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## Exodus 16:2-36          “Manna from Heaven”

Intro. Recently Capital One announced that they were eliminating 380 more jobs from their Richmond location. Imagine that you are among the hundreds that have just received a pink slip. How would you feel? Many of us have been there. Would you be like the Israelites, and complain against the Lord? Only 3 days into the wilderness they started complaining instead of trusting in God. Would you complain that the Lord is not being fair to you? You can think of sinners who are far worse than you, and yet they have a good job, and you just lost yours. It's easy to *say* you trust God, but when you lose your job, it's more of a real test of your faith.

This morning I want to show you from Exodus 16 that you can trust God to be your provider. The Israelites certainly needed a great Provider. Here in chapter 16, for the first time, the full deprivation of desert life stared the people fully in the face. Every step they took was now leading them farther away from the inhabited countries and conducting them deeper into the land of desolation and death. Yet, God was both willing and able to provide for them even in the wilderness.

Even so, if you do your part, God will provide for you. But today's message is not going to focus merely upon our physical needs. You are not just an animal. You have a soul and spirit. We were created in the image of God. So we will see that God will also provide for your spiritual needs.

So let me share with you the first main point of our text today:

## I. TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE FOR YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS

This truth is seen in the way God provided for the physical needs of the Israelites, even in the wilderness. He gave them quail for meat, manna for bread, and water for their thirst. God told them in v.4 that He would “rain bread from heaven.” Some time during the night, very early in the morning, manna would be placed upon the ground along with the morning dew. It must have been quite exciting at first, when the hungry Israelites arose in the morning, looked outside their tents, and saw white (v.31) manna all over the ground, almost like clumps of snow. Manna was something totally new. When they saw it for the first time, they said in v.15, “What is it?” They did not know what it was. By that way, that’s how manna got its name. Their question was *Mann hu* in Hebrew.<sup>1</sup> No one had ever eaten such heavenly bread before. It is clear from this text that the Lord provided for their daily need. In fact, in vv.16, 18, & 21 we read that the Israelites gathered the manna “according to each one’s need.” Notice v.18 in particular, “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.” No one lacked enough to eat. God provided for their need in a wilderness that could not provide for their need through natural means.

Even so, God promises to provide for our needs as well. Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.” Paul said in Phil. 4:19, “And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

Now even though God promises to provide, we must do our part. We must do two things: trust in God to provide, and then we must work. The Israelites could not be lazy & sleep in. They had to arise early, for the manna would melt when the sun rose (v.21). That had to work by gathering their food. There is a reference to the Israelites “gathering” manna a total of eleven times in this chapter. And since according to v.14 manna was small, it took some work to gather enough to eat for the whole day. And it wasn’t on short trees & tall shrubs, but on the ground. They had to stoop over, or get down on their knees. It was not easy work.

I want to tell you why God is worthy of your trust. First of all:

A. God Provides Graciously – Last week I shared with you how the Israelites were so unworthy of the Lord’s provision. In spite of all the miracles they had seen, they did not trust God enough to believe that He would provide for them in the wilderness. Instead, they complained over and over again, as we see in vv.2-3. It wasn’t just a few who were guilty, but the whole multitude. Yet in spite of their unbelief and complaints, God patiently bore with them. Instead of raining down fire and brimstone, He rained down manna from heaven to meet their physical needs. He also gave them quail for meat, and water for their thirst. Marvelous grace was this! All were gifts of His grace to an undeserving people.

We need to realize that we are sinners, and we don’t deserve God provision. So let us not appeal unto God to provide for us based on our merit. Let us trust in God to provide based on His goodness and grace.

B. God May Provide Miraculously – He certain did for the Israelites. Notice in v.4 that the Lord said, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.” This bread was not brought in

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, it is just *man* here, and usually “manna” is from the Hebrew word *man*. It is translated *manna* in the LXX.

from Egypt. It miraculously appeared every morning. It was “bread from heaven.” Each morning the Jews participated in a miracle as they emerged from their tents to find all the nourishment they needed waiting on the dew.

We have to be careful about applying this to us today. The manna ceased when the people left the wilderness and came into Canaan, where grain and fruits were available, and where they had homes to store their grain. Miracles end when means are possible. So if you have the means to work and earn a living, don’t expect God to rain dollar bills from the sky to provide for your need. But on the other hand, it’s quite possible that God will provide for you miraculously if the situation calls for it, or if it fulfills His purpose. But even if He uses what seems to be natural means, it may nevertheless be viewed as a blessing from heaven.

