

Bread from Heaven

By Mary Kane

One of my and my husband's favorite things to do with family and friends is



to gather around the dinner table for great food and fellowship. Simply put, we love to eat! Our friends would describe my husband and me as health nuts or "granolas." We are very committed to eating foods that *God* created, not fast food chains, so we cook from scratch and shop the local farmers' markets. To add variety, we are always

searching for new "super foods."

God created the ultimate "super food"—manna! Not only did this "super food" keep the Israelites healthy and hearty for forty years in a desert, but they didn't have to lift a finger to produce it; they only had to gather it each morning. I envy these Old Testament believers and I long for a taste of the bread that rained from heaven.

What about New Testament believers? Has God also blessed us with bread from heaven? Before we answer this question, please quiet your heart before the Lord and pray for insight into His Holy Word.

Now please read Exodus 16.

Prior to this chapter, God had called His people out of slavery in the Land of Egypt, to journey with Him to a place where they could live and worship Him freely. The journey should have only taken a few weeks, but due to the sin of Hebrews, they ended up wandering in the desert for forty years. To sustain them in their wilderness wanderings, God supplied His people with bread from heaven.

What did the people do in verse 2-3?

They complained against Moses and Aaron for the lack of food. At this point in time, the people believed they were going to starve to death.

What should the people have done instead of complain against Aaron and Moses?

The same thing that we should do when faced with a hard situation; trust God and take our concern to Him in prayer. It is also helpful to recall the many ways that God has already acted on our behalf.

How had God previously acted for the Israelites (if you are unfamiliar with the Exodus read over Exodus 7-12)?

How has God previously acted on your behalf?

At this time do you have a hard situation that cannot be resolved unless God acts?

Have you been praying about it and asking God to provide for you?

Now let's go back to verse 4.

According to verse 4, what did God do about the complaints of the people?

He rained bread from heaven. According to Matthew Henry, God had every right to rain fire and brimstone upon the Israelites, but He chose mercy instead. Right to the place of their need, God sent the Hebrew people food from heaven. All they had to do was step outside their tents in the morning and gather the manna.

Perhaps like me, you are curious as to what this manna was like. Let's see what we learn from scripture about manna.

Please look up the following verses and record what you learn about manna.

Exodus 16:31:

Numbers 11:7-8:

Many of you may already know that in the original language *manna* literally means, "What is it?" Manna was something that Israelites had never seen before. Some of the commentaries I studied state that certain trees in the area drop a honey like sap on the ground during July and August and that this could possibly be the manna the Israelites gathered. I firmly believe, however, that this manna was a miraculous provision rained down from heaven just as God said it did. If the manna was just ordinary tree sap from trees common to the region, why would the Israelites have exclaimed, "What is it?" And if the tree sap was only available for July and August, how does one account for the fact that the Israelites ate it for forty years wherever they traveled in the wilderness?

Do you think the people of Israel expected God to rain down bread from heaven?

I doubt they did! They probably expected to find a stand of grain on the other side of a hill or gully. I don't think they dreamed of bread falling from the sky; manna was completely unexpected. Likewise, please don't miss God's answer to your problem because it comes in a form that you aren't expecting.

Please look up the following verses and record why God sent bread from heaven to His people:

Exodus 16:4

Deuteronomy 8:3

The manna was sent to test the people to see if they would walk in the "law" or not. It is my opinion that God was not referring specifically to the Law (the Torah), because God had not given His people the written law yet. I believe that God was testing to see if they would depend and rest on Him daily for His care and provision. Matthew Henry describes this as whether they would "trust Him and walk in the *law of faith* or no (emphasis mine)." They also needed to learn, according to Deuteronomy 8:3, that it is not bread or water that sustains life; it is the Word of God. And He is able to provide for us no matter what "desert-like" circumstances we may be experiencing. He is truly all we need and is able to sustain us in the harshest circumstances.

When were the people to gather the manna?

Every morning. God wanted His people to learn to depend on Him to meet their needs on a daily basis; ensuring a close relationship between them. By

sending the manna daily, God was offering His people a fresh feast every morning. His mercies are new each morning! Think of how nutritious manna must have been: rolled up into this one "powerbar" from heaven were all the vitamins, minerals, bioflavonoids, protein, complex carbohydrates, and essential fatty acids needed to sustain good health. A feast fit for a king. The "no-carb" diet was out! Hallelujah!

I am reminded at this time of the *Lord's Prayer* from Luke 11:3 "Please give us this day our daily bread." As New Testament believers we also need to depend on God to supply our daily needs. For most Americans, He does this without much notice from us. We often eat three meals a day without a conscious thought for the fact that God supplied our food. The truth is we depend on God to provide our daily bread just as much as the Israelites depended on God to supply their daily manna.

