him, He will fill His believers with abundance. It is both a promise and a provision. May we rely on His Truth not for yesterday in seasons of harvest, but for today in seasons of drought and tomorrow in seasons of growth.

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