One time a man was traveling on a busy interstate when he passed a vehicle that was moving slowly in the curb lane. Assuming the car had a mechanical problem, he stopped and offered assistance. The driver was a young pastor, and his car was running out of gas. As he drove him to a nearby station, he teased him. “A minister stranded! Isn’t the man up above supposed to watch out for you?” “Yes”, he replied, “and I have to assume He sent you.” God could have miraculously caused gas to appear in his tank, but instead, he sent someone to provide gas in a more conventional way.

C. God Provides Bountifully – This truth is first given in v.4, “Behold, I will *rain* bread from heaven.” He didn’t say “sprinkle.” Rain suggests abundance. Then in v.8 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*...” Likewise, in the middle of v.12 we read, “in the morning you shall be *filled* with bread...” God did not give them just barely enough to live on like they do in a prison camp. Each day they could eat to the point of being full. Just to give you an idea of how much God provide for each person, look at v.16, “Let every man gather it according to each one’s need, one omer for each person...” How much is an omer? In v.36 we find the answer, “Now an omer is one-tenth of an ephah.” Does that help you? Probably not. An ephah was an Egyptian dry measure. The bottom line is this: An omer was slightly more than 2 quarts. Each person could eat a pint of manna 4 times/day. That’s an abundant supply! And when you consider that God fed about 2 million people, it was truly an abundant supply of heavenly bread. One commentator estimated that it was equivalent to the load of ten 30-car trains every day.

Do you remember the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000. In Mt. 14:20 we read, “So they all ate and *were filled*, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained.” Once again God provided bread in abundance.

Even so the apostle Paul said in 1 Tim. 6:17 that we are not “to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly [*plousios*-or abundantly] all things to enjoy.” God is good. Let us trust in a God who delights to meet our needs with an abundant supply.

D. God Provides Faithfully – Except for the Sabbath, the Israelites could count on God to provide manna every morning, without fail. As sure as the sun rises in the morning, even so God provided manna in the morning. And notice how long God continued to provide for them. In v.35, “And the children of Israel ate manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land...” God is faithful. You can count on Him to provide.

Just as the Israelites had no need to hoard manna, so we do not need to hoard our financial resources. That’s because God is faithful. He will provide. Jesus taught us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread.” He didn’t teach us to pray, “Give enough bread to last for a

year.” We are to trust God to provide every day. Let me ask you a question. How much in the bank is enough? While it is prudent to save up for large purchases, I do not believe we are to save up to the point of hoarding, because we do not trust God to provide in the future. You can trust God for tomorrow. He is faithful.

E. God Provides Joy as Well – In this text we see that God also provided the pleasure of good taste. In the last of v.31 we read, “the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.” It was not bland like a communion wafer. It was sweet like angel food cake (cf. Psa. 78:25). And since Canaan was a land of milk & honey, perhaps God was giving them a foretaste of what was to come. I believe that God gives us such joy that we get a foretaste of heaven.

One of the reasons God gave manna the way He did was to reveal Himself to His people. In fact, we read in v.12 that as a result of God’s provision, “you shall know that I am the LORD your God” (cf. v.6). In v.7 He said, “And in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD....” The manna revealed the glory of the Lord. Indeed, this chapter teaches us that God will provide for us. He will do so graciously, miraculously, bountifully, faithfully, and even sweetly. Psa. 34:8 says, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good....” Yes indeed, God is good. God is gracious. Let us recognize His goodness, and thank Him for it. Do you thank God before you eat each meal?

We need to realize that we are more than physical beings. So not only should you trust God for your physical needs, but you should also:

## II. TRUST GOD TO PROVIDE FOR YOUR SPIRITUAL NEEDS

It is clear from this text and other parts of the Bible that the provision of manna was not intended merely to provide for physical needs. It was also to provide for their spiritual needs. Notice with me 3 ways the provision of manna does that:

A. The Provision of Manna Teaches Us that We Are Sinners – We read in the last of v.4, “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.” This test was not for God’s benefit. He is omniscient. He knew the outcome of this test. Rather, this test was to teach something to the Israelites about their own spiritual condition. So let’s see how well they did with the test of manna. In v.19 they were specifically told, “Let no one leave any of it till morning.” There was no need to hoard or store up the manna. As we have seen, God promised to provide fresh manna every morning. But v.20 says, “Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank.” We’ve all seen spoiled, rotten food. When they opened their jar of manna, it smelled, and the sight of maggots was enough to make you sick. It doesn’t pay to rebel against what God says in His Word.

Then they had a second test. They were also told that God would rest on the Sabbath & not provide manna on that day. So the Israelites were to rest as well. They were to gather twice as much on the sixth day, and prepare the extra by cooking it (v.23), and it would remain edible for an extra day. They were to just sleep in on the Sabbath & rest. But in v.27 we read, “Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none.” Some of the Israelites did not see the necessity of obeying the God who had saved them, and they went out on the Sabbath anyway. This act of disobedience caused God to say to Moses in v.28, “How long do you refuse to keep My commandments and My laws?” So it was already

clear that the Israelites would fail the test, and disobey God's law, even before He gave the 10 Commandments. That pattern of disobedience was repeated throughout their wilderness wanderings. And that's one purpose of the law, to show us that we are all sinners. We need forgiveness. We need a new heart to replace our rebellious heart. We need a Savior!

