

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You came to earth in gentleness, and gave Yourself to the task given You by the Father. Thank You for Your obedience and for the faithfulness You showed both to the Father and to us. As we receive the benefits of Your grace and grace, may we be inspired to live as You did, and so fulfil our calling. We ask this in Your name, Lord Jesus Christ, AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

As you listen to or watch the news today, pray for the people whose lives have been affected by the headlines.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the homeless.** *Pray for young people who are thrown out of home, and for those who feel they cannot cope with life*
- *Pray about immigration and how it affects your own country*
- *Give thanks for the quality of life you have been given*

Meditation

Come and reign in us, Lord Jesus

As our Master and Lord, consume our attention and make us glad;
Challenge our ways of thinking with all the energy of your youth;
Speak into our hearts with the authority given You by the Father;
Demonstrate Your sovereignty in works of power and might;
Heal our bodies, souls and spirits, cast out our demons with a word;
Fight the evil and sin exposed in us by Your truthfulness and love;
Break down the ungodly systems and traditions we obey instead of You;
Demand a full response from Your people to the sacrifice of Your love;
Lead us in authority through the baptism of death to life, with power;
Grant us a vision of Your glory which shines a light upon our future

Come and reign in us, Lord Jesus, now and for evermore.

Bible passage – Exodus 16:13-36

¹³ So it was that in the evening, quail flew over and covered the camp. Then, in the morning there was a layer of dew all around the camp. ¹⁴ And when the dew evaporated, there on the surface of the desert were fine flakes like a frost on the ground. ¹⁵ When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, 'What is it?' because they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. ¹⁶ Now this is what the LORD has commanded: "Gather it so that each of you has enough for your needs, an omer for each person according to the number of people each of you has in his tent."' ¹⁷ The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered more, some less; ¹⁸ and when they measured it by the omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage. Each of them gathered as much as was needed. ¹⁹ Moses then said to them, 'Let no one keep any of it until the morning.' ²⁰ But they did not listen to Moses. Some left part of it till the morning, and it bred worms and stank; so Moses was angry with them.

²¹ Every morning each of them gathered as much as was needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted. ²² On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers each. When all

the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, ²³ he said to them, 'This is what the LORD has commanded: "Tomorrow is a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD; bake and boil what you wish, and all that is left over you may keep until the morning."' ²⁴ So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not smell or become full of worms. ²⁵ Moses said, 'Eat it today, for today is the Sabbath of the LORD; you will not find it today in the field. ²⁶ You will gather it on six days, but on the seventh, which is a Sabbath, there will be none.'

²⁷ Nevertheless, on the seventh day some went out to gather, but they found none. ²⁸ And the LORD said to Moses, 'How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? ²⁹ Look! It is the LORD who has given you the Sabbath, so on the sixth day he gives you food for two days. On the seventh day each of you must remain where you are; no one is to go out.'

³⁰ So the people rested on the seventh day.

³¹ Now the Israelites called this food 'manna'. It was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers made with honey. ³² Moses said, 'The LORD has commanded this: "Let an omer of manna be kept for future generations, so that they may see the food I fed you with in the wilderness, when I brought you out of Egypt."' ³³ Moses then said to Aaron, 'Take a jar, place in it an omer of manna, and place it before the LORD to be kept throughout future generations.'

³⁴ So Aaron placed it in front of God's Covenant for safekeeping, as the LORD commanded Moses. ³⁵ The people of Israel ate manna forty years until they came to agricultural land. They ate the manna until they reached the borders of Canaan. ³⁶ (An omer is a tenth of an ephah.)

Bible Study

Review

This reading is long, far longer than needed to explain God's provision of food to the Israelites in the form of quails and manna. God's provision was of course miraculous; but far more than this, it was a test of faith, hence the long story. The Israelites had to learn about their relationship with God as they journeyed through the wilderness, and with each incident recorded in Exodus, they learned more. The description of God's miraculous provision of food for Israel is straightforward enough, but the description of Israel's journey of faith is far more important.

In the story so far, we have already learned that the Israelites were good at complaining (15:22-27), so the receipt of God's provision comes here with a number of tests. The Israelites must show trust in God for His provision (16:15), acceptance of the Lord's judgements (16:17,18,27), recognition of miracles (16:21f.), obedience to the Lord's Sabbath (16:22f.), and they must remember what they have learned (16:31-34)!

Faith, of course, is built up over time and in the course of many experiences of life. As we saw yesterday (16:1-12), the Israelites had a rather short term faith, for they trusted God when they saw Him do great things, but quickly forgot this when faced with their physical needs. In this, the Israelites were very much like all people, so faced with a journey in the desert, their most pressing need was for food, and this became the testing ground for their faith. Every day they gathered manna during their desert wanderings, the people of Israel were reminded that they had to trust their God. Scripture records that this journey lasted for forty years before they came into the settled agricultural lands of Canaan and were able to eat again from grain and other cultivated products.

