

Raining Bread from Heaven Genesis 16

After the parting of the Red Sea, today's story is the only other one we are going to tell from the three months that it took Israel to travel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai, the Mountain of God. In your Bibles this time period spans five chapters from Exodus Chapter 14 - 19. I do hope you are reading along with these stories at home, because a lot more happens than I will be able to share with you in this one message.

For instance following the drowning of Pharaoh's army with the closing of the Red Sea over the top of their chariots, Moses writes a psalm of victory and then his sister Miriam takes her tambourine and leads the women of Israel in a dance of victory (15:1-21).

'I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. (15:1-3)

Wouldn't you love to have been there with the Children of Israel singing and dancing their praise to God by the seashore?

But having walked just three days away from the Red Sea into the wilderness, the people are once again complaining against Moses. They are thirsty and the spring they have arrived at was undrinkable; so they blame Moses. After God has shown Moses how to make the water drinkable and has quenched their thirst, for the first of many times God sets down some statutes and ordinances for the people to follow. He also calls these rules "a test" for the people:

'If you will listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the Lord who heals you.' (15:26).

As they would many times later, I am sure that the people agreed right there that the Lord was their protector, their provider, their healer and everything the Lord tells them they will faithfully do. But it only takes another month before the people are again complaining against Moses – and by extension God - saying how nice life had been back in Egypt. This time their complaint is about hunger. How easily it seems that they forget.

'If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.' (16:3)

This isn't the last time they complain, in fact the Israelites make a regular habit of grumbling against God and Moses throughout their 40 year sojourn in the wilderness and at first God deals gently with their complaints, but later their grumbings will bring about some rather severe discipline from God. No matter what God does for them, the Israelites faith lasts only until the next crisis and they go right back to talking about the good old days in Egypt.

But here is where we will stop and spend some time today. Because four weeks into their wilderness journey when people begin to complain of hunger, God then sets up a miraculous feeding program that will carry them along for the next 40 years. God tells Moses that He will "*rain bread from Heaven*" for them on a daily basis (16:4). All they have to do is gather it according to His specific guidelines and they will never go hungry again. Whether or not the Israelites notice, this will actually be a forty-year-long miracle, occurring on a daily basis; so if they are looking, every Israelite could personally recognize God's miraculous providence for them every single day.

Not surprisingly, when we recite the line from the Lord's Prayer, ***give us this day our daily bread***, we are echoing what God was trying to teach the Israelites during their forty year sojourn in the wilderness; not only can we trust God – if needed - to part our Red Seas for us, but we can also trust Him every single day to deliver today's bread for today's need.

And again, whether or not they realize it, this daily miracle which they are to harvest according to God's rules – will be for them a test to see how faithfully they might follow God's ordinances.

Every morning, when the Israelis looked out their tent flaps they would find a white flaky substance covering the ground. When they first saw it, they asked "what is this?" which is how Manna got its name. They could boil it like a porridge, they could bake it like a bread and it was delicious to eat – tasting like honey. But God's first rule was that they were only to gather an "omer" per person each day (an omer is about two quarts).

Here then is where the first everyday miracle occurred. Those persons who out of lack of faith gathered more than their daily needs and those people who for whatever reason gathered less than their daily needs, when they returned to their tents to measure their harvest each would have just an omer per person; no more, no less, they always harvested just what they needed for the day (16:18). A daily miraculous proof of God's ability to provide.

The second rule God gave them to follow was to keep none of the manna overnight; to not hoard it. They were to trust God each and every day to give them just enough

manna for that day and then to trust God for tomorrow to give them the manna they would need tomorrow. Those people who tried to store some of their harvested manna for the next morning would find by the next day that it had spoiled or was worm infested. This was the second “test” from God that many of the Israelites failed. When Moses heard of their failed attempts to hoard manna, He became very angry with them.

Now here is the third rule and the second miracle which occurred on a weekly basis. For five days they were to gather enough for only that day, but on the sixth day they were to gather twice as much so that they would have food to eat on Sabbath without having to work for it. This is the first time a Sabbath day of rest was mentioned in Scripture (16:22-26). And miraculously any other day that they tried to gather enough food for the next day, that food would spoil. But the double portion they gathered on the sixth day did not spoil.