Have you come to realize that you are a sinner? Romans 3:23 says, "All have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God." You are guilty before a holy God.

But I have good news for you. Even though Israel was rebellious, God was willing to provide for their physical needs by His grace. And God is willing to provide for our spiritual needs by His grace as well. So I want you to see next of all:

B. The Provision of Manna Points to the Savior – Jesus makes it clear from John 6 that manna pointed to Him. Turn over to that chapter. The Jews wanted Him to prove He was the Messiah by duplicating the miracle of the manna (vv. 30-31), but instead, He declared in v.33 of that chapter, "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." Just as manna came from heaven, even so Jesus came from heaven. And just as manna sustained physical life, even so Jesus gives spiritual life. How? Look at the last of v.51, "the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." Jesus gave His body to be beaten and whipped. He gave His body to be crucified on a cruel cross. He held back nothing. He gave Himself fully for you and for me. And did you notice that even though manna was given only to the Israelites, Jesus was given to "the world." Everyone may partake of Jesus, God's heavenly Manna. Unlike manna which only satisfies for a few hours, Jesus satisfies your soul forever. He said in v.35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger..." Finally, look over to vv.57-58, "As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." If all you eat is physical food, you will still die some day. Only Christ can give you eternal life.

Do you realize that you are a sinner in need of the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? His incarnation from heaven to earth, and His death on the cross, will not do you any good unless you personally receive Him. God gave manna from heaven, but it would not do anyone any good unless they stooped down, gathered it, and ate it. So I invite you to kneel before the Lord at the close of this service, and receive Jesus as your personal Savior by repentance of sin, and faith in Him. Jesus made this same point in John 6:54, "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life..." He is not speaking literally and physically. Based on the context, He is making a comparison. Just as eating manna gave physical life, even so by receiving Christ we receive eternal life. The only way to be saved from sin is to receive Him into our inner being just as the body receives food.

C. The Provision of Manna Points to the Scriptures – We need more than physical bread. We need nourishment for our souls as well. Deut. 8:3 says, "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD." Many live only to supply their physical needs and desires, and neglect their spiritual needs. But we also have spiritual needs, that are far more important. Our first need is to be saved, forgiven of our sin. Once we are saved by receiving Christ as our Savior, we need to grow spiritually. And one of the most important ways we grow

is by the Word of God. Peter said in 1 Peter 2:2, “as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.”

It’s amazing the parallels we find between manna & the Word of God:

1. Like Manna, the Bible Is from God – It is a gift from heaven. God used men to write the Bible, but it was nevertheless fully from God. The Bible is a miraculous production. It was given by Divine Inspiration. It has come from heaven. It is the gift of God.

2. Like Manna, God’s Word Is to Be Received Internally – God’s Word is given to provide food for our souls. But in order to derive from it the nutriment we require, we need to learn how to feed on the Bread of Life. We must appropriate it. We must make it our own. God’s promises will afford you no comfort, and minister no strength to you until you make them your own. Then, we must meditate upon it. This is like chewing our food. Don’t just quickly read God’s Word, but ponder it; reflect upon it. Then fully assimilate it. Internalize it. Memorize it. Psa. 119:11 says, “Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You!”

3. Like Manna, God’s Word Is to Be Received Daily – We can’t try to live on yesterday’s spiritual nourishment. It’s good to hear the Bible preached and taught on the Lord’s Day, but we need fresh manna each day if we want to be healthy Christians. There’s no substitute for a daily time alone with God, gathering fresh nourishment from His Word. O let us face the fact that our souls are in urgent need of a daily supply of the Bread of Life. Whatever else be left undone, let us see to it that we regularly feed on the spiritual manna.

We also see from our story when we should read God’s Word. Just as they had to arise early to gather the manna, so we should rise early to read God’s Word. The Divine Word must not be given a secondary place if we would have God’s blessing upon us. Remember, Jesus said in Mt. 6:33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

4. Like Manna, We Should Work to Benefit from God’s Word – It takes effort to get up, get ready, and come to church. But God blesses the effort by giving you manna from heaven, the Word of God from teachers and preachers. And studying God’s Word is work, but God will bless your work. 2 Tim. 2:15 says, “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

Sources: Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 325-327 only; Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2007; Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Exodus* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972); Warren Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus* (Colorado Spring: Chariot Victor Books Publishing, 1998). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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