As with all the amazing details of the Israelite's experiences in Egypt and the desert, many people have attempted to explain the appearance of 'manna' and quail. It is relatively easy to account for the quail. These came over the Israelite camp the night after they complained (16:1-12), and they were God's immediate response to the problem. However, quails are known to emigrate in large numbers across the Sinai peninsula and are notoriously easy to catch. Their presence does not have to be regarded as a miracle, except perhaps that they appeared at the right time and in sufficient numbers for them to be caught. The book of Numbers contains an even more extensive version of this story (Numbers 11:31f.).

The provision of quail was temporary, however, and the stable diet provided by the Lord was something quite different, called '*manna*' (16:13,31). It is well known that in some parts of the desert, a thin layer of honeydew-like excreta of insect larvae may be found near Tamarisk trees, and this is similar to the manna described in Exodus (16:14,31). However, the quantities in which is naturally found today (and likely in the past) would not be sufficient to feed a small family for one meal, let alone twelve tribes of a nation numbering six hundred thousand! So God's provision of 'manna', for the Israelites was clearly miraculous, and if we think of it in any other way we will miss the point of the story.

While the Israelites had to exercise faith and trust that God would continue to provide this food, our passage links manna with two further matters of faith. Firstly, the Israelite's faith was tested every Sabbath, when they had to accept that the manna they collected would not go mouldy after a day, as it usually did, and last for the extra day of the Sabbath (16:24). Secondly, the Israelites had to gather a jar of manna and keep it in perpetual remembrance '*before the Lord*' (16:32f.), as a reminder of the Lord's provision. The people had shown how easily they forgot what the Lord could do, so it was important that they had reminders of God's provision!

In their journey out of Egypt towards the Promised Land, God needed to move the Israelites on from an immature faith tied to the present, to a mature faith rooted in the history of their own experience. We can learn from this today.

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The first provision of quail and manna
- The Sabbath
- Remembrance

Going Deeper

In the passage, the provision of quail and manna is described first (16:13f), before the testing begins. There are some interesting touches, for example, however much manna was gathered, it was always sufficient for those who needed it (16:16-20)! There is no part of this text which we can easily explain. In the end, however, we must ask how our faith today is sustained so that it is not merely like the immature faith of the Israelites.

The first provision of quail and manna

There was clearly a substantial memory amongst the people of Israel of a significant event when quails flew over the Israelites camp one evening. This is reflected in the story in Numbers 11, in which the quantity of quail was such that the birds fell (presumably exhausted from their flight) in an area of one mile radius around the Israelite camp, and up to two cubits deep! It was a veritable glut of meat which created its own problems (Numbers 11:31-34), because some people died from having a 'craving' to eat the meat (Num 11:34). This story, however, did not serve the purpose of Exodus, which was to build up the faith of the people at the beginning of their journey rather than to demonstrate further problems!

All we know about the quails in Exodus is that they came to fulfil the Lord's promise of the provision of 'meat in the evening' (16:7,12). The fulfilment of the Lord's promise for bread in the morning (16:4,8,12) came with the dew, which evaporated to leave behind 'fine flakes like frost on the ground' (16:14). There is another description of this later on; 'it was like coriander seed, white, and it tasted like wafers made with honey' (16:31). To this day, there is much division of opinion about what it would have looked like. Some say that these descriptions indicate a fine substance that had the properties of something like fine flaky pastry, and was obtained in flakes or sheets. Others say that the original Hebrew words indicate small round or oval shaped flakes like thin cornflakes. The trouble with such a debate is that yet again it discusses something we can never fully know, and it takes our attention away from the real issues discussed in this text.

Immediately the manna came to the Israelites, it caused controversy. Firstly, the word itself is a conundrum. The people said 'what is it?' and the two Hebrew words that make up this question, 'Mah' and 'Nah' go easily together to make the name 'manna'. Before the people could even discuss what they had seen, Moses told the people the basic rules for its collection. Manna was to be collected at the rate of an omer per person per day. Clearly, each family had different numbers of people living in it, but when the manna was used, it was found that however much was collected, it proved to be sufficient for the needs of each family. It is a little difficult to follow verses 17 to 19, but what is described is a miracle whereby the Lord made what was gathered sufficient for the day for each family. Those who tried to buck the trend of God's provision by keeping some to the next day (16:20) found that the manna became unpalatable! True faith recognises that the blessings of one day are sufficient in themselves, and the future always lies in God's hands.

The Sabbath

This passage of Scripture is the first place in the Bible where the phrase translated 'holy Sabbath' is used (16:23). The principle of the Sabbath is defined in the stories of Creation (Gen 2:1-3), but the actual word 'Sabbath' is not used in Genesis. It's first appearance is in the early verses of chapter 16 (as we saw yesterday). The idea behind 'Sabbath' was that it was primarily a day of rest, and that God was honoured and respected by keeping His command to cease from work. This idea then conflicted with the notion that God provided for the needs of His people on a daily basis, as His provision required the people to go out and

do the work of gathering the manna each day. As we have seen, the solution to this was that the people had to gather enough food for two days on the day before the Sabbath, and have faith that the manna would stay edible for two days, when on all other days it did not. However much modern people like to try and explain manna as a natural phenomenon, this feature of its gathering and use was certainly miraculous! In addition, because Sabbaths came and went on a weekly basis, faith had to be exercised regularly; and in this way, it had the potential to build up the Israelites. They had almost lost touch with faith in the God of their forefathers during their time in Egypt, so the Lord began to help His people grow in faith.

If you read through the story, you will see occasional references to the unbelief of the people, in particular, when some of them went out on the Sabbath to collect the manna (16:27f.). God showed great patience in continuing to speak to the people through Moses (16:28) until in the end, the people were obedient and 'rested on the seventh day' (16:30). They were capable of learning!

Remembrance

The last part of our reading is a little contentious. Clearly, it describes how Moses gave an instruction to Aaron to keep a small amount of manna in a jar as a remembrance of the desert experiences of God's provision (16:31-36). The difficult part of this passage is the sentence describing where Aaron was supposed to place the jar. It does not seem a very important matter to us, but in some versions of the Bible, verse 34 reads 'Aaron placed the manna in front of the Testimony', where the word 'Testimony' is the same word (in Hebrew) used to describe the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark, of course, was placed inside the 'Holy of Holies' in either the Tabernacle or the Temple. The trouble is that neither the Tabernacle nor the Temple had yet been commissioned by God or built, and the Ten Commandments contained in the Ark had not yet been delivered (see Exodus 20f.)! So what does verse 34 mean when it says (in my translation) 'Aaron placed it in front of God's Covenant' (the English words 'Covenant' and 'Testimony' both translate the same Hebrew word).

The options are this. Either this passage was written at a later date when the Ark of the Covenant was already built; or the command to keep manna was only given at a later date but was included here in the Exodus story simply because it fitted with the rest of the story about manna. The second is the most likely, in my opinion. However, this should not distract us from the important issue at stake. The Lord certainly gave some instruction about the keeping of manna so that the people had a visual reminder of the provision that He gave them in the desert. It was a means of assisting the faith of the people whilst they travelled through the desert.

It appears however that the 'manna in a jar' was only useful as a reminder during the days of journey through the wilderness, as there is no other reference to it in the rest of the Bible.

Application

The principles of faith are hardly different for us now than they were for the ancient Israelites, even though our faith is in Jesus Christ. The very important principle illustrated by this passage is that God provides for our daily needs, and although we do not need to eat manna every day, it is still the Lord who provides. In addition to this, the passage outlines four principles of faith (see review); trust, acceptance, obedience and remembrance. All of these are worth our attention.

This is a difficult lesson for many of us today, especially when we live in a world where the monetary economy makes us believe that we have provided for ourselves from our own resources, worked for by our own sweat and labour! Faith is renewed when we come to accept that everything that keeps us alive, from food to the provision of wealth in its many forms, comes ultimately from God. It does not take too much imagination for us to work this out and perceive how this works. Food may be processed, but its origins are in the life of animals and vegetables created by God in abundance on our world, and even the level of wealth we have or the intelligence we use is God's gift to us when we were born. In addition, when we accept God's role in providing for us at every level, then we are in a better place to understand the plight of people with genuine need for food and wealth. God has given to each one of us so that we might share His resources, spiritual and physical.

One thing that God does not do is to pander to the human desire to account for the future. He asks us to have faith in His providence now as the basis of all that is to come. Human greed works on the desire to stock up goods in advance so that we gain the feeling we have made ourselves secure. In reality, the only security we can have for the future is faith in God our maker, who alone is able to guide us and know what we really need.

Discipleship

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways has the Lord provided for you in special ways at special times? Share your experiences of God's 'manna'
2. Is the Sabbath day a day of rest for you? How is the Sabbath principle kept by Christians today, if at all?
3. How do we remember what God has done for us on a regular basis? Do we need visual reminders of God's grace today?

Topics covered by this text

- *God's provision of manna and quails*
- *The lessons of faith; trust, acceptance, obedience, remembrance.*

Personal comments by author

Countless Christians have testified that it is when they are doing something specific for the Lord that they know His special provision; just as the Israelites, however reluctantly, were doing the Lord's will by journeying to Canaan with a mission to occupy the land. This can be the experience of every disciple if we know we are actively doing what He wants us to do. I know that in the course of my own life, I have been able to work in five different fields, and in each, the Lord has prepared me and enabled me to work sufficiently for what has been required. I regard this as the Lord's provision, even when I have found it hard!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *How easy do you find it to believe that God is concerned to provide for you on a daily basis? Can you pray 'give us this day our daily bread' and mean it? Indeed, what does this phrase mean to you?*
- *Pray that the Lord will challenge His people to depend upon Him for the provisions they require for His calling. Perhaps, ask the Lord to give His people such a new and radical calling that they will have to depend upon Him in new ways and therefore be renewed in faith!*

Final Prayer

Holy Spirit, come and be with us at this time. Give us an insight into Your purposes and the Kingdom of the Father; guide us by Your grace and the power of Your love; strengthen us for all that You would have us do both now and in the days to come. Thank You, Holy Spirit: AMEN