How much manna were the people instructed to take (verse 16)?

Each person was to gather an omer of manna (an omer equals about a half of a gallon). One omer of manna in the morning was enough to nourish a man, woman or child of any size for a whole day. "Let every man gather it according to each one's need." Whether one was famished or had little appetite, the omer of manna was exactly what it needed to be, each day, for each person.

What other food did God send to the Hebrew people while they were in the desert (verse 13)?

Because the Israelites complained about the manna, God also sent quail for them to eat. The quail, however, were not part of God's menu for His people.

Please read Numbers 11:18-21.

Why did God send the Israelites the quail?

God was giving them over to the cravings of their flesh.

What happened as a result of their indulgence (Numbers 11:31-34)?

The people “feasted” the cravings of their flesh and were struck with a great plague. Did you notice that in verse 32, that the people who indulged their cravings went without sleep and did not gather the manna that God had provided for them in the morning? They gave up the Bread of Life for the craving of the flesh.

How many times have we done the same thing? Every morning we have the manna of God’s Word waiting for us and we forgo it to satisfy our flesh by sleeping in late, watching TV, or starting on our to-do list.

The Hebrew people preferred the longings of their flesh and the idolatry of Egypt over the manna and the presence of the One True God. Think about how serious this is for a moment: The Israelites would rather trade in the Presence of the Lord for meat to satisfy the cravings of their flesh.

You may be wondering how this miracle of the Old Testament affects New Testament believers. I believe God has a fresh application for us if we are willing to dig a little more into His Holy Word. With that said, please read John 6:25-40, keeping in mind that just prior to this passage of Scripture, Jesus fed the five thousand.

Who is the true bread from Heaven?

By what other title does Jesus call himself in verse 35?

Jesus is the Bread of Life; the manna from heaven! God used manna to teach His people the world's greatest object lesson. Like the manna from heaven, God was going to send down His Son, Jesus, to give us life. Jesus is the Bread of Life!

Bread was and is the "staff of life" for Eastern people. *The International Bible Encyclopaedia* states that "In the East bread is primary, other articles of food merely accessory; while in the West meat and other things chiefly constitute the meal, and bread is merely secondary. Accordingly "bread" in the Old Testament, from Ge 3:19 onward, stands for food in general."ⁱ Bread was also and still is considered a symbol of friendship and fellowship in the Arab world. Through Jesus, the Bread of life, God offers man peace and fellowship with Himself.

God calls us to come, take and eat, to taste and see that the Lord is good. When we decide to draw closer to God, to make an "exodus" from an old way of life to The Way of life, we will need some life-giving food to give us strength for our journey. Like the Hebrew people, we have an abundance of manna (God's Word) in United States. All we have to do is reach out our hands and gather all the manna we wish in whatever version, style and media we wish. Manna is everywhere. May we not trample it under foot.

These Old Testament Scriptures are rich with applications for New Testament believers. In closing, let's take a moment to apply some of these concepts to our own walk with the Lord:

- **Leave Egypt behind.** Like the Hebrew people, God is constantly calling us to leave behind the "Egypt" of our flesh and walk closer with Him. Do we have anything in our lives that we idolize above God that we need to leave behind? God will provide strength (manna) through His Word for our journey out of Egypt to follow Him.
- **Gather manna daily.** God calls us to gather daily nourishment from His Word at the start of the day. I believe that the best time to spend time with God is at the start of the day. We can't expect to get by on a one-day-a-week-quiet-time any more than we can expect to survive on one meal a week. If spending time with God is truly a priority, we'll make the time to do it.
- **Starve your cravings.** God wants us to draw all the nourishment we need from His Holy Word. We can't mix food of the world with manna

from God. If we don't hunger and thirst for God's truth, we can ask Him to make us hungry for it. In order to have an appetite for God's Word, we need to ruthlessly cut ourselves off from the wisdom of the world. Imagine gorging on junk food before attending a gourmet feast. No matter how great the feast, we'll not be hungry for it if we have filled up on junk food. Are there things we can eliminate from our lives in order to give us more time in God's Word?

- **God's Word is all you need.** Whether our problems and decisions are big or small, God's Word will guide us to His will for our lives. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all other things will be added unto you.
- **Can you think of any other applications?**

Keep walking with Jesus. Don't give up! Gather your manna and follow Him.

"He who has an ear,

let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna to eat."

Revelation 2:17

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ⁱ Eager, George B. "Bread", *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Edited by James Orr. Blue Letter Bible. 1913. 5 May 2003 15 Jun 2011.
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