Even more miraculously, the manna that faithfully appeared daily for six days, on the Sabbath day it would not appear. On Sabbath even God was resting, and he expected the people to join Him in this holy rest. But don't you just know that on the Sabbath some people – while having sufficient manna sitting in their tents – nevertheless went out looking for more manna that wasn't there.

With their daily provision of miraculous bread, God had also given them three tests of their faith, that at first the Israelites regularly failed:

- gather only enough for each day except on the sixth day when you can gather a double portion.
- Keep none of the manna overnight except for the double portion gathered on the sixth day so that you may continue to eat while joining with God for a Sabbath rest.
- Don't go looking for manna on the seventh day when you are expected to be resting.

When God witnessed people out looking for manna on the seventh day, got mad and said to the Israelites,

'How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.' So the people rested on the seventh day (16:26-30).

I am happy to report that eventually Israel learned and began to faithfully honor this Sabbath lesson. Many years later in the midst of Israel's wilderness sojourn, after having been given and promising to faithfully obey God's Ten Commandments, a man went out on a Sabbath to gather firewood. Those who found him gathering wood, brought him to Moses and Aaron asking what should be done to him. Then after the Sabbath, at God's command, all the people took this man out of camp and stoned him.

That is how seriously God expected the Israelites to keep even His Sabbath command (Numbers 15:32-36).

Then the final miraculous part of this daily feeding program was that it occurred every six days for forty years, for the entirety of Israel's wilderness sojourn until the day they entered the Promised Land where they could harvest and gather their own food. But before this daily provision of manna stopped, Moses had Aaron, the High Priest gather up an omer of manna in a jar to place in the Ark of the Covenant, where supposedly it still sits to this day as a reminder of God's ability to faithfully, daily, give His people their daily bread.

In the next few weeks we will come with Israel to Sinai, to the Mountain of God, where they will camp for 1-2 years (depending upon how you interpret Numbers 10:11-12), as they receive the Ten commandments along with God's other regulations for life and for constructing the Ark of the Covenant along with a tabernacle in which to place it, but where they also will sin by building the golden calf. All these are stories for another day. What remains for us today is to take lesson from God's forty year provision of bread from heaven.

For the forty years that Israel wandered through the wilderness, they received God's miraculous provision of food and water for the entire time that they could not provide such for themselves. Yet whenever life got the slightest bit difficult, they would grumble against God and reminisce about how great life had been back in Egypt. But regardless of their early lack of faith, God still graciously provided for their needs in ways that they probably did not even recognize as being miraculous.

It is easy for us to condemn their attitude, yet I suspect had we been there we too would have joined in with the grumbling. Because the desert is a hard place to live, especially when we lack the resources to care for ourselves and must rely on God's daily provision of this day's food. In contrast, we live in fat times where we have seldom had to rely – for more than a brief period – on God's provision of our daily bread and so our faith is relatively weak. Yet there have been those, like the Children of Israel, who have lived through such times and I don't doubt that there are also Christians all around our world today who continue to live by such daily faith.

Both satisfaction with the life we live and faith in God's daily provision are benefits of a mature faith if we don't want to learn these traits by going through our own deserts, perhaps we can learn from those who have. As the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians,

These things happened to [Israel in the wilderness] to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing

has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:11-13).

One more thing we can learn from the life of Israel in the wilderness is how miraculously their needs were met yet how seldom they noticed. At the end of their forty year sojourn Moses would point out to Israel not only their miraculous daily provision of bread, but also that neither their clothing nor their sandals had worn out during the entire journey (Deuteronomy 29:5). How often do we go through our daily lives taking for granted the miraculous ways that God cares for us.

Perhaps it seems trite to say that all life is a miracle, but as we look at our lives from the very breath we take, to the daily evidence of God's provision all around us, we will awaken to the everyday miracles that make up our life. As the Psalmist declares,

*O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth! ...
When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them? (from Psalm 8).*

Let us learn from the children of Israel in the wilderness not to take God's daily provision for our life for granted and to trust Him to give this day our daily bread.

Lets pray